

# JOHN WESLEY: REVIVAL AND REVIVALISM, 1736-1768

by

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“Revival” used in a religious sense can denote either a long term movement of religious growth and renewal or a short-lived local period of intense religious excitement marked by a concentration of conversions.<sup>[1]</sup> The word is used in both senses in this study. A preacher who generated revivals was known as a “revivalist,” and his approach to his work of generating revivals was known as “revivalism.”<sup>[2]</sup> This study, therefore, is about John Wesley’s understanding of revival, and of the approaches he adopted and advocated for encouraging revivals to occur.

The aim of this study is to refute the claim made by Richard Steele in his study of John Wesley’s synthesis of the revival practices of Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, Nicholas von Zinzendorf<sup>[3]</sup> that, “Wesley drew so much from so many different sources that he cannot be said to have called any man father. His eclecticism was his originality. His methodology of revival was a hybrid, a synthesis of many divergent approaches that was nevertheless greater than the sum of its constituent parts.”<sup>[4]</sup> Steele was able to arrive at this conclusion only by totally disregarding Wesley’s High Church heritage derived from his father, and Wesley’s experience of religious revival as a child at Epworth, as a don at Oxford, and as a missionary in Georgia.

It is the argument of this study that it is the man Wesley called “father” who was the formative role model for Wesley’s concept of revivalism, and that his revivalism was essentially the High Church ministry of his father at Epworth and Wroote in Lincolnshire creatively adapted and modified by Wesley to the needs of the Wesleyan Methodist (as opposed to Whitefield’s Calvinistic Methodist) revival in line with Wesley’s own mature ambition to be a “Primitive Christian” conforming to the practices and doctrines of the first five Christian centuries. John Wesley was indebted to Jonathan Edwards for demonstrating to him that genuine Christian conversions could take place within the context of intense, disorderly religious excitement and hysterical physical behavior.

Jonathan Edwards’ “Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in Northampton, Massachusetts” enabled Wesley to recognize “enthusiasm” as the genuine work of God’s Holy Spirit. “In this work,” says R. P. Heitzenrater, “he could plainly see the influence of the Holy Spirit in the revivals of New England . . . it set the stage for the understanding of the movement of the Spirit among the people.”<sup>[5]</sup> The second part of this study examines how Wesley’s acceptance of enthusiasm affected his concepts of revival and revivalism.

## John Wesley's High-Church Revivalism: Georgia, 1736-1737

In the late seventeenth century, “the Church of England produced a remarkable cult of Christian primitivism,” says John Walsh, “which, in a quiet way, constituted a virtual religious revival affecting many aspects of its life.... There was a fine flowering of Anglican patristic study in writers like Fell, Wake, Bingham, Cave, Reeves, and Deacon, when a knowledge of early Christian thought reached not only parish priests, but also devout laymen.”<sup>[6]</sup> One of these parish priests was Samuel Wesley, the rector of Epworth in Lincolnshire. He was a member of the “High Church” party of the Church of England who, according to Walsh, “were self-conscious conservatives” turning back to Christian tradition to defend apostolicity, episcopacy, liturgy, the eucharistic sacrifice, and the “religious character of magistracy; divine right, passive obedience.”

An ethic of charity inherited from the Middle Ages and reinforced by patristic learning stressed the obligations of Christian stewardship towards poverty and wealth.<sup>[7]</sup> Concern for the reformation of society, education, and the conversion for the heathen was expressed in the foundation of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and the Propagation of the Christian Gospel to Foreign Parts. Samuel Wesley saw himself, therefore, as a guardian of the apostolic order and doctrine handed down from men like Laud and Hammond, and became involved in the work of reformation and renewal. He preached on behalf of the Society for the Reformation of Manners at Westminster in 1699, but failed in his attempt to found a branch of the society in his parish. His parish ministry was marked by:

1. A clear, intense pattern of public religious services. At Epworth he held two services every Sunday, administered the Holy Communion monthly, and held prayers twice a week, and on feast days;
2. Regular religious instruction through house-to-house visitation, the catechism of children during Lent, and the provision of a library;
3. The encouragement of spiritual development by forming a Religious Society of some twenty-eight men on Bishop Horn-beck's model for prayer, reading, edifying conversation, and the doing of acts of charity;

4. Strict discipline. <sup>[8]</sup>

He welcomed James Oglethorpe's scheme to found a colony in Georgia for debtors, and even considered going there as a missionary despite his advanced age! <sup>[9]</sup>

John Wesley imbibed his father's high churchmanship, <sup>[10]</sup> and fulfilled his father's ambition to be a missionary by going out to Georgia as a missionary with the S. P. C. G. on October 19, 1735. Once he was in Georgia, John Wesley exercised a parish ministry which bore the basic features of his father's ministry: a clear, intense pattern of public worship with three services on a Sunday and daily prayers: regular religious instruction from house to house and the education of the young by his friend Charles Delainotte during the week and catechizing by Wesley on a Sunday; encouragement of spiritual development by forming religious societies for women as well as men; the reformation of manners by private and public reproof; He championed the cause of those whom he deemed wrongly accused and unjustly treated by the magistrates: he opposed licentiousness, blasphemy, drunkenness, slavery, and every violation of the laws of God and man" <sup>[11]</sup>; and strict discipline in matters relating to baptism and the administration of Holy Communion. Only communicants were allowed to sponsor babies for baptism. Communicants had to give prior notice of their intention to attend the Sacrament. People who had been irregularly baptized were not given the sacrament. <sup>[12]</sup>

While at Oxford Wesley had been influenced by John Clayton of Brasenose College who was associated with a group of Non-Jurors in his hometown of Manchester to extend his interest in primitive Christianity to the liturgical practices of the early church. Georgia gave Wesley the opportunity to practice a primitive Christian ministry. He divided the Sunday services into morning prayer, communion and sermon, and evening prayer; he stood to pray on Sundays: faced east at the recitation of the creed; mingled water with wine at the Holy Communion; immersed those babies strong enough to take the shock at baptism; prayed for the faithful departed; enjoined fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays; and commended confession and penance as Christian duties. <sup>[13]</sup>

Wesley's ministry in Georgia lasted for nearly nineteen months from February 2, 1736 to December 2, 1737. The animosity aroused among the colonists by his high church discipline, the fiasco of his courtship with Sophy Hopkins, his flight back to England, and his agonized soul-searching all combine to create the impression that his ministry in Georgia was a failure. R. D. Urlins verdict was that Wesley "accomplished little." <sup>[14]</sup> This was not Wesley's considered judgment on his labours in Georgia. In his sermon on "The Late Work of God in North America," published in 1778, he stated that a

revival broke out in 1736 among the German-speaking colonists of Georgia and among the English-speaking colonists at Savannah and Frederica concurrent with a revival at Northampton in New England under the ministry of Jonathan Edwards. The two revivals spread towards each other through the middle colonies. George Whitefield inherited this revival on his arrival in the colonies in 1738 “and by his ministry a line of communication was formed, quite from Georgia to New England.”<sup>[15]</sup>

It is ironic that it is only now that historians are taking seriously Wesley’s evaluation of Whitefield as “a catalyst rather than an instigator of revival,” as being “part of a larger movement, rather than as the final cause of the awakening.”<sup>[16]</sup> Wesley’s claim to have seen an awakening under his ministry in Georgia gains further credibility when his ministry in Georgia is seen to have been the model for his concept of the nature of a revival. According to Wesley, a revival is a short-term, dramatic increase in the number of people within a community showing a renewal of interest in religion, followed by an equally dramatic decline of interest in religion: “Everywhere the work of God rises higher and higher, till it comes to a point. Here it seems for a short time to be at a stay; and then it gradually sinks again. The little flock that remains go on from faith to faith: the rest sleep and take their rest; and thus the number of hearers in every place may be expected first to increase and then to decrease.”<sup>[17]</sup>

Wesley’s ministry in Georgia fits into this pattern of arousal, increase, and decline of interest. Note this pattern:

1. Wesley began his ministry on Sunday, March 7, 1736, by preaching in the wooden storehouse next to the larger court house and parsonage. There was a large, attentive, but doubtless curious congregation present to see the new preacher from England.<sup>[18]</sup> There was another large congregation at Frederica when Wesley preached there on Sunday, April 11.<sup>[19]</sup> A sign of the growing revival was Wesley’s advice in mid-April to the “more serious among” his congregation to form themselves into “a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week, in order to instruct, exhort, and reprove one another.” Out of this society Wesley chose an elite few to meet him as a group in the parsonage on a Sunday, and as individuals during the week.

<sup>[20]</sup>

2. The growing momentum of the revival necessitated a move to the courthouse for public services on Sunday, May 9. From Monday, May 10, Wesley began to visit his parishioners from house to house between the hours of 12 noon and 3 p.m. while they were forced to rest because of the heat.

3. His labors bore fruit. When Charles Wesley exchanged charges with his brother in mid-April, he found

himself addressing 100 hearers at the weekday services. <sup>[21]</sup> The work at Frederica revived with John's arrival. On May 23 there were nineteen people present at the morning service, with nine communicants.

The following Sunday there were only five at the morning service, but twenty-five at the afternoon one. A

small society was also formed. <sup>[22]</sup> Wesley's work at Savannah "increased more and more, particularly on the Lord's day." This was because Wesley, in the best tradition of Anglican parochial ministry, treated his parishioners impartially. He used his gifts for languages to the full by conducting prayers in Italian at 9 am. and French at 1 p.m. He conducted prayers in German at Frederica. and he also began to learn Spanish in

order to minister to the Jewish community in Savannah. <sup>[23]</sup> He paid visits to the smaller hamlets at

Highgate, Hampstead, Thunderbolt and Skidoway. <sup>[24]</sup> By the time Charles left the colony on August 11,

1736, the number of communicants had risen from an original three to forty. <sup>[25]</sup> Wesley's plain, pointed, persuasive preaching which "endeavored to convince of unbelief, by simply proposing the conditions of salvation as they are laid down in scripture; and appealing to their own hearts, whether they believed they

could be saved on no other terms" <sup>[26]</sup> reinforced by his sincerity, goodness and kindness, began to bear fruit. The women heeded his admonitions to put aside their fashionable gowns and turned up for Sunday worship more modestly attired. A ball arranged to compete with one his evening services "was deserted while

the church was full." <sup>[27]</sup> A revival among the children at Savannah in June, 1737, marked the end of the revival. Interest among the adults that had been declining for some months previously. <sup>[28]</sup>

4. The revival began to come to an acrimonious end on Sunday, July 3, 1737, with Wesley's decision to reprove Sophy Williamson for unseemly behavior. On Sunday, August 7, he repelled her from Holy Communion. By September 30, Wesley was bewailing "the poison of infidelity, which was not with great industry propagated among us." On Friday, December 2, 1737, "finding there was no possibility" of fulfilling his original mission "of preaching to the Indians," he left Georgia for Charlestown and a passage

home to England. <sup>[29]</sup>

To sum up, John Wesley was high churchman with the desire to make his churchmanship correspond as closely as possible to the doctrine and practice of the early church of the first five centuries. He viewed revival as a steady, assured growth in genuine Christian holiness. He looked for revival to be the product of: (1) plain, pointed, persuasive scriptural preaching; (2) a clearly defined pattern of intense, public religious worship enforced with strict discipline; (3) meeting in

fellowship with groups of like-minded Christians for mutual reproof, instruction and exhortation; (4) regular instruction in scriptural Christianity from house to house, the catechizing of children, and the provision of good Christian literature; (5) the reformation of public manners and acts of charity.

### **John Wesley's Charismatic Revivalism: London, Oxford, Bristol, 1738-1739**

Revival followed Wesley home from Georgia. Between his landing in England on February 1, 1738, and his departure for Herrnhut on June 13, 1738, Wesley lost no opportunity to preach whatever he could find an audience: parish churches, inns, stables, private house, prisons, even on horseback to fellow travelers he met along his way. [30] This intemperate eagerness to witness to the Gospel whenever and wherever he could might have been the expression of what he regarded as an extraordinary call to abandon a regular parish ministry in order to look upon the whole world as his parish. [31] That call was confirmed by the revival that began on his return from Herrnhut on Saturday, September 16, 1738. The following day he “began again to declare. . . the glad tidings of salvation, preaching three times and afterwards expounding the Holy Scripture to a large company,” possibly some two hundred or so people, in a butcher’s shop in Minories at London. [32] Wesley now embarked on a busy round of preaching in parish churches, private homes, prisons, and workhouses in London and Oxford. On October 14, 1738, he jubilantly informed John de Koker of Rotterdam that “both in London and Oxford . . . there is a general awakening, and multitudes are crying out, ‘What must I to be saved?’” [33] On October 30 he informed Count Zinzendorf that “The word of the Lord runs and is glorified, and his work goes on and prospers. Great multitudes are everywhere awakened and cry out, ‘What must we do to be saved?’” [34]

Wesley’s life was a busy round of preaching in churches, prisons, workhouses, and the private rooms of the religious societies to be found in London and Oxford. An idea of how full his days were can be gathered from a letter he wrote to George Whitefield on February 26, 1739:

Sunday — preached at the churches of St. Katherine-near-the-Tower and at Islington: and to religious societies meeting at Mr. Sim’s, Mr. Bell’s, Mr. Bray’s, and at Fetter Lane.

*Monday evening* — Skinner’s at 4.00, Mrs. West’s at 6.00, Gravel-lane (Bishopgate) at 8.00, and Mr. Crouch of St. James’s Square.

*Wednesday* — “at 6 . . . a noble Company of Women, not adorned with Gold or Costly Apparel, but with a Meek and Quiet Spirit, & Good Works.”

*Thursday* — Mrs. Sims and the Savoy.

*Friday* — Mr. Abbot’s and Mr. Parker’s.

The revival was in full flow, with the fields after the service at Islington “white with people praising God.” There were “about 300 present at Mr. Sims” on the same day. “A large Company of poor Sinners” met at Bishopsgate on a Monday.

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On a Thursday evening at the Savoy there were “usually 200 or 300.” At this time Wesley, as Henry Rack observes, “was moving in a highly-charged charismatic atmosphere in which he thought he saw the scenes of the Acts of the Apostles reproduced, with all the strange gifts of the apostolic age repeated: not only instant conversions, but ‘~ isions. demon possession and healing.” [36]

A new dimension was added to the charismatic character of the revival with sporadic incidents of hysterical behavior (i.e., deep, disturbed emotions expressing themselves through exaggerated physical activities) from the beginning of 1739. On January 1 during a love-feast at Fetter Lane attended by some sixty people: “About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we had recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, ‘We praise thee. O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord,’” [37] On Sunday, January 21, while Wesley was expounding in the Minories “A well-dressed middle-aged woman cried out as in the agonies of death. She continued so to do for some time, with all the signs of the sharpest anguish of spirit.” [38] At Oxford, while praying with a woman in her house. “she fell into an extreme agony both of body and soul. and soon after cried out with the utmost earnestness. ‘Now I know, I am forgiven for Christ’s sake.’” [39] The following evening Wesley met her again with a number of her neighbors. One of these “felt as it were the piercing of a sword” and in the street outside the house “could not avoid crying out aloud.” Wesley no longer maintained a detached attitude with such sufferers but began to pray [40] for her relief together with her companions.

On March 3, 1739, George Whitefield wrote to Wesley to inform him of “a glorious door opened among the colliers. You must come and water what God has enabled me to plant.” A reluctant Wesley was prodded for a decision in a

further letter on March 22: “If the brethren after prayer for direction think proper. I wish you would be here the latter end of next week.”<sup>[41]</sup> Whitefield’s invitations caused consternation among Wesley’s circle of friends in London. They had “an unaccountable fear that it would prove fatal to him.” Lots drawn to decide the issue decreed that Wesley go to Bristol. The ever loyal Charles caught up in the drama, “desired to die with him.”<sup>[42]</sup> On his arrival at Bristol Wesley wrote to his brother Samuel: “I do not now expect to see your face in the flesh. Not that I believe God will discharge you yet: but I believe I have nearly finished my course.”<sup>[43]</sup>

Wesley, therefore, arrived and preached in Bristol in a state of intense excitement. His agitation matched the mood of the city which was in a state of social turbulence and transition because of its development as an industrial and commercial center and port. The population was growing rapidly/ Colonial trade in bulk goods like sugar, tobacco and iron ore was creating mercantile credit that being invested in developing industries like coal mining and the manufacture of glass and porcelain. A network of roads constructed between 1721 and 1730 enabled people like John Wesley to travel relatively quickly from London to Bristol via Reading, and to make frequent excursions to Bath and Gloucester while he was at Bristol.<sup>[44]</sup> The excitement engendered by the rapid industrial expansion of the city and of its economic hinterland was aggravated by popular social unrest. Corn riots among the miners at nearby Kingswood were a cause of great anxiety to the inhabitants of Bristol. The religious temperature of the city was raised by the activity of the “French Prophets,” with their claims to being able to perform miracles and to receiving divine revelations in dreams and visions accompanied by physical convulsions.<sup>[45]</sup>

Wesley’s excitement reached a climax on the morning of Thursday, April 26, at Newgate Prison. While preaching on the words “He that believeth hath everlasting life,” Wesley was led, without any previous design, “to speak strongly and explicitly of Predestination, and then to pray ‘that if I spake not the truth of God, He would not delay to confirm it by signs following.’” In spontaneously calling upon God to vindicate the gospel of free grace with the instant public conviction and conversion of sinners, John Wesley, the popular revivalist, was born. The proper clergyman arrayed in his gowns and bands<sup>[46]</sup> who had been, until just prior to his arrival in Bristol, “so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order” that he “should have thought the saving almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church,”<sup>[47]</sup> was now casting all his inhibitions aside, and calling publicly and fervently upon God to convict and convert his hearers: “Immediately the power of God fell upon us: one and another, and another sunk to the earth: you might see them dropping on all sides as thunder-struck. One cried out aloud. I went and prayed over her, and she received joy in the Holy Ghost. A second falling into the same agony, we turned to her, and received for her the promise of the Father. In the evening I made the same appeal to God, and almost before we called He answered. A young woman was seized with such a palsy as I never saw before: and in a quarter of

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an hour she a new song in her mouth, a thanksgiving unto our God.

In these events at Bristol on the morning and evening of April 26 are present four features that would become characteristic of Wesley's charismatic revivalism:

1. Preaching aimed at creating an emotional crisis of repentance and rebirth in his hearers. Edward's account of the revival at Northampton had demonstrated to Wesley that the instantaneous conversion he had experience as a private individual could be repeated on a larger, more public scale, and that it could be brought about by preaching consisting of what a listener of Wesley's sermons described as "a combination terror and tenderness." [49] Wesley admitted that his preaching was designed to drive people into what his critics called "a species of madness" and which he termed "repentance and conversion." [50] He defended his method by saying, "may not love itself constrain us to lay before men 'the terrors of the Lord?'" And is not better that sinners should be terrified now that they should sleep on and awake in hell? I have known exceeding happy results of this even upon men of strong understanding." [51]

2. His use of prayer to reinforce his appeals for instantaneous conversion. Henry Moore recalled of the aged Wesley: "Sometimes when he had liberty his words literally struggled for utterance and he poured them out with great rapidity and force, often stopping for a moment to breathe out a most impressive prayer that the people might there and then believe, and the word have an entrance to them." [52] Wesley also went among those laboring under a conviction of sin to pray with them in order to help them overcome their shame, fear, and indecision.

3. His toleration of bizarre, hysterical behavior. Thomas Max-field sunk down as though he were dead, "but soon began to roar out, and beat himself as one dead, so that six men could scarcely hold him." An awed Wesley recorded: "I never saw one so torn of the evil one." [53] There was an element present at the meetings which feigned this violent crisis of conversion, either persons drawing attention to themselves or indulging in drunken horseplay. Charles Wesley was always willing to eject any imposters who disturbed his meetings in these ways. At Pelton on June 4, 1743, he left a drunkard come fresh from the ale-house to thrash about on the floor and to beat himself heartily without anyone praying over him; and a girl suffering from violent convulsions was carried out of the room, placed on the floor outside the door, and at once

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recovered the use of her limbs. John Wesley was quite prepared to accept that “in some few cases, there was a mixture of dissimulation — that persons pretended to see or feel what they did not, and imitated the cries and convulsive motions of those who were really overpowered by the Spirit of God; yet even this should not make us either deny or undervalue the real work of the Spirit.” [55]

4. Field preaching, with an occasional spectacular crowd numbering hundreds or thousands, was backed up by regular meetings for exhortation and prayer in numerous private homes. The evening meeting at Nicholas Street in Bristol on May 21, 1739, must have been the first Methodist “Ranter” prayer-meeting since “all the house (and indeed all the street for some space) was in uproar. But we continued in prayer; and before ten the greater part had found peace.” [56] It was destined to set the pattern for a movement of popular, cottage based, prayer-meeting revivalism led by laypersons who were independent of the authority of Wesley and his preachers. This pattern would prove a disruptive force within the Wesleyan Methodist movement and lead to a number of secessions from the Connexion in the years following Wesley’s death. [57]

### **Wesley’s Synthesis of High-Church and Charismatic Revivalism in 1768**

John Wesley still remained a high churchman at heart when he became a charismatic revivalist and the leader of the Wesleyan Methodist movement. His basic concerns were still “the renewal of ancient Christian morality and spirituality and for church structures and institutions patterned after those of the ancient church.” [58] Methodism was raised up by God “to reform the nation, particularly the Church: and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” [59] Albert Outler is right to say of John Wesley that “despite his gifts as leader and organizer, it was his impression that he had never planned the Methodist Revival. He had instead been gathered up into it and swept along by what seemed to him the clear leadings of divine providence.” [60] Wesley himself informed Vincent Perronet that neither he nor Charles had any “previous design or plan at all: but everything arose just as the occasion offered.” [61] Nevertheless, what Wesley did was to adopt for Methodist use a succession of practices which reflected those of the Primitive Church — field preaching, class-meetings, class tickets, love feasts, watch night services, [62] and especially the connectional principle of itinerating preachers linking together independent societies under the supervision of John Wesley as their “Father in the Gospel,” which reflected the organization of the Pauline churches of the New Testament.

The years between 1757 and 1762 were decisive for the growth of Methodism as a national movement. They were years of unprecedented growth marked by numerous revivals throughout England and Ireland. At the close of 1763 Wesley wrote: “Here I stood and looked back on the late occurrences. Before Thomas Walsh left England God had begun that great work which he has continued ever since without any considerable intermission. During that whole time many have been convinced of sin, many justified, and many backsliders healed.”<sup>[63]</sup> In 1765 the first public record of the Conference Minutes showed 25 circuits and 71 preachers in England, 4 circuits and 4 preachers in Scotland, 2 circuits and 2 preachers in Wales, and 8 circuits and 15 preachers in Ireland. In 1767 there were 22,410 members in England, 2,801 in Ireland, 468 in Scotland and 232 in Wales.<sup>[64]</sup>

In 1768 Wesley noted that “in many places the work of God seems to stand still.” He went on to ask, “What can be done to revive and enlarge it?” To answer his question Wesley went back to the high-church ministry he had exercised in Georgia. The recommendations Wesley made for his preachers to follow are a synthesis of the high-church revivalism he practiced in Georgia and the charismatic revivalism he had practiced in the British Isles since his return in 1738, with the pattern of his revivalism in Georgia providing the basic framework into which he could fit his charismatic revivalism. Wesley looked for Methodist revival to be the product of:

1. Plain, pointed, emotionally charged, extempore scriptural preaching of the vital necessity of Christian holiness for salvation implemented by fervent prayers for the conversion of the hearers;
2. The rigorous observance of the Methodist pattern of public religious services — especially field preaching, the 5 a.m. preaching service, the fervent signing of hymns, and the diligent observation of both the Friday and quarterly fast days;
3. The core of “believers in any place” meeting in bands for intimate fellowship where they could “speak without reserve”;
4. Regular religious instruction from house to house, spending “an hour a week with the children in every large town,” and the dissemination of Methodist literature.
5. By being “conscientiously exact in the Methodist discipline” — especially in the regular

appointment of new society stewards who were responsible for distributing charity to the poor and needy; and

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6. Continued union with the Church of England.

A gifted preacher could exercise such a ministry effectively. Adam Clarke wrote to Wesley from Plymouth on January 30, 1786:

When I was admitted to Conference, I promised, before God and my brethren, to observe the Rules laid down in the Larger Minutes, and to keep them for conscience sake; one of which was, ‘To recommend fasting, both by precept and example.’ To the latter, through the grace of God, I have constantly adverted ever since; but to former, viz., recommending it by precept, I must confess, though I have not wholly neglected it, yet I have been to remiss. . . . I know it rejoices your soul to hear of the prosperity of the work of God. I have some intelligence of this kind to impart. We have and do see glorious days in Dock. . . . The congregations have been wonderfully enlarged. . . . multitudes have been convinced, several converted, and, though I do not yet know any who have attained, yet there are several who are panting after *perfect love*. . . . At Plymouth our congregations were distressingly small for some time. I went out to the Parade, and had more hundreds to hear there than I had dozens in the room, and though I have preached out in the cold weather at the expense of my hearing and voice, yet have I been amply compensated for both, in seeing an increased congregation in the room, and several of these have awakened and joined to the Society. . . . There is one thing that conduces much to the prosperity of the work at Plymouth and Dock, viz., the constant morning prayer-meetings, together with several evening ones, which are all productive of good, and are well attended. . . .

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Wesley’s call for continued union with the Church of England was an unconvincing attempt to preserve the myth of Methodism as a renewal movement within the Established Church made all the more unconvincing by Wesley’s high-handed departures from the standard practice of the Church — preaching in other men’s parishes without their permission, extempore prayer, and the holding of annual conferences at which lay preachers were given their stations for the year. Methodism was relegated to the status of a sect, and the itinerant preachers disliked their subordinate role to the ordained Anglican clergymen found within the ranks of Methodism. Charles Wesley aggravated their sense of grievance by exercising

his right as a clergyman to preach twice every Sunday in the City Road chapel to the exclusion of the lay itinerant preachers whenever he was resident in London, to the exclusion of the lay itinerant preachers. [67]

America was where Wesley's revised concept of revivalism found its truest and most effective expression. The Revolutionary War "destroyed any remaining supposition about a connection with the Anglican Church. In 1784 they organized as an independent denomination, with Wesley's (somewhat reluctant) blessing." [68] Francis Asbury wedded the charismatic revivalism of the camp meeting to the disciplined structure of High Church revivalism so that under his superintendence early American Methodism secured its identity in post Independent America by "being a force for democratization and proponents of an egalitarian gospel while building a singularly undemocratic, episcopal, and preacher dominated polity." [69]

## **Conclusion**

John Wesley was an Anglican High Churchman with the inbred desire to make his churchmanship correspond as closely as possible to the doctrine and practice of the primitive Christian Church. He inherited his High Churchmanship from his father. At Oxford he extended his concepts of High Churchmanship to include the liturgical practice of the early church. In Georgia he put his ideas into practice and generated a revival which consisted of a dramatic rise in religious interest followed by an equally dramatic decline accompanied by acrimony. At sometime during his return from Georgia he received a call to leave the parochial ministry in order to concentrate on an itinerant ministry designed to reform the Church of England. He became involved in a charismatic revival in London, Oxford and Bristol which added an intensely emotional character to his revivalism, especially to his preaching and praying for instantaneous conversions. The dramatic growth of Methodism as a nationwide religious body with its own identity despite his attempts to keep it in union with the Church of England directed him to devising a synthesis of his High Church and Charismatic revivalism suitable for preachers who were now exercising pastoral as well as evangelical ministries.

The crux of this Wesleyan revivalism was preaching for instantaneous conversion, a clear pattern of public religious services, regular religious instruction of adults and of children, the meeting of the core of faithful believers in intimate fellowship groups, and charitable works. Since Wesley regarded revival as the unpredictable work of God's Holy Spirit which could work in quite powerful and bizarre ways he tolerated the emotional excesses which often attended Wesleyan revivals. In all of this Wesley was a debtor to his own religious and cultural background and heritage, and to his intelligent,

pragmatic reflection upon his own experience. His revivalism was a synthesis of his own, hard won values and experience—not a secondhand synthesis of men like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Nicholas von Zinzendorf.

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## Endnotes:

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H. D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 159. Rack goes on to say that local revivals take place “in a single community of Christians who are already Christians in an evangelical sense.’ This is not necessarily so for the miners at Kingswood, near Bristol in 1739, who were Christians in a nominal sense only before the Methodist revival inspired by the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley.

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There is a tendency by recent Evangelical scholars like Iain Murray and Ian Rennie to define “revivalism” derogatorily as “organized evangelism” to distinguish it from genuine, unpredictable revivals which are inspired by the Holy Ghost without human initiative and management. See Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994, xix, and Ian Rennie, “Fundamentalism and the Varieties of North Atlantic Evangelicalism’ in Noll, Bebbington, Rawlyk, *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles, and Beyond. 1700-i 990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). 335.

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*Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 30:1 (Spring 1995), 154-172.

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Ibid. 171.

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R. P. Heitzenrater. *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, Kingswood Books, 1989), 127

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J, Walsh, “John Wesley and the Community Of Goods” in Keith Robbins, ed., *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany, and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 28. See T. A.Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, Kingswood Books, 1991), 7-21 for a review of this revival of these studies which Campbell dates from 1620.

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Walsh, op. cit., 32. The other main “parties” were the “Low Church” and the “Broad Church” or “Latitudinarians.” These should not be regarded as “Parties” in the Victorian sense of the word as being “well-organized, possessed of a keen sense of group identity, and more or less permanently mobilized for combat.” The labels were “ascribed perjoratively by opponents more often than they were used as terms of self-definition,” There were periodic, sometimes vehement conflicts between the various groupings of Anglican clergymen in the eighteenth century, but these should not be over-emphasized. There was a mainstream Anglicanism whose minor cross-currents did little to disturb a high degree of clerical fraternity, cooperation and consensus” (Walsh, Haydon, and Taylor, editors, *The Church of England c1689-1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30. Campbell points out that Christian antiquity was put to three main uses by the various groups in the Church of England: (1) polemical—to reject the authority of Christian antiquity unless substantiated by Scripture; (2) conservative—to hold up the vision of the ancient church as a test of ecclesiastical polity and doctrine; (3) programmatic—the ancient church was the model to be reinstated (or renewed or revived) in the Church of England. He stresses that “these three uses of the vision of Christian antiquity were not mutually exclusive” (ibid. 20-21).

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H. D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 53.

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J. S. Simon. *John Wesley and the Religious Societies* (London: Epworth Press, 1921), 111.

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The Moravian, Spangenberg, reported of Wesley that he had “several quite special principles, which he still holds strongly, since he drank them in with his mother’s milk, He thinks that an ordination not performed by a bishop in the apostolic succession is invalid.... All these doctrines derive from the view of the episcopacy which is held in the Papist and English churches and which rests upon the authority of the Fathers. Above all, he believes that all references in Scripture of doubtful interpretation must be decided not by reason, but from the writings of the first three centuries (quoted in Campbell. *Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 34-35).

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Simon, *Wesley and the Religious Societies*, 159.

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M. Lelievre, *John Wesley: His Life and Work* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1900), 72-73.

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Campbell. *Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 30-31.

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R. D. Urlin, *The Churchmans Life of Wesley* (London: SPCK. new edition, 1886), 30.

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Albert Outler, editor, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 3, Sermons III. 71-114 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 596-597.

[16]

M. J. Wesererkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 187.

[17]

*Short History of the People Called Methodists*, T. Jackson, editor, *Works of the Rev. John Wesley*. Vol. XIII London: Wesleyan Conference Office. 1865), 320-321, Wesleys description of the decline of a revival is colored by his bitter experience in Georgia: “Men, once curious to hear, will hear no more; men, once drawn, having stilled their good desires, will disapprove what they approved of before, and feel dislike instead of good-will to the preachers. Others who were more or less convinced will be afraid or ashamed to acknowledge that conviction; and all these will catch at ill stories, true or false, in order to justify their charge.” Compare Jackson, *Works*, Volume I, 26 — “I could hardly believe that. . . the *far* greater part of this attentive, serious people would hereafter trample under foot that word, and say all manner of evil falsely of him that spake it.”

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Jackson, *Works*, 1:26 (& 13, 289).

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Ibid., 28.

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Ibid., 29 (& 13. 289).

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T. Jackson, editor, *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, Volume I (London: John Mason. 1849. reprinted by Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 1980), 27

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Jackson. *Works*, 1:30-31.

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Jackson. *Works*, 13:290.

[24] Jackson, *Works*, 1:29, 38.

[25] Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 118

[26] Jackson, *Works*, 1:28.

[27] Lelievre, *John Wesley*, 72-73.

[28] Jackson, *Works*, 1:48.

[29] Jackson, *Works*, 13:290.

[30] Jackson, *Works*, Volume 1, sample entries for 02/01/38 (inn at Deal), 02/12/38 (St. Andrew's, Holborn, London), 02/18/38 (Castle prison, Oxford), 03/13/38 (on the coach to Salisbury), 03/15/38 (inns at Shipston & Hedgeford, private house at Stafford).

[31] "I look upon the world as my parish; thus far I mean that in whatever part of it I am I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare, unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation" (W. R. Ward & R. P. Heitzenrater, *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 19, Journals and Diaries II [1738-1743], Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1990, 67, and Telford, *Letters*, 1:282). The respondent was formerly believed to have been James Hervey; but now, with the discovery of that letter, it is believed to have been John Clayton (Outler, *Works of John Wesley*, Volume 1, Sermons 1, 1-33, Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1984, 13, fn. 47).

[32] Ward & Heitzenrater, *Works*, Volume 19, 12 & fn. 33.

[33] Telford, *Letters*, 1:262.

[34] *Ibid.*, 265.

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*Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, Volume XXXIV, Part 4 (December, 1963). 76-77. A corrupt version of the text of this letter is found in Telford, *Letters*, 1:280-281.

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Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 187. Examples in Ward & Heitzenrater, *Works*, Volume 19, are instant conversions (09/30/38 and 10/09/38), visions (11/19/38). demon possession (12/05/38), and healing (01/09/38).

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Ward and Heitzenrater, *Works*. 19:29.

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*Ibid.*, 32.

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*Ibid.*, 35.

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*Ibid.*, 36. This is the first, spontaneous example of what Methodists later called “praying companies.”

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Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*. 190.

[42]

Jackson, *Journal of Charles Wesley*. 1:146.

[43]

Telford, *Letters*, 1:291. The dreadful irony was that Samuel himself would die in November, 1739!

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Scattered references in Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (1989) and Barrie Trinder, *The Making of the Industrial Landscape* (1987).

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Elisde Halvey, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (trans. B. Semmel, Chicago, 1971), 67.

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Wesley preached in gown and cassock, even in the open air (John Telford, *The Life of John Wesley*, 1886, 317).

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Jackson, *Works*, 1:174.

[48]

*Ibid.*

[49]

R. P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive My. Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:83.

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G. R. Cragg, *The Works of John Wesley* Volume 11, *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 196.

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Telford, *Letters*, 2:69.

[52]

*Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, 1897, 515.

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Jackson, *Works*, 1:185.

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Jackson, *Journal of Charles Wesley*, 1:314.

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Quoted by W. L. Doughty, *John Wesley: Preacher* (London: Epworth Press, 1955), 133.

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Jackson, *Works*, 1:185.

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The cottage-meeting became a more self-conscious, prayer-based method of revivalism in the early 1760s. From 1772 onward, when an association of Methodists was formed in London for conducting cottage based prayer-meetings, the cottage prayer-meetings became an organized method of revivalism among the common people. Prayer-meetings could be very irregular and ill-conducted. The attempts of some traveling preachers to curb the worst excesses of praying revivalism created disaffection with their authority, especially with the outbreak of the American War of Independence in 1775. There were some revivalists who refused to be brought to order. The Band Room Methodists at Manchester, the “Quaker Methodists” at Warrington, revivalist groups belonging to the Methodist New Connection at Stockport and at Macclesfield, together with some disaffected Anglicans at Oldham, came together in 1805 to form Independent Methodism, united by a “common dedication to liberty, commitment to free gospelism, and disavowal of the professional ministry.” See, among others, J. S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Wisconsin University Press, 1984), 25-29.

[58]

Campbell, *Wesley and Christian Antiquity*, 52-53.

[59] “Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others from the year 1744 to the year 1789,” Jackson, *Works*, 8:287.

[60] Outler, *Works*, 1:5.

[61] Telford, *Letters*, 2:292.

[62] *Ibid.*, 294-295 (societies), 299 (watchnight), 300 (class tickets), 302 (love feasts), 305 (stewards to distribute charity).

[63] Jackson, *Works*, 3:148. April 13, 1758, was the date one which Thomas Walsh left England for Ireland.

[64] H. E. Luccock and P. Hutchinson, *The Story of Methodism* (N. Y.: Methodist Book Concern, 1926), 103.

[65] L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 1876), 22-23.

[66] *The Wesley Banner and Revival Record*, 1850, 241-243.

[67] G. J. Stevenson, *City Road Chapel and its Associations: Historical, Biographical, and Memorial* (N.Y.: Methodist Book Concern, 1872), 75.

[68] Randy Maddox, “Reading Wesley as Theologian,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30:1 (Spring 1995), 28.

[69] R. E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1991), xv.

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