

The Early Methodist Preachers

I have been asked to speak on the subject of the early Methodist preachers – their content and their method.

Henry Bett wrote:

“The world has seldom seen a more wonderful company of men as the early Methodist preachers, and yet their extraordinary quality has been very little realized by those who have written about the rise of Methodism. The fact is that the greatness of John Wesley has obscured our sense of the remarkable gifts of his helpers. But, great as Wesley was, he could never have done the miraculous work he did without their aid.”

The Early Methodist Preachers p.9

The same writer tells us that in 1791, the year of Wesley’s death there were more than 130,000 Methodists in Britain and America. Added to this there were in the region of a million adherents. All this is being accomplished in less than 50 years.

We are looking at the body of men who under God changed the face of our country. Fortunately in 1778 Wesley asked these men, to produce short auto- biographies of their lives and work, with the aim of publishing them in successive editions of the Arminian Magazine (later to be known as the Methodist Magazine) between 1778 and 1811. Many of these biographers are collected by Thomas Jackson in 1837 – 1838 and published in three volumes as *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*. Early in the 20th century they were republished under the title of *Wesley’s Veterans*.

The following tribute has been given to them.

These, and others like them, were the men who made Methodism, confessors of which any Church would have a right to be proud, and the remembrance of their steadfastness and devotion ought to kindle a new fire of enthusiasm in the men of our own time. The moral of their lives is summed up in the stirring words of the Methodist Revival uttered by President Roosevelt.

“If we are to advance in broad humanity, in kindness, in the spirit of brotherhood, exactly as we advance in our conquest over the hidden forces of nature, it must be by developing strength virtue, and virtue in strength, by encouraging and training men who shall be both good and strong, both gentle and valiant, -- men who scorn wrong doing, and who, at the same time, have both the courage and the strength to strive mightily for the right.”

The Roots of Methodism W.B. Fitzgerald p. 119

How did they come about?

First by way of lay preaching, almost simultaneously in several places laymen began to preach the Gospel. As early as 1735 Howell Harris had began to form what he called praying societies in Wales, there were soon about 30 of these set up. Out of the fellowship and practice of sharing testimonies men began to exhort others to repent of their sins and seek salvation through Christ. Wesley met Harris in 1739 and through his influence began to consider the principle of lay preaching. As George Eayrs remarks:

“Wesley was at first very reluctant to sanction lay preaching. This development owed much to the appreciation and courage of godly women. Lady Huntingdon urged Thomas Maxfield to use his gifts; Susanna Wesley defended him when he did so; and aged Mrs. Canning of Evesham said to Wesley concerning Thomas Westell, ‘ stop him at your peril.’ He preaches the truth, and the lord owns him as truly as He does you or your brother.”

New History of Methodism p.292

We know that John Cennick in 1739 preached to a gathering of 500 colliers at Kingswood Bristol and “Many believed in that hour.” Cennick at that time was a mere layman. Wesley sanctioned

Cennick's preaching but rather inconsistently would have put a stop to Maxfield who Wesley had appointed as his assistant at the Foundery in London as an expounder of the Scriptures. During Wesley's absence Maxwell's expounding developed into preaching, Wesley hearing of this hastened back to put a stop to it. His mother persuaded him from such a course commenting:

"Take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as truly called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear also yourself."

Ibid p.293

He took heed of his mother's council and was constrained to say, "It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Lesley F. Church- speaks of the divine inevitability which brought about the appointing of these men. At first Wesley could count on a number of his brethren amongst the Church of England ministers who would associate with his work. For various reasons some of these pulled back, and at the same time the work was growing, the numbers who could direct it were pitifully inadequate. It was soon obvious to Wesley that he must find "helpers", and give them some sort of authorization.

"The Gospel which Methodism proclaimed was one of conscious, personal salvation, and many of those who accepted it, entered into a rich living experience, were constrained to proclaim it to their neighbours. Later they learned to sing:

*What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell.
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible."*

More about Early Methodist People p.99

It was this fire that burned in the soul of those early converts which found some of its expression in the ministries of those early itinerants.

Forty such preachers were at work by the year 1744 who whilst Wesley went about the country, took oversight of the societies and preached in their own localities. Wesley defends their position in his Appeal to men of Reason and Religion. He points out that our Lord Himself was a layman: "*Is this not the carpenter?*"

"Wesley had grateful recollections of the Moravian mechanic and lay preacher, Christian David, who at Herrnhut had been as an angel of God to him, learned and in holy orders though he was. He dared not stop men whom he saw and heard doing the like service to others, else unhelped. Often the lay preachers had their own sharp replies for their clerical critics. A clergyman told a North Country lay preacher that he was not qualified to preach, astonished him and drew the brusque retort, Qualified! You say that? Why, without your gown you dare na, and without your book you could na, and without your pay you would na. And I do without all three."

Ibid p.294

Itinerant Preachers

As the lay preachers multiplied and their powers developed they began to itinerate like Wesley and Whitfield. Methodist Societies at this time were springing up in many parts of the country, circuits were being formed and the need was for men to visit these societies and preach to and teach the people. (Wesley had early resolved not to strike one blow where he could not follow up the blow. p.280)

"The circuit system another distinguishing feature of Methodism developed gradually. Such clergy of the Church of England as assisted the Wesley's remained in their residences, and exercised a wide ministry round such centres.

John Lenton argues that some of the early itinerants worked through and in conjunction with the parish ministries of men such as Grimshaw of Howarth, Sellon of Breedon, Fletcher of Madeley and later John Crosse of Bradford, David Simpson of Macclesfield and John Eyton of Wellington. Vincent Perronet, the Vicar of Shoreham in Kent, who was affectionately called by Charles Wesley "the Archbishop of the Methodists", and who always gave the Wesley's an eager welcome to his church, and gathered his people into classes after the Methodist fashion. Another strong supporter of the Wesley's was John Berridge the Vicar of Everton in Bedfordshire. He was a Senior Fellow Clare College, Cambridge, an able scholar, and a brilliant wit. The experience of conversion came to him with extraordinary power, and the college weight became a passionate evangelist. He used his sanctified wit his talents of drole illustrations to reach the heart and mind of the village labourer. Berridge remained a bachelor to the end of his life, and thought that marriage was a great hindrance to an itinerant preacher, saying that it had slackened Charles Wesley's missionary passion, and that it would have done the same for John Wesley and George Whitfield "if God in his good providence had not been pleased to send them a brace of ferrets".

Scenes of revival were witnessed at Everton, and Berridge, travelling as an itinerant preacher, spread the flame of his message through the villages round about his parish. John Wesley often visited Berridge, and speaks with enthusiasm of him and his work. It was Berridge's method to follow the Methodist plan. "Preaching", said Berridge "kindles the fire, but Societies keep the flame alive." He was one of the most devoted and picturesque figures of the Revival, a great but not blind admirer of Wesley. He strongly disassociated himself from Wesley when he thought that Wesley had taken action which indicated that the Methodists would separate from the Church of England. Berridge is best revealed in his epitaph, written, except the date, by his own hand:

"Here lies the earthly remains the John Berridge, late Vicar of Everton, an itinerant servant of Jesus Christ, who loved his Master and his work; and after running His errands many years, was called to wait on Him above. Reader, art thou born again? No salvation without the new birth! I was born in sin, February 1716. Remained ignorant of my fallen state till 1730. Lived proudly on faith and works for salvation till 1754. Admitted to Everton Vicarage, 1755. Flew to Jesus alone for refuge, 1756. Fell asleep in Christ, January 22, 1793."

Even in his epitaph he still desires to plead with souls and to call them to the New Birth. We love the omission, for there is no word about his academic distinctions- Senior Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge.

(John Wesley's Preachers p.406 and Methodism Bardsley Brash p.111).

In the later part of the 18th century many of the London proprietary chapels and the lecture-ships were in the gift of Evangelical laymen, and they selected Evangelical clergyman for these positions, and thus the number and influence of Evangelical preachers spread in London. Thus the work grew; and owing to the Revival which had been first born in the hearts of Whitfield and the Wesley's, the Evangelical Party became stronger not only in London, but in fashionable centres such as Bath and Cheltenham, and also in Hull, owing to the influence of Joseph Milner, and in Huddersfield, through the ministry of Venn. Later Richard Cecil, at St. John's Bedford Row, London, and John Newton, at St. Mary's Woolnoth, and Charles Simeon at Cambridge, added strength to the movement.

But none of these clergyman worked as colleagues in toil with Wesley; they owed much to him, but were never true yoke fellows. (See further notes on these Anglican helpers pp. 111-117 Methodism W. Bardsley Brash). At the Fourth Conference held at the Foundery in London June 16th, 1747. See History of Methodism Stevens vol. I p.248.

For sketches of the lives of some of these see John Wesley C.E. Vulliamy 273...

The Minutes of the 12th Conference of the Methodist leaders give three lists of preachers. The names of the Wesley's come first then it is added, the names of our present preachers are: in this list

are the names of several clergymen and a number of itinerants. This is followed by a list of “Half Itinerants” and “Our chief Local Preachers.” Half itinerants were such men as William Shent of Leeds, who continued his business, while others managed, while he travelled as a preacher under Wesley’s direction.

Circuits Founded by Preachers

John Lenton gives us the following insight into those men who at first were influenced by the revival but who without having no immediate contact with the Wesley’s began preaching circuits of their own which were afterward merged into the Methodist movement.

Amongst the most well known of these were John Bennet’s round in the 1740’s in Cheshire, Lancashire and North Derbyshire. John Nelson had been creating a round of societies near Birstall after his conversion and before Wesley accepted him as a preacher in 1742. The Society at St Ives, which drew Wesley into Cornwall in 1743, was absorbed into Methodism and became the foundation of the powerhouse that was West Cornish Methodism. Wesley said of them, not quite relishing their independence “ They took me into their fellowship, and not I them.” Other similar preachers included Thomas Lee with his group of Societies in Nidderdale in 1748, Thomas Mitchel, and in Ireland the Society led by Mark Davis in Dublin. We can also add that some of the early local preachers also began to itinerate further afield.(See New History of Methodism p. 294)

The Character and Qualifications of the Preachers as defined by Conference

What came to be the standard requirement by way of character and qualification of these preachers reads as follows:

“Do they know in whom they have believed? Have they the love of God in their hearts? Do they desire and seek nothing but God?... Have they success? Do they not only speak as generally either to convince or affect the hearts, but have any received remission of sins by their preaching? A clear and lasting sense of the love of God? As long as these marks undeniably occur in any, we allow him to be called of God to preach. These we receive as sufficient reasonable evidence that he is moved thereto by the Holy Ghost.”

It was to be the judgement of Wesley and his preachers, the spoken testimony of the new helper himself, the witness of those helped by his preaching, and the approval of the society of which he was a member that were to answer whether or not these requirements were met.

This was followed by a period of prayer and fasting that a right decision should be made.

The candidate was then appointed on one year’s trial.

This period was followed by a further four year period on note and at the end of which he was received into full connexion with Wesley and the Conference.

Every new preacher received a copy of the Large Minutes, a summary of Methodist history, doctrine, and discipline, inscribed with a recognition of his status as a fellow- labourer. The preachers also received a copy of Wesley’s The Twelve Rules of a Helper. They were meant to embody the ideal for a Methodist preacher.

1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed a moment. Never be triflingly employed. Never waste away the time; neither spend any more time in any place than is strictly necessary.
2. Be serious. Let your motto be, “Holiness to the Lord.” Avoid all lightness, jesting, and foolish talking.
3. Converse sparingly and cautiously with women; particularly with young women.
4. Take no step towards marriage without first consulting with your brethren.
5. Believe evil of no one unless you see it done, take heed how you credit it. Put the best construction on everything. You know the judge is always supposed to be on the prisoner’s side.

6. Speak evil of no one; else your word especially would eat as doth a canker. Keep your thoughts within your own breast, till you come to the person concerned.
7. Tell every man what you think wrong in him, and that plainly, as soon as may be; else it will fester in your heart. Make all haste to cast the fire out of your bosom.
8. Do not affect the gentleman. You have no more to do with this character than with that of a dancing master. A Preacher of the Gospel is the servant of all.
9. Be ashamed of nothing but sin. Not of fetching wood (if time permits) or of drawing water: not of cleaning your own shoes or your neighbours.
10. Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. And in general, do not mend our Rules, but keep them; not for wrath, but for conscience' sake.
11. You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always not to those who want you, but to those who want you most. Observe: It is not your business to preach so many times, or to take care of this or that society, but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord. And remember! A Methodist preacher is to mind every point, great and small, in the Methodist discipline! Therefore you will need all the sense you have, and to have all your wits about you !
12. Act in all things, not as according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel. As such, it is your part to employ your time in the manner which we direct; partly in preaching, and visiting from house to house; partly in reading, meditation, and prayer. Above all, if you labour with us in our Lord's vineyard, it is needful that you should do all that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for his glory.

A New History of Methodism p.295

Wesley expected his preachers to study and prepare well their sermons.

“Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. Steadily spend all the morning in this employ, or, at least, five hours in the four and twenty. ‘But I only read the Bible,’ Then you ought to teach others to read only the Bible. But if so, you need preach no more. Just so said George Bell. And what is the fruit? Why, now he neither reads the Bible, nor anything else. This is rank enthusiasm. If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St Paul. He wanted others too. “Bring the books,” he says, “But especially the parchments”- those wrote on parchment. “But I have no taste for reading.” Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade. “But I have no books.” I will give each of you books as fast as you can read them, books to the value of five pounds.”

Ibid p. 297

See Wesley's Veterans vol VII Thomas Taylor p.64-66. Note Taylor at the first setting out as a Helper was a convinced Calvinist but this was no barrier to him being appointed. See Veterans Vol VII p.25. and Evangelicalism in Britain p.28. Thomas Taylor learnt Hebrew and Greek and Latin. (Footnote Although he repudiated it, Wesley pursued no vendetta against Calvinism. Men holding Reformed views were admitted to his annual conference, and during the 1760's Wesley employed without examination a preacher Thomas Taylor, who read little but Calvinist authors ...)

My method of spending my time is this. The time before breakfast is wholly devoted to my Hebrew Bible, comparing the original text with the Latin and English versions. I did for a while, carry about with me the Septuagint translation, that is the Hebrew Bible translated into Greek by Seventy Jews: but finding it to be so wide of the Hebrew, I have laid it aside, only consulting it occasionally.

Wesley expressed his confidence in the fact that there was not one of his preachers who could not pass the examination in practical, experimental divinity as few of the candidates for holy orders, even in the University are able to do.

The Pattern of Itinerating

Wesley said in (1784) that it was too much for the preachers and the people for the preachers to stay in one place for more than six or eight weeks together. He believed that they could not find matter for preaching every morning and evening, nor would the people come to hear him. Wesley was insistent on keeping the itinerant system though it took a great toll on the preachers. Eventually however the system was modified to allow the preachers to stay in one place for up to three years at a time.

Eayrs comments on the advantages of the system.

“Moving to and fro, the itinerant was a bond of union between the societies in the circuit, and his appointment in several circuits with the passing years knit them together in the connexion of which he was the representative. The system helped also to secure uniformity in teaching and administration. The preacher did not remain long enough to impress upon the members his peculiar views or methods. His doctrine and discipline and those of his predecessor and successor had been derived from Wesley and the Conference. To these he and they were all amenable. Different times and conditions may necessitate modifications; but for securing the unity homogeneity, and happy co-operation of a new, scattered, varied, and rapidly-growing community, perhaps nothing better than the itinerancy within the circuits and from circuit to circuit could have been devised. Wesley’s preachers had the mobility of Wyclif’s itinerating poor priests and laymen, or recalled the Friars of the Middle Ages without their hampering vows.”

Ibid p.298

The Buildings in which they Preached

The preachers effectually used any buildings in which they could gain a hearing a farmer’s kitchen, a miner’s cottage, a shopkeeper back parlour. In Manchester Methodism began in a third story garret of an old building by Blackfriar’s Bridge; in York in a house and a building known as the Hole in the Wall.

Ministry amongst Children

Children received the special attention of the preachers, “Where there are children in the society meet them at least an hour every week” said Wesley. In the homes he visited, each child was to receive from the preacher the “*Instructions for Children*”, and on his next visit he was to hear what had been learned by heart. Neglect of these duties was dealt with summarily by Wesley. Though like Isaac Watts, he had no children of his own, he was devoted to young folk. Wesley’s school at Kingswood, Bristol was chiefly for the children of his preachers. His Sunday school at the orphan house, in Newcastle, was one of the best in the kingdom. It soon had no fewer than a thousand children in attendance

New History of Methodism pp 301 302

Wesley gives the example of how Thomas Walsh one of his preachers put this into practice.

He first introduced in many places the custom of meeting weekly such of them as could attend, in order to instruct them in such truths, relating to godliness, as their years and capacity admitted of. In doing which, he desired their parents might be present likewise; to whom his affecting manner of address was not less serviceable than to the children themselves, both often weeping together.

Wesley’s Journal, April, 1756 quoted in Veterans Vol. V p.66

Work amongst the Jews

Again quoting the example of Thomas Walsh it is recorded of him that whilst in London he had several interviews with the Jews, frequently attending their synagogues, and reasoning with them out of their own Hebrew Scriptures. And although he could not with certainty say that any of them

were converted it was an obvious that he had a concern for them and *non-were able to gainsay the power by which he spoke.*

Veterans vol v p.66

The way they allocated their time

An insight into this is given from the account of Thomas Taylor. Who as we noted gave the early part of his day to studying the Bible in its original languages here gives us this insight into how the rest of his day was spent.

After breakfast I write, or read in some Latin author, till it is time to take horse. If I do not ride, I visit the sick, and others till dinner. After dinner I generally read divinity, history, geography, or philosophy, till five: and then spend some time in my Greek New Testament, and consider the subject I shall preach from that evening. After preaching, and the Society Meeting, I spend the little remains of the evening in friendly conversation with such as happen to be present, till I retire. I then write down what has occurred in the day, and then commit myself into the hands of my gracious God. This is my general manner of spending my time; but I find a good deal of difficulty in keeping to it. Sometimes I want convenient retirement; so that I am obliged to pursue my study in the midst of children, noise and confusion.

Indeed if anyone comes to me for advice, or in distress of mind, I directly lay aside everything else, and apply myself wholly to the case; but otherwise I keep to my regular plan.

Veterans vol 7 p. 65

The size and extent of the circuits

At first however the circuits covered very wide areas. For example in 1746 there were only six circuits covering the whole of England. These were London, Bristol, Newcastle, Cornwall, Evesham, and Yorkshire; Wales was a seventh circuit. London included all of Surrey, Kent, and Essex. Bristol included Somerset, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire, and Gloucestershire. Yorkshire included Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Rutland, Nottinghamshire, and Lincolnshire as well as the vast county of York.

In 1765, the first year that the Stations of the Preachers are found in the printed minutes of Conference, there were 25 circuits in England, manned by 71 preachers.

We could add to this the fact that in those days travelling was both difficult and dangerous and that there was hardly a decent road in all England.

Added to this was the threat of attack by highwaymen, when the preachers preached they faced mob violence, and in many places clerical hostility.

Wesley said to Alexander Mather as he was setting out on circuit Ministry, *“To be a Methodist preacher is not the way to ease, honour, pleasure or profit. It is a life of much labour and reproach. They often fare hard, often are in want. They are liable to be stoned, beaten, and abused in various manners. Consider this before you engage in so uncomfortable a way of life.”*

As Bett comments: *As a matter of fact there were few of the early preachers who did not run a real risk of martyrdom, and it is remarkable that so few of them actually suffered serious and lasting injury.*

If I might quote two brief examples. John Nelson was nearly murdered at York. He was struck on the head with a brick, so that the blood ran down into his shoes, and later in the day he was attacked again, knocked down again and again, brutally kicked, and dragged over the stones by the hair of his head. After this attack his attackers believed they had killed him and left him to die. On the same day that this happened which was her Easter Sunday, his wife was mobbed at Wakefield and nearly murdered. The brutal treatment to which she was subjected resulted in a miscarriage, and half a lifetime of suffering.

Peter Jacko was attacked so savagely at Warrington in Lancashire that the blood gushed out of his mouth, nose, and ears.

Perhaps the most systematic and carefully-organised of all the outrages on law and on humanity which the records of English history can supply, was the riot in North East Lancashire, from Colne as a centre, to which John Wesley and his friend Grimshaw, the famous parson of Haworth were exposed in 1748. This riot was deliberately planned and arranged Rev. George White, M.A. minister of Colne and Marsden, in the summer of 1748. The mob which this clergyman raised by systematic enlistment and public proclamation, brutally beat Wesley and Grimshaw, and cruelly ill treated many of the Methodists, some of whom they threw into the river from a rock 12 feet high. The Living Wesley J. H. Rigg p. 165

Their attitude shaped by Wesley's grasp of the Puritan Hope

I mention the above not only to show what brave and dedicated men these were but also to demonstrate something of their attitude towards the ungodliness of their day. Methodists are used to singing "*His blood can make the foulest clean, his blood availed for me.*" The point is they firmly believed this. There is a wonderful example of this quoted in Wesley's Journal in regard to his arrival in Newcastle upon Tyne in May, 1742. He wrote these memorable and significant words:

"I was surprised; so much drunkenness, cursing and swearing (even from the mouths of little children) two I never remember to have seen and heard before in so small a compass time.

Now here is the point.

"Surely this place is ripe for Him who "came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Iain Murray commented on these words.

"The Gospel of grace does not need promising conditions to make its reception a certainty."

The Puritan Hope XX

Wesley and his preachers believed in the power of the grace of God and in the fact that, "*When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.*" (Isaiah 59.19). We may note also the Pietists of Halle under Franke expected at this time the imminent return of the Lord, heralded by the conversion of the Jews. (A History of Christianity MacCulloch p. 740) This was not a passive waiting but a waiting with lamps trimmed and burning like the wise virgins of Scripture an active waiting which inspired them to send a mission to the Jews of Eastern Europe. It was the same beliefs and the desire to propagate the religion of the heart that inspired them to set up colonising schemes in the Quaker state of William Penn's Pennsylvania.

The battle they faced:

Rivington, who was latter to become Wesley's publisher complained in 1736 of the fact that, "*Many of the young men in his parish had left off attendance at all public services and professed deism and that there had been a visible decline in the sale of good books.*"

In 1738, Archbishop Secker of Oxford complained. "*That an open and professed disregard for religion is become through a variety of causes, a distinguishing character of the present age.*"

Archbishop Butler's complaints voiced in his preface to the famous *Analogy of Religion*, has become the almost definitive contemporary comments on the spiritual climate of that age.

"It is come I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons but Christianity is not so much a subject of inquiry, but that it is, now at length discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly they treat it as if in the present age this were an agreed point, among all people of discernment, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule as it were by way of reprisals for it having so long interrupted the pleasures of the world."

Certainly it was an age when the rationalistic philosophies of the Enlightenment were dazzling the minds of the thinking classes. We forget that the earlier part of the 18th century came under the influence of David Hume the Scottish philosopher often described as the father of modern scepticism. The century ended with a philosopher of the German George Frederick Hegel who taught that God is no longer to be thought of as a personal being distinct from the universe. (see *The Case for Christianity* Chapman. p.p. 164 and 168).

Amongst the lower classes there was widespread disregard for morals. Anybody familiar with the writings of Telford will know that in 1736 every six house in London was a grog shop and the purveyors of cheap gin hung signs outside their shops advertising, “*Drunk for a penny, dead drunk for tuppence – clean straw for nothing.*”

The consumption of alcohol in that period was phenomenal. Gangs of youths roamed the streets of London and made it unsafe to be out at night.

As far as the leaders of the nation were concerned things were no better. One French observer commented on the fact that in England not more than four or five of the members of Parliament who regularly attend church. Green in his *Short History of the English People*, adds.... “*Of the prominent statesman of the time the greater part were unbelievers in any form of Christianity and distinguished for the grossness and immorality of their lives*”.... Purity and fidelity to the marriage vows was smeared out of fashion, and Lord Chesterfield instructed his son in the art of seduction as part of polite education.

Time fails me to say anything about the state of the church except to say that as regard to the Church of England the early 18th century was known as *the glacial Epoch of the Church*, cold in theology and all else cautious, colourless, Laodicean. Sadly amongst the free churches not a few were drifting into Unitarianism. The 18th-century church is well portrayed in Hogarth’s cartoon, “*The Sleeping Congregation*” 1728. Yes there were many bright spots but I am just here trying to briefly portray the general condition.

How did Wesley and his Preachers begin to address this situation? The Strategy they followed
Wesley’s strategy has in recent years been linked to schemes that were at that time afoot to pull down the corrupt government of Walpole. That the Whig government of that time was thoroughly corrupt and corrupting is an undisputed fact.

To Walpole was given the shameful distinction of making bribery and corruption a persistent and consistent policy of state. The first real "Prime Minister" of Britain, he vied with any Stuart sovereign in the misuse of Government funds and places for the maintenance and augmentation of personal power. Once, on scanning a gathering of Members of Parliament, he observed: "All these men have their price." That's conjecture, unfortunately, was far too true, and on it he moulded his policy.

See Wesley Bready’s *England Before and after Wesley*. pp.119.. Also G.F. Nuttall who examines this issue in his *Howell Harris and the grand table: a note on religion and politics 1744-50* *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* Vol 39 1988 pp531-44. (Quoted in *Was there a Methodist Evangelistic strategy?*)

W.R. Ward maintains that many of the early Methodist Societies were composed of individuals that were interested in reforming policies and strengthening the ties of the Church of England with the evangelical groups on the continent such as those of Halle and their rivals the Moravians. (*Was there a Methodist Evangelistic Strategy* p.287)

“Ward suggested that the Methodist group which included Whitefield, Harris and the Countess of Huntington as well as the Wesley’s, was until Frederick Prince of Wales’ death in 1751 thinking in terms of a political revolution which would include religious reform, giving them at least control of patronage.”

John Wesley’s Preachers p. 407

Something of this may well have been in Wesley and Whitefield’s mind at the beginning and may have lingered in the mind to some extent, evidence Wesley’s support for the re-constituted Society for the Reformation of Manners in 1757. Wesley preached in favour of this Society. Sermon 57.(Attached from internet).

Something of this purpose may also be present in his statement of his purpose of his ministry:

“Q. What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the preachers’ called Methodists?

A. To reform the nation, and particularly the Church of England, to spread Scriptural holiness over the land.”

Was there a Methodist Evangelistic Strategy? p.286

However we may note the comments of the widely respected church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette who notes that;

“Wesleyanism, which was so important in the life of England in the latter part of the eighteenth century, was loyal to the constitution, John Wesley believed that under it the people had sufficient liberty and in politics he was a mildly conservative force.

The movement was not out to work basic changes in society. However, John Wesley persistently contended against such evils as bribery and corruption in politics, smuggling, and the plundering of wrecked vessels. Moreover, Wesley worked strenuously to relieve poverty and started missions to prisoners. It was one of his warm friends and admirers, John Howard, who became an outstanding pioneer in prison reform. Wesley too was a pioneer in the anti- slavery movement. He did much to mould the English Middle Class and to inculcate in it steadiness, sobriety, and industry, and to teach it to regard wealth as a trust. Wesley’s followers worked against the exploitation of one group for the benefit of another.” (see Warner The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution).

History of the Expansion of Christianity Vol. 3 p.390 and 399.

There can be no doubt that if any of the above was ever part of Wesley’s strategy it was largely superseded by his all embracing desire for the salvation of the souls of individual men and women and to encourage them to lead holy, virtuous and godly lives. (Wesley would have talked of going on towards perfection.)

This he sought to achieve by preaching the great doctrines of the Reformation or as he sometimes expressed it, the grand old doctrines of The Church of England.

Wesley’s doctrinal manifesto is set out in his famous Four Oxford Sermons. 1738, 1741, 1742, 1744.

Almost immediately after his conversion Wesley began his great life work, the Four Oxford Sermons can be seen as announcing the main theme or the manifesto of that work.

The Four Oxford Sermons were preached in the years 1738, 1741and 1744.

Their titles were:

Salvation by Faith	June 11 th 1738
The Almost Christian	July 25 th 1741

Awake Thou That Sleepest April 4th 1742

(Preached by Charles Wesley)

Scriptural Christianity

August 24th 1744

These sermons, we would argue, formed the manifesto of the revival.

G.C. Cell comments:

'They assailed boldly the dead theology and decadent Christianity of Oxford circles and of the church at large' They depicted the current religion as 'a nominal Christianity', no better than the 'faith of a devil or the life of a heathen' Its adherents were called 'saints of the world,' or 'baptised heathen', whose religion is only 'a poor superstition' or 'mean pageantry.'

This nominal Christianity is handed over as the lawful prey of a destructive criticism. But at the same time, these Revival manifestoes do much more than picture the decay of religion; they raise the standard of Reformation. They assure 'a return to the principles of the Reformation 'can alone avert national disaster. They culminate in the prayer, 'Be glorified in our reformation, not in our destruction.'

'Rediscovery of John Wesley' G C Cell p39

We might also add Croft Cells further comment:

It admits of full proof that the religious energy of Wesley's message lay in its unity with the faith of the first Reformers and not in any deviation from them. There need be no doubt or uncertainty whatsoever that the principal power and the supreme resource in the preaching alike of Whitfield and the Wesley's by which, all agree, a religious revolution was begun in England, was the Luther - Calvin idea of the sovereign saving significance of a God - given faith in Christ as a perfect revelation of God and a complete atonement for sin. It is often perhaps commonly, supposed that the theological differences between Whitfield and the Wesley's were profound while their doctrinal agreements were superficial, at any rate far less important. But they certainly did not think so and Wesley roundly denounced that view as close to absurdity. Wesley is on record, not once but often and always, that the peculiar religious energy of the Wesleyan revival came out of the unity of the Protestant faith, the very heart of it, and not out of its divergences. "It is the faith of the first Reformers which I by the grace of God preach."

Rediscovery of John Wesley p.246

As a clergyman of the Church of England, Master of Arts and Fellow of Lincoln College it was required of him that he preach before the University every third year. These sermons were preached from the historic pulpit of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford. The obligation was binding for both parties 'no clergyman can avoid his turn, nor could the University refuse.' However Wesley was only called upon to preach on these three occasions. Such was the controversy unleashed that he was never called again.

John Wesley in the Reformation and Puritan Tradition p 95.

See also extract from Wesley's Journal Sept 13th 1739 p. 331-333 *ibid.*

" On the threshold of the great revival, a few words may be devoted to its special teaching. Throughout life Wesley was faithful to all the doctrines of the Reformation and the English Church. Repentance for sin, justification by faith, and holiness of heart and life were the constant themes of his ministry and his writings. His own long bondage to doubt made him careful to show the way of acceptance. The doctrine of assurance, on which he laid such stress, appears in the alluring light of his brother's hymns and in his own sermons. Wesley rendered inestimable service by bringing out

into clear light the blessed truth that no Christian need walk in darkness, but may rejoice in the assurance of acceptance with God

Entire sanctification was set in its proper light as a goal to wards which every Christian should press. Wesley fixed no time and prescribe no methods of this work. He was content to urge his people to grow in grace, and to strive to gain all the mind that was in Christ.

The opening paragraphs of his “Earnest appeal to men of Reason and Religion” while perhaps the finest epitome of ruling purpose of the Great Revival. The lifeless and formal religion of the time was a sad contrast to that religion of love which they had found. The love of God and all mankind “we believe to be the medicine of life, the never failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the mysteries and vices of men. Wherever this is, there are virtues and happiness going hand in hand. There is humbleness of mind, gentleness, long-suffering, the whole image of God, and at the same time a peace that passeth all understanding, and joy unspeakable and full of glory... this religion we longed to see established in the world, a religion of love, and joy, peace, having its seat in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing forth, not only in all innocence (fall in love worketh no ill to his neighbour),but likewise in every kind of beneficence, spreading virtue and happiness all around it.” Wesley then shows how he and his friends had long wandered in darkness, having no man to guide them into the straight way to the religion of love, even by faith. The blessed change it had wrought in their own souls gave them confidence in the urging all to seek the same joy. By this faith we are saved from all easiness of mine, from the anguish of the wounded spit it, from discontent, fear and sorrow of heart, and from that inexpressible listlessness weariness, both of the world and ourselves, which we had so helplessly laboured under for many years, especially when we were out of the hurry of the world and sunk into calm reflection. In this we find that love of God and of all mankind which we had elsewhere sought in vain. This we know and for you, and therefore cannot but declare, saves everyone that partakes of it both from sin and misery, from every unhappy and unholy temper.”

Life of Wesley John Telford p 112-3

Another important insight into Wesley’s strategy is recorded by J. S. Simon in its *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*.

*“ He never lost sight of the goal described in *The Country Parsons Advice to his Parishioners*: “The restoring of our decaying Christianity to its primitive life and vigour, and the support of our tottering and sinking Church.” The country parson suggested that the best way to attain the end was the formation of Religious Societies; but as Wesley strode along the roads he must have owned to himself that the Societies with which he was connected were not answering their high purpose. The echoes of disputes sounded in his ears, and the possibilities of coming contentions could not be ignored. He must have seen that until the Societies were changed in spirit until they adopted new methods of work, it was impossible they could be used as instruments to bring about the national revival of religion. Upon that revival his heart was set.*

One of the principal defects of the religious societies was the lack of provision for the evangelization of the people outside their narrow enclosures. The Reformation Societies connected with some of them attacked public immorality and, by legal process, did much to discourage and repress vice. When we examined the rules of the Societies of the highest type we fail to detect any organization for effecting the conversion of the multitudes that were outside all the churches.

It was at this point Simeon argues Wesley became convinced of the need for out door and itinerant preaching.

John Wesley and the Religious Societies J.S. Simon pp. 306

The early Methodist preachers as we have seen above clearly taught the same doctrines.

(Footnote A strange turn of providence Wesley and Lincoln College Oxford. That college establish to counter the teaching if Wiclif and the Lollards. See John Wesley and the Religious Societies p 68-9)

That there was perhaps a tension in Wesley between trying to reform from the top or the bottom as is mentioned by David Hempton in Methodism Empire of the Spirit p. 14-15

Unsurprisingly, given his political and religious heritage, Wesley oscillated in between seeking to reform the national religious establishment from above and trying to forge new structures from below.

This tension between authoritarianism and religious conservatism on the one hand, and something approaching egalitarianism and religious radicalism on the other was evidence wherever Methodism took root. The resulting conflicts were played out as ferociously within the Methodist tradition as they were between the tradition and its surrounding culture.

We can safely say that Wesley's strategy for reform began and largely centred in England and Wales on the ordinary working population. Maybe with some variation and adaptation in Scotland and Ireland.

Hugh Price Hughes in his introduction to his condensed version of Wesley's Journal adds:

Then came John Wesley and his "Helpers." They were the first preachers since the Franciscan friars in the Middle Ages who ever reached the working classes. (Thomas Bradwardine preaching to Edward III troops in France 1339.)

As Dr. Rigg has shown, Wesley's itineraries were deliberately planned to bring him into direct contact neither with the aristocracy nor with the dependant or poverty stricken poor, but with the industrious workmen in town and country. The ultimate result was that "the man in the street" became Methodist in his conception of Christianity, whatever his personal conduct and character might be.

The Journal of John Wesley p. 11

By and large Wesley and his preachers began at the bottom. They took the Gospel to the very worst.

How they worked

Some of Wesley's preachers began as prison visitors and some spent all of their lives in this work. As noted above Wesley said to his preachers, in The Rules of a Helper:

"You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those who want you, but to those that want you most."

It was in accordance with this brave and noble council that several of the early Methodist preachers began their work in Newgate Prison. This foul place was crowded with men and women many of them under sentence of death, some for the violence crimes and some of the most trivial offences. The theft of any sum larger than 40 shillings together with dozens of other offences were in those days all punishable by death.

Silas Told one of the earliest of Wesley's preachers heard Wesley preach at the Foundry at five o'clock in the morning in the year 1744. The text was:

"I was sick and in prison, and ye visited me not:"

He made up his mind there and then to visit the prison in Newgate and devoted the rest of his life to this work.

Again to mention Hogarth, Hogarth painted a picture entitled, *The March to Tyburn*, where there is depicted a man of grave appearance with an open book in his hands, beside the prisoners in the cart. This is said to be a portrait of Silas Told.

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn for the prisoners to sing on their way to the gallows.

*O might we with our closing eyes
Thee in Thy bloody vesture see,
And cast us on Thy sacrifice:
Jesus, my Lord, remember me!*

Many of them did repent, and with bitter tears cast themselves on the mercy of the Friend of sinners and indeed went to their death rejoicing with an unspeakable joy.

Went to the Large Manufacturing Towns

Wesley and his preachers were also fully aware of the large social upheaval being caused by the Industrial Revolution. They were quick to see the appalling conditions men and their families were experiencing in the new pit villages and colliery towns as part of the increasing demand for coal. The same could be said of the tin miners of Cornwall. If the state of morality and religion was poor generally in the country it was infinitely worse in these new localities. English village and exercise from time to time you a tradition of religion and order.... In some villages there was even a school as well. All these things were lacking in the new industrial and mining centres. The result was that the colliers were practically a heathen population, and that is precisely why Wesley and the early Methodist preachers went to them.

See also MacCulloch p. 750.

See John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism Maximin Piette p.390

Dallimore in his life of George Whitfield says the blessing of God was wondrously manifest on this ministry to the colliers. Although these people were notorious for their brutality, there is not the slightest evidence that Whitfield was ever subject to a vicious word or gesture among them. On the contrary, they seem to have been immediately moved by his manifest love for them, and not only did the whole community come flocking to hear him preach but it is apparent that they held him in deep affection.

The following extract from his journal is well-known but very moving:

“Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of the Jesus who was a friend of publicans and sinners, and came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of that being affected us to see the white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks, as they came out of their coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were brought under deep conviction, which, as the event proved, happily ended in a sound and solid conversion. The change was visible to all, those though numbers chose to imputed it to anything, rather than the finger of God.”

George Whitfield Arnold Dallimore p.263

Let us look at some of the Fundamental principles which Characterized and underlay this great movement of the Spirit of God.

1. They believed in the necessity of the New Birth

It is often said that Methodism was born in song it certainly did sing and I hope it always will and not turn away from its heritage. But it is better to say that it was born in the experience of conversion or the new birth. Every Methodist knows of Wesley's Aldersgate St. Experience Wednesday May 24th, 1738.

“About a quarter before nine (while one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Roman's.) while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone, for salvation: and an

assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Life of Wesley John Telford p. 101

Every one of Wesley’s preachers passed through the same kind of experience.

The experience of Robert Wilkerson

In the beginning of July (1767), as Stephen Watson and I were sitting together, he had a volume of the Christian Library in his hand, out of which he read one of Mr. Rutherford’s Letters. When he had done, “Stephen,” I said, “I find, as it were, a melting in my heart.” “So do I too,” said he. He then asked, “Cannot you believe that God has pardoned your sins?” “No,” said I, “I dare not “: on which I immediately lost my comfort.

On Sunday, July 12, Joseph Watson preached in the chapel at Weardale. He gave out that hymn-

*All ye that pass by,
To Jesus draw nigh:
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?*

Then all within me cried out,

*That sinner am I,
Who on Jesus rely,
And come for the pardon God cannot deny.*

I then believed that God for Christ’s sake had forgiven all my sins, and found that peace which arises from a sense of reconciliation. The people of God who knew my distress perceived by my countenance that the Lord was gracious to me, before I had the opportunity to tell them.

I went home rejoicing, and could not help telling what God had done for my soul.

Wesley’s Veterans vol. V p.233

2. They believed in the divine Inspiration and Infallibility of the Bible.

Wesley’s message and that of his preachers always moved within the context of the message of Scripture. Scripture was central in his thinking, his conversion and we might say even before his conversion. The Oxford Holy Club had resolved to take the Bible “*as their whole and sole rule.*” It being their one desire and design to be “*downright Bible Christians.*”

A vital point is made by Robert Coleman in his recent work; *Nothing to do but save souls.*

“His practice was the reflection of a conviction that the Bible was fully inspired by God. Biblical passages were often referred to as the very words of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, according to Wesley “nothing which is written therein can be censured or rejected.” He believed that the Bible was inerrant, “infallibly true,” “the Word of God which abideth forever.” “If there is one falsehood in that book,” he wrote, “it did not come from the God of truth.”

Some have said that his biblicism was because he lived in a pre-critical age. But this is not the case. Views questioning biblical integrity were beginning to circulate in Europe in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Wesley simply had no use for them. He gave no credence to scholars who stood in judgement on the oracles of God.

Out of this confidence came his commitment to the doctrines of historic evangelical Christianity. Though he did not draw up a lengthy creedal statement, like some of the older churches, he did take from his Anglican heritage a simple confession of faith in his “Articles of Religion.” These with his Forty- Four standard sermons and Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, constitute the Methodist “standards” of doctrine.

To contend, as some have, that Methodism has no “confessional principle” is a distortion of history. It is an attempt to justify a liberal theological climate in the church by imposing upon

Wesley a concept of “pluralism,” citing as support his oft quoted dictum: “as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.”

What is ignored is that Wesley’s conciliary principle applied only to peripheral matters- like modes of baptism or ecclesiastical forms of government - and was never intended to excuse deviation from basic Biblical revelation. This deposit of non-negotiable truth included such foundational doctrines as original sin; the Saviour’s virgin birth; his vicarious atonement; the bodily resurrection; Christ’s ascension; and triumphant return; and the judgement to come.

To be sure, the catholic spirit of Wesley cut across all sectarianism and bigotry. (Fiercely anti Roman Catholic See Maldwyn Edwards, *John Wesley A Study in Social and Political Influence*). But there could be no toleration of heresy. Methodist preachers were carefully examined on the doctrines of the church before being sent to preach. The model deed of the properties of the Methodists stipulated that the premises could be used for worship only so long as the doctrinal standards were faithfully observed.

From this kind of theological stamina flowed Methodist evangelism. It is sheer folly to imagine that the church today can produce the fruits of the Gospel without such similar doctrinal integrity. There can be no genuine witness nor growth in spiritual experience, if we do not believe the Bible message.”

See Wesley’s summary of fundamental doctrine in *Journal* vol. I p. 211-213 Thursday 13th Sept. 1739

3. They believed in the fact that men and women without Christ are lost.

There testimonies and writings are filled with references to sermons preached on such texts as; *The time is short; Turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God; Prepare to meet thy God; Say unto them I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.* The comment of Frances Asbury after preaching on “Corinthians 5:11 *Knowing the terror of the Lord we persuade men,* might express the attitude of all the itinerants. He wrote, “If the people say it was like thunder and lightning, I shall not be surprised. I spoke with the power from God, and there was a general and deep feeling in the congregation: thine, O Lord, be the glory.”

Robert E. Coleman p.47

4. They believed in the free offer of the Gospel to all

O that the world might taste and see
The wonders of his grace,
The arms of love that compass me,
Would all mankind embrace.

The whole structure of Methodism was geared to this vital aim.

Wesley said “*What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in his fear and love? And if it answers them not, it is nothing worth.*”

Wesley’s Letters 5: 13 Quoted by Coleman p.34

The preachers were ready to go to the very ends of the earth to preach it John Prichard was ready to go to Africa at that early date but in the end circumstances prevented him leaving for what would have been certain death. (See *Veterans* vol.3 p. 236)

4. They believed in the absolute necessity of the grace of God in Salvation

Let me give you an example of this from American Methodist history.

“*When the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church was revised at the General Conference of 1804, one preacher moved to strike out the word preventing from this Article and insert in its place*

the word assisting. Superintendant Thomas Coke waited impatiently for the man to finish, then rose to his feet, and at the top of his voice exclaimed, "Where am I? In a Methodist Conference? I thought so, but have we turned Pelagians? Do we think we can get along in our natural depravity with a little assistance, without preventing grace? He insisted that the proposed amendment would ruin the intent of the Article which, as it stands, asserts the utter inability of anyone to do anything toward personal salvation except as God's grace through Christ prevents, or as the word means, "comes before." "Brethren", he cried, do not change the word. I would go to the stake, for that word. I would go to the stake, yes, to the stake, for that word, as soon as any word in the Bible."

Coke won his point and vital it was for the safeguarding of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. This was the free unmerited grace the early Methodist preachers preached.

5. They believed in preaching as God's great appointed method for the salvation of mankind

The veteran Richard Whatcoat records (Vol 2. p. 224), that the Methodists preachers regularly preached two or three times each day. I have read of one who on an occasion preached 36 times in one week. Early morning preaching on the Lord's day was strongly encouraged by Wesley, the well known 5 am. preaching.

Minutes of Conference 1768.

"Let the preaching at five in the morning be constantly kept up, wherever you have twenty hearers. This is the glory of the Methodists. Whenever this is dropped they will dwindle away to nothing."

Adrian Burdon The Preaching Service the Glory of Methodism p.19

Wesley gives the following practical advice to his lay preachers in a letter addressed to an evangelical layman dated December 1751.

I mean by preaching the Gospel preaching the love of God to sinners, preaching the life death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ, with all the blessings which in consequence of are freely given to true believers.

By preaching the Law I mean explaining and enforcing the Commandments of Christ, briefly comprised in the Sermon on the Mount.

I think the right method of preaching is this. At our first beginning to preach at any place, after a general declaration of the love of God to sinners, and his willingness that they should they saved, to preach the law in the strongest, closest, the most searching manner possible....., only intermixing the Gospel here and there. After more persons are convinced of sin, mix more of the Gospel, to raise them into spiritual life.

The Preaching Service the Glory of Methodism p.24

The Content of the Preacher's Sermons

Much of this I trust we have been able to derive from what has already been said.

It is not that easy to get at the actual sermons. John Lenton explains why this is.

'Many itinerants recorded the details of their preaching, in terms of places preached at, texts used, date etc. ...following the example set by Wesley himself in his sermon registers. George Story's list of the societies he preached at on the Isle of Wight(1783-85) include a record of what sermons he preached at each society during those years. Most itinerants kept manuscript journals, and many of these included details of sermons. Some kept their manuscript sermons and so two volumes of Adam Clarke's survive, dated around 1808. Because of Wesley's opposition to publishing by the preachers without his permission, they published few sermons in his lifetime. However, at least 15 of those who left and were thus out of his control, made their sermons available to a wider public. After Wesley's death, 28 or more of those who died in the work, including some of the more important preachers, published some of their sermons.'

Sermons tended to be positive, about the blessedness of faith and hope for the believer, rather than negative and concentrating on hell-fire and damnation.

As Hempton suggests, they dealt with themes such as grace, godliness, repentance, temporal and eternal joy, perseverance, vigilance and assurance. ‘

John Wesley's Preachers p, 132

However much can be gleaned of the general tenor of their preaching matter from the testimonies in the Veterans.

What occasioned my commencing as a preacher was as follows: in September 1758, we returned to Limerick; and as Government resolved to shoot a deserter in every city, in terrorem, the lot fell upon a young man in our regiment to die in Limerick. His name was Joseph Newton and he was a Derbyshire man, 22 years of age. I longed to talk with it; but as he was kept in a public guard house, with no place of retirement, I could not tell how to speak to all pray with him among so many people. But when I found the adjutant at been to inform him that he must die on Monday (this was on the Tuesday before), I saw I had no time to lose. I went in, and I found him weeping as if his whole heart would break, and reading a Whole Duty of Man with all his might – like a drowning man catching at anything to save him. I spoke a few words to him then, and again in the evening, though with uncommon reluctance, that being many soldiers round about us. I prayed with them and found very great freedom to speak to him and to all who were present. He had no plea, but saw himself and an undone sinner without help, and almost without hope. Some of us visited him twice or thrice a day, and on Thursday his soul was set at liberty. From that time he witnessed a good confession to all that spoke to him. Everyone that saw him go to the place where he was shot could not but admire the serene joy that appeared in his countenance. He said but little, but his calm, happy death made a deep impression on many of our soldiers; fall they could not but this the difference between him and one they saw die shortly before Dublin, who showed the greatest reluctance, the field office of the day being obliged to ride up to him several times to tell him he must die; a while Joseph Newton was not about 10 minutes on his knees before he dropped the signal, and went to Paradise.

I thought now was the time to try what could be done among the soldiers. I therefore told several that as many as had a mind might come to my room every night after roll call and I would sing, read, and pray with them as well as I could. They came crowded my room and in a little while I had a class of them.

Wesley's Veterans Duncan Wright vol 2 p. 25

Having found salvation myself, I felt an intense desire that others should enjoy the same unspeakable blessing. I therefore began a meeting for prayer on Sunday evenings, and many of our neighbours attended. As we have no one who could give a word of exultation, I sometimes read the settlement, and sometimes the Homilies of the Established Church. These had not been heard of for a long time, and therefore quite new; and the inhabitants, being one and all church people, were very willing to hear them. The minister of the parish, being, as I said before a determined enemy to true religion, was highly offended, and laboured with all his might to prejudice the people against me. The he lost his bad labour, and was so provoked by the people turning Methodist that he left the town. I also read select passages from Burkitt on the New Testament; and afterwards I took God's own book, read part of a chapter, and endeavoured to explain it. The people bore with my weakness constantly attended at all opportunities, and my feeble endeavours were crowned with some degree of success.

John Pawson vol 4 p.25

These men were certainly well grounded in Scripture. Evidence John Nelson quick retort. John Nelson was a Yorkshireman under stone mason by trade. He was a born thinker is no doubt in another age could have easily have been a university lecturer. On one occasion an attempt was

made to press gang him into the army. While preaching, he was seized by a constable, dragged before the commissioners, and forced into the army.

Bail was refused, his friends were not allowed to open their lips in court, all evidence was suppressed, and the whole of the proceedings simply illustrated the truth of Nelson's own words at the time: "there is neither law nor justice for a man that is a Methodist." But in the sturdy Yorkshire mason they got more than they bargained for. He was a man of unconquerable spirit, and had an inconvenient knack turning the tables on his persecutors.

They threw him into Bradford town jail, a horrible dungeon underneath the shambles, reeking with the blood and filth that soaked down into its. "But," says Nelson, "my soul was so filled with the love of God that it was a paradise to me."

Nelson's ready wit and marvellous knowledge of the Bible is illustrated by an incident that happened as the troops were passing through Boar Lane in Leeds. A well-dressed woman, who knew Nelson and had no great love for him, pushed her face close to his and said, "Now, Nelson, where is thy God? Thou saidst at Shent's door, as thou wast passing, thou wast no more afraid of His promise failing than thou wast of dropping through the heart of the earth." Instantly Nelson replied, "Look in the seventh chapter of Micah, and the eighth and 10th verses." The verses are these –

"Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

Then she that is mine enemy shall see it, and shame shall cover her that said unto me, where is the Lord thy God?"

The Roots of Methodism p.115 – 116

Gideon Ousley and the Irish Wake

Before the internment took place, the scene at a wake was frequently one of whiskey drinking smoking and sport mingling with the dead - wail throughout a whole night, but sometimes varied by the presence of a priest, who said mass and collected offerings for the soul of the departed.

Mr Ousley frequently went to these gatherings, and with solemnity and pathos entreated the people to meet God. On one occasion, as the priest was reading mass, and the multitude were on their knees, a stranger suddenly rode up. Dismounting, he knelt in the midst of the congregation with a manifest solemnity. Ask the priest went on reading in a tongue of which the people knew not a word, the stranger caught up passage after passage, selecting, though unknown to his hearers, those portions which conveyed directly scriptural truth or solemn warnings. He suddenly turned the words from Latin into Irish, and repeated aloud after the priest. Then, with deep feeling, he cried at the end of each passage, "listen to that!" the priest seems to have been overwhelmed and awed, and the people completely melted. When the mass was ended, and all rose up Mr Ousley, with a face beaming with affection, urged the people the necessity of having their peace made with God, telling them that they must become reconciled to him, and that it was possible so to do by real repentance and true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he was taking his departure, the crowd cried to the priest, "Father...., who was that?" "I do not know said the priest; he is not a man at all; sure he is an angel. No man could do what he has done."

Mr Ousley was forthwith mounted and was gone.

Years later Gideon Ousley was to meet a man converted at that gathering.

Anecdotes of Gideon Ousley p. 96 Experience Vol I.

Several of their published sermons appear in the pages of the Arminian Magazine.

We do also have comparatively easy access to the sermons of John Fletcher and Adam Clarke.

See Fletcher's Works volume 4 Page 97 Sermon on the New Birth. Also examples of sermon outlines same volume pp 218 214 215 207 203 202 etc.

See also in Fletcher his apologetic work Eulogy on Christian Philosophers Vol 4 p 14.

Also we could mention in the same volume (p.42) an essay on the Trinity intent on countering the arguments of Deists, Materialists and Fatalists.

We could also note other examples of this sort of thing exposing the falsehood of Deism and other examples of false theological and philosophical thought current in the eighteenth century. Whilst on the point the Arminian Magazine (Edited by another of Wesley's veterans Thomas Olivers) published testimonies, obituaries and reflection on current events of the time together with poetry and hymnody all with the purpose of furthering the Gospel and the building up of the saints.

Early Methodist Preachers Sermon Outlines

John Pawson's Funeral Sermon of Mr. David Bumsted City Road Chapel 1797:

Text... *Thanks be to God to giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I

Corinthians 15:57

The bondage we were brought in to by Adam.

Sin subject to Satan's tyranny.

To the power of death.

The victory obtained by Christ.

His conquest of Satan.

Triumph over death.

Mr Bumsted's conversion.

His labours in the Gospel.

Happy in sickness and death.

Mr. Thomas Taylors sermon on Jehovah's pleading his own cause

Arise, O God and plead thine own cause.

Psalm 74:22

The cause of God considered.

The various ways in which he pleads his cause.

At the Reformation.

In the present revival.

The faithful desire to see God's cause prosper.

They must be workers together with Him.

Other subsidiary methods were used that appears in the pages of the Arminian Magazine testimonies and accounts of the Lord working amongst believers and unbelievers. Also poetry and hymnody is included. There are also essays giving reasoned accounts against Deism and Socinianism. Obituaries are given relating the Christian life's of ordinary men and women.

Mr. Prentice's narrative of a ship wreck on the island of Cape Breton.
An account of the Mutiny on the Bounty.
The death of a notorious backslider.
Method of visiting prisoners.
Deliverance of three persons from the savages of the Tate Islands.

All of this must have provided sermon illustrations and examples of the use of the local and itinerant preachers.

Text and subjects for outdoor sermons - Local Preachers Treasury 1886.

1. Christ rejected by men, exalted by God. *The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. Matthew 21:42*
2. What will men do in the end of a misspent life?
And what will ye do in the end thereof? Jeremiah 5:21
3. It is not an easy thing to be a sinner. *The way of the transgressor is hard. Proverbs 13:15*
4. When and why the multitude is not to be followed.
Thou shall not follow the multitude to do evil. Exodus 23:2
5. Two necessary things. *Repent ye, and believe the gospel. Mark 1:15*
6. How and for what purpose did God love the world. *John 3:16*
7. Death as the wages of sin, life as the gift of God. *The wages of sin is death. Romans 6:23*
8. The friendship and fellowship of Jesus with sinners. *This man receiveth sinners. Luke 15:2*
9. The effect in heaven over the repentance of one sinner on earth. *Luke 15:10*
10. A chain with four links. *Repent ye, therefore, and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. Acts 3:19*

See 3 Volumes of published sermons by Adam Clarke (See also When Adam Clarke Preached p.90. Adam Clarke Maldwyn Edwards p.26.

Irvonwy Morgan summed up the message of Wesley's preachers as:

All men need to be saved.
All men can be saved.
All men can know that they are saved.
All men can be saved to the uttermost.

Twixed the Mount and the Multitude p.27

Methodism Needs to Recover it's Lost Identity if it is to Survive

Throughout the 19th century Methodism exerted a tremendous influence upon the populations of the large manufacturing towns of the North and Midlands and other great centres of influence such as Bristol and of course London. In the country districts also especially Cornwall in the West Country her influence was extensive. The preaching of justification by faith alone in England as that century moved into the 20th century, it has been said, was as common a part of chapel on Sunday as a football match on a Saturday afternoon. The theological downgrade of this great body has played a great part in the secularization of this country. Allied to this was that the closure of many chapels at the time of Methodist Reunion in 1933 led to the loss of many adherents and the subsequent contact with literally thousands of families. Further this union seemed to favour the more liberal side of the denomination and on a practical level the more plainly built chapels of the former Methodist New Connexion, Free, and Primitive groups seem to have been targeted for disposal. The leaven of these groups was hence quickly lost.

In one sense it is true that the distinctive teachings of traditional Methodism are generally speaking as far as the fundamentals are concerned no different than that of any other truly evangelical church. A book on Methodist teaching for the young summed up the Methodist Church's teaching as being that she preaches, salvation by faith alone in Christ, that a believer can have full assurance of faith, that every Christian should strive after holiness in the Lord and is to follow after sanctification, and that all Christians need the fellowship of other believers and that we cannot reach maturity in the Christians life on our own. Methodism's great strength however lay not only in its authoritative teachings as such but in its spirit and its zeal. This is well captured by Ian Murray in a chapter in his 'Wesley and the Men who Followed'. Writing of a 19th century Wesleyan minister Thomas Collins he speaks of some of the characteristics of Collins' life as follows:

'Of the lessons that may be drawn from the life of Collins, one of the foremost would be the evidence it gives of the supernatural power bound up with the Gospel. Nothing else can explain the glorious changes he so often saw. None proved to be too guilty or too depraved for his message, and the fresh and artless language of those converted under his ministry witnessed to the reality of the new life.'

Collins attributed usefulness in the ministry to the following source:

'Marvellous results come not of nothing. God giveth the increase.'

The secret anointing of the Holy Spirit was the explanation and source of all real effectiveness in the ministry.

Another prominent characteristic of Collins' ministry was that of unity amongst the people of God. To see a work united in a brotherly spirit was his first priority in every field where he laboured.

'Sacred sociality is the spirit, life, and leaven of genuine Methodism.'

*All praise to our redeeming Lord,
Who joins us by his grace,
And bids us each to each restored,
Together seek his face.*

*He bids us build each other up;
And, gathered into one,
To our high calling's glorious hope
We hand in hand go on.*

'Colleagueship in the ministry, and class meetings for the members, are its result. They are our strength: but the strength of them is love. Let love decline, and such a system must at once be found to be a bondage and a fret'

Another great strength of traditional Methodism was its method of selecting candidates for the ministry. It had no formal denominational selection committee or, in the beginning, theological colleges to train them. However it did have very clear guidelines. It followed the apostolic rule *'let them first be proved'*(I Tim 3:10). If a man give evidence of decided piety, and talents for public usefulness he was put on trial as a local preacher and subject to the inquiry of the Quarterly Local Preachers Meeting. After this the superintendent minister could recommend the individual to the Quarterly Meeting and, if his name was approved by that Meeting, to the District Meeting of the circuit where there was further examination with such questions as the following:

'Do they know God is a pardoning God? And are they holy in all manner of conversation? Have they a clear sound understanding? Have they had just conception of salvation by faith? And has God given them an acceptable way of speaking? Have they had any fruit of their labour? Have any being truly convinced of sin, and converted to God, by the preaching?'

Murray also draws our attention to another ingredient in the training of these early Methodist preachers. That is a model of a Gospel minister and ministers was set before them. For successive generations Methodism would have a common ideal. The day when the message and methods of the fathers would be seen as antiquated was not yet come; rather,

'The young felt that they were connected with bygone times, and associated with the fathers of Methodism, to catch their mantle, and a double portion of their spirit.'

Their vision was that the lessons that the past to them should be kept alive. The history of their forefathers in the faith was encouraging to them.

Ian Murray also sets out the following maxims of Collins. These maxims also very clearly indicate something of the spirit of the early Methodism.

'The old power can be obtained by three things: experimental consistency with our own teaching of truth; freedom from the manners, maxims, and spirit of the world; and passion for souls.'

'Be always tenderly yearning for sinners. This is a happy unhappiness. A man full of Christ like tears is a noble creature. Such concern melts men, and tells with God.'

'In selecting the sermon to be preached consider the people, not yourself.... Choose your hymns carefully. Give them out heartily, and with much inward devotion. In your first prayer plead until the people move; wait until the baptism of power falls. You must not preach without power.'

'Never doubt either God's presence, God's word, God's pity, or God's power.'

'Wesleyan Theological Tutors have all been pastors. May it never be otherwise! Theory, unsobered by necessity of practical application, is a great source of German scepticism. Who would trust the therapeutics of one who never healed? Medical professors reach their chairs through hospital wards. According to Wesleyan usage our 'Masters in Israel' have to do the same'

Wesley and Men Who Followed Iain H Murray pp211–213

It is in the elements of this spirit that Methodism's great strength lies. Her present-day adherents have an urgent need to return to it. And those who boast of their Reformed orthodoxy need to look again at Wesley and traditional Methodism and consider whether or not they have misjudged it by being misinformed. And though it may be that they may still find much in it that they must still be at variance, nevertheless by a second look derive much from it that will be to them a benefit and a blessing.

Notes of Lecture given at Penn Free Methodist Church, High Wycombe Buckinghamshire 2010