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Proceedings

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THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN METHODISM: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

OF all the Christian denominations only the Quakers have an unblemished record in the treatment of women as equals to men. John Wesley, however, comes a reasonably close second. The high intelligence and pastoral gifts of his mother predisposed him to accept the ministry of women, and he had no difficulty about giving responsible tasks to women and appointing them as leaders of 'classes'. He came steadily to see that 'God owns women in the conversion of Sinners', and Mary Bosanquet (afterwards Fletcher) and two or three others became members of his group of travelling preachers. He did not appoint any women in 1784 to the 'Legal Hundred' which was to oversee Methodism after his death; but his vast correspondence (more, as it happens, with women than with men) shows him to be free from the preconceptions and male-preference which have dogged and oppressed women through the Christian centuries.

Nineteenth-century Methodism did not live up to his standards in this as in other ways. Women 'travelling preachers' were no longer to be found in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and women 'local' preachers were heavily discouraged. Among the Primitive Methodists women were at first accepted as 'itinerants', but the practice gradually died out. The Bible Christians also had women itinerants for a time, but in due course advised them to marry the men preachers and help them in their work; the numbers of women ministers steadily declined, therefore, though there was one left at the end of the century. In other words, the Wesleyan Methodists had been quick to accept the nineteenth-century bourgeois (and especially Victorian) convention that a woman's place, as Luther thought, is in the home, where she can preserve not only the health but also the morality of her children (though not always of her husband), and the smaller Methodist Churches gradually fell into line with it.

In the twentieth century women *local* preachers gradually came back into their own, but the question of women *travelling* preachers (i.e. ministers) had to be tackled again from the beginning as Methodist Union approached. But it did *have* to be tackled, as women were beginning again to ask for ordination.

There are people who suppose that the admission of women to the Methodist ministry in modern times was smoothly and uncontroversially accomplished (in contrast, one might say, to the long-drawn-out agonies of the Church of England). There are also, even, women ministers of the present day who reject all suggestions that there was ever any need to be 'militant' in the matter, and look back with some disdain on those whom they regard as having been militant in the past. The facts completely refute such thinking, and show that it was only after a long and arduous campaign, with a necessary place for powerful and persistent assertions of principle (which is what is meant by 'militancy'), that the first women were ordained in 1974 to the ministry of Word and Sacraments in the British Methodist Church. So the full story shall be told.

In 1933 the first Conference after Methodist Union accepted a report which said that 'there is no function of the ordained ministry, as now exercised by men, for which a woman is disqualified by reason of her sex'. The committee which said this further proposed that the Deaconess Order and the company of women missionaries should be combined into a new 'Order of Women's Ministry', and that members of that Order should, if they believed themselves to be called to the ordained ministry, be examined and accepted on the same terms as men.¹ This proposal was 'sent down' to the Synods, ten of which rejected it; and the Deaconess Order and the women missionaries did not wish to be combined. The proposal was therefore turned down by the Conference of 1934 - 'for the present'.

In 1939 the matter came up again, this time in the form of a committee's proposal that women should be accepted for ordination if one of several departments of the church was willing to guarantee their maintenance and retiring allowances (one cannot fail to observe a somewhat patronizing attitude in the wording of the committee's full report).² The Conference approved this in principle and agreed to consider, next year, the practical implications of this scheme. Then Hitler invaded Poland.

The war in Europe was scarcely over in 1945 when the Conference of that year declared its readiness to receive women for ordination, and sent the matter down to the Synods for their vote. Two-thirds of the Districts reported approval, ten rejected the whole idea.

¹ *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order* pp. 117-119.

² *ibid* pp.120-123.

In 1948 the Conference was again asked to declare itself willing to proceed with the ordination of women. Then followed the most disgraceful scene that I ever remember witnessing in the Conference. Russell Maltby, former President of the Conference, former Warden of the Deaconess Order, and among the most respected, even revered, teachers of the faith and of the devotional life in the whole of Methodism, rose to speak in favour of the motion - and was shouted down. The Conference listened with awe to Daniel Niles, of Ceylon (as it then was), one day to become the leading theologian and ecumenist of the Far East, but, of course, oriental in his background and not yet at all conversant with the British situation; and declined by a majority to declare the willingness which it had frequently expressed in the past.

All schemes for the ordination of women were thus put on the shelf, where their opponents no doubt hoped that they would gather dust and be forgotten. But-

Say not, the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not nor faileth,
And as things have been, they remain.
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking
Seem here no painful inch to gain.
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

In other words, the campaign, silenced in the Conference, went down into the circuits and Districts of Methodism, where many people, plainly, still needed to be convinced. During the next twenty years, with growing momentum, through speeches, sermons, conversations and writings, people like Dorothy Farrar, speaking for the Deaconess Order, Maldwyn Edwards, John Gibbs and Pauline Webb, coming into the debate at various stages, transformed the atmosphere within the Church at large, and already when the issue next came up for official consideration in 1959 the prospects for change were very different. Part of the argument was that the Congregational and Baptist Churches already admitted women to the ministry on the same terms as men, and that in 1956 the Methodist Episcopal Church of the USA, after a period in which women had 'limited' clergy rights, had decided to go the whole way. But the basic contention was that the church would not have a 'whole' ministry until it included both men and women. The question of 'women's rights' did not enter the discussion at all.

My own contribution as Convenor of the Faith and Order Committee consisted largely in clearing the way for constitutional change. It was the request of a Liverpool circuit that deaconesses should be given authority 'to be faithful dispensers of the Word of God and of his Holy Sacraments' that caused a new committee to be set up in 1959 to consider the 'Status of Deaconesses and the Admission of Women to the Ministry' (with Kingsley Turner as secretary). In 1961 it produced a

comprehensive statement on these matters, going deeply into the teaching of the New Testament, the practice of the early church, and the history of Methodism. It noted, as Kingsley Turner and I agreed, that the Statement on Ordination recently approved by the Conference contained nothing that could exclude a woman from ordination on grounds of her sex alone. The report included the arguments both for and against, partly because the committee was itself divided, and stressed the point that a married woman minister would have a conflict of loyalties. But the general trend of the document was in favour of women's ordination.

The divisions in the committee prevented it from recommending an immediate decision, and Conference was happy, once again, to commit the whole matter to full discussion throughout the Church. When the results of this were known in 1963 it was clear that the opposition had greatly decreased in strength, though there were still many 'don't knows'; two Districts, Bristol and Chester and Stoke, called for a definite scheme to be brought before the Conference. The Conference did not agree to this last proposal; rather, it decided that no decision should be taken, because of the conversations with the Church of England; and the two next Conferences confirmed this.

For a new and confusing element had now entered the situation. Official 'Conversations' with the Church of England had been in progress since 1955, and it was apparent by now that there was no Anglican intention to ordain women to the priesthood; therefore the ordination of women by the Methodist Church might prove to be a stumbling-block to the reunion of the two churches. The supporters of women's ordination, who were, in nearly all cases, also in favour of union with the Church of England, were faced with a real and painful problem. There could be no question whatever of retracting the proposal that women should be ordained; but should a delay be recommended to the Methodist people? Some people argued that to recommend a delay would be a kind of betrayal; others that an immediate drive forward would inflict an incurable wound on the whole ecumenical process.

The delay wished for by Conference lasted until 1966, but in that year Pauline Webb persuaded the Conference to declare, plainly and openly, that it intended to ordain women, but she did not demand an immediate implementation. Thus nothing was betrayed and ecumenical interests were preserved. The Conference then requested the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to appoint representatives to meet Methodist representatives to discuss the whole question.

Nothing came of this request, and the period of suspense continued. In 1969, immediately after the Church of England had rejected the Anglican-Methodist Scheme, the Conference, on a notice of motion, asked the Faith and Order Committee to present a scheme *to the ensuing Conference* for acceptance or rejection. In other words, the matter had

reached the point where no further delay was contemplated or expected.

Over the years there had been much argument about the difficulties said to be created by marriage, and even about the emotional ability of women to stand up to an exacting ministry (deaconesses had been required to do this for many years without disagreeable effects). Thus there had been a tendency, even among supporters, to draw up a different set of rules for the acceptance, training and stationing, of women. This knot was cut, once and for all, when the Faith and Order Committee agreed to propose that the terms for women and men should be the same; a scheme was drawn up on these lines, and came, as directed, to the Conference of 1970.

But there was a hiccup even then. Eric Baker, Secretary of the Conference, who was still afraid of ecumenical consequences, advised the President (i.e. me) that it was the function of the *Ministerial* Session of the Conference to decide the issue, not the Representative Session (with an equal number of lay members) as had been previously thought and practised. I consulted the Church's constitutional advisers, who confirmed Dr Baker's contention. I was compelled, reluctantly, to rule accordingly. So the scheme had to be brought before the Ministerial Conference of 1971. The vote in favour was unanimous, except for one dissident (who later joined the Church of England, and later still, declared himself in favour of the ordination of women to the priesthood). I was very happy to preside over this vote. The Representative Conference under my successor approved of this decision a few days later.

A large number of deaconesses, who had been in many cases exercising all ministerial functions, except that of presiding at Holy Communion (and, in several cases, by dispensation, that also), were readily accepted for the ordained ministry, and other women, some of whom had been waiting for years, offered themselves in good numbers. The first women entered theological colleges in 1973 (it was a matter of great personal regret to Margaret and myself that we left Wesley College just at the time when what we had worked for over many years was realized), and the first ordinations of women were at the Bristol Conference of 1974. This was indeed the climax, joyfully celebrated, of a long struggle for the Gospel.³

In the event, the proclaimed intention of the Methodist Church to ordain women did not affect the issue of the Anglican-Methodist conversations. It was not even mentioned in the 1969 debate in the Anglican Convocations, or in the 1972 debate in the General Synod. It may, of course, have been in the minds of some; but the ruling considerations were quite different. Anglicans, after all, must have

³ A report recently presented to the Conference, on 'the Ministry of the People of God', described the ordination of women as a 'haphazard development'. The only possible response to the authors is: 'You must be joking'.

been aware that according to the Anglican-Methodist Scheme the two Churches were to be in communion with each other, but remain independent, for a period of at least ten years, that by the end of that period they would certainly be contemplating the ordination of women themselves; and that already they were in communion with Anglican Churches which *did* ordain women. But, in hindsight, I am still prepared to say that the Methodist Church was right to exercise restraint for a time, and then to act as it did.

If the Anglican-Methodist Scheme had been accepted by the Church of England, it is at least probable that there would be Anglican women priests by now, and that the protracted distress to which their church has been subjected would have been avoided. Surely the experience of working side by side with women ministers of a church to which the Church of England was linked by the tie of intercommunion, a common Ordinal and the promise of organic union would have convinced all but those most entrenched in a particular dogmatic tradition that women can and do receive a divine calling to the sacred ministry. This is, of course, an 'if' of history, and therefore perhaps unprofitable. But in the present situation it is mildly puzzling that those still engaged in the struggle for the ordination of women to the priesthood so rarely consult those who have been through the same struggle and emerged successful, or draw on the experience of women who are actually exercising a full ministry.⁴ This may be partly due to the understandable, but not always accurate assumption, to be found in all churches, and not least in the Church of England, that 'we can look after our own affairs by ourselves, thank you'. But the underlying cause may be a theological misunderstanding.

It is often said by Anglicans, and sometimes even by Methodists, that Anglican clergy are called to be 'priests', and Methodist clergy to be 'ministers', with the implication that a 'priest' is a different animal, or being, from a 'minister'. If this statement and implication were correct, it would no doubt follow that the Movement for the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood in the Church of England has a different aim from that already achieved by the ordination of women in the Methodist Church. But they are not correct.

The agreed definition of the ordained ministry in the Preface to the Draft Ordinal produced by the Anglican-Methodist Commission in 1974, approved by both Churches and never repudiated, is sufficient evidence that in the eyes of both churches 'priest' and 'minister' are different names to describe what is essentially the same office. The difference of names no doubt points to difference of emphasis in the understanding of that office; and there are certainly Anglicans who

⁴ There are a few exceptions to this, as in a sermon preached by Mary Tanner on a festive occasion in Canterbury Cathedral in 1986. In the debate on the ordination of women in the General Synod in 1988 Free Church women ministers were mentioned only once, by the Bishop of Durham.

take a 'higher' view of priesthood (and some who take a 'lower' one) than the definition implies; and there are Methodists whose view of the ordained ministry is decidedly lower. But this does not affect official doctrine. Although I am not normally called a priest, I have no objection to the title; and I imagine that Anglican priests, by and large, do not object to the title 'minister'. The difference of terminology, in fact, conceals identity of substance.⁵

It will be pointed out that whereas Anglican priests are episcopally ordained, Methodist ministers are ordained by the Conference (which here, in fact, exercises one of its episcopal functions). But only a particular school of theology in the Church of England maintains that the imposition of episcopal hands has so profound an effect on the person thus ordained that the reasons for ordaining him (it can only be 'him' according to this school of thought) and his experience after ordination cannot be compared with those relating to anyone non-episcopally ordained. I suspect that not many of those who support the ordination of women to the priesthood in the Church of England belong to this school of thought. They could, therefore, learn a great deal from the Methodist experience.

Women ministers in the Methodist Church are now accepted (except in some small circles) without question; people wonder why we took so long to agree to their ordination. But the position of women in the Methodist Church, or in any other Church, is not perfected and guaranteed simply because some women are ordained. There is great danger in supposing that it is, the danger of supposing that nothing more needs to be done.

Progress is still certainly being made. There have been slightly more women than men Vice-Presidents of the Conference in the last fifteen years (a fact which, however, scarcely compensates for the male preponderance of the preceding forty five years). The first woman Chairman of a District has been appointed, and the 1992 Conference is set to elect its first woman President. More and more women are to be found on important national and district committees of the Church, and more and more women are in the vestries of local churches to welcome the

⁵ It is sometimes said that Methodists do not take seriously the Anglican (and Orthodox) teaching that Christ is the *eikon* (the visible image) of the Father and that the priest is the *eikon* of Christ. Methodists, it is true, do not often use this language, but have no difficulty about the idea so long as it is properly expressed. The *incarnate*, visible Christ is certainly the *eikon* of the invisible Father (Col. 1: 15). The visible priest/minister, though Scripture does not say so, can be called the *eikon* of Christ. But it is the risen, ascended, invisible Christ - not the incarnate Christ - of whom the priest/minister is the *eikon*. It cannot be the incarnate Christ, for in that case his *eikon* would have to be not only male (as the proponents of the idea wish him to be) but also Jewish (which they certainly do not want him to be). If it be argued that he 'took up his maleness into his ascended Person as part of his humanity', then he must have taken up his Jewishness also.

In the risen and ascended Christ *all* humanity, which is both male and female, is fulfilled: therefore the *priesthood*, which is his *eikon*, must be male and female too.

preacher. But on the highly influential President's Council women are scarce, and the higher echelons of the Church's bureaucracy and the staffs of the theological colleges still present a mainly masculine face.

We are, I hope, working towards a real and dynamic 'Community of women and men in the Church'. This was the title of the World Council of Churches' Consultation in Sheffield in 1981,⁶ and it expresses an ideal which we are still far from attaining. Several things, far beyond equal representation on committees and the like, necessary though they are, are required of us if we are ever to approach it. Here are two of them:

There must be free and frank discussion (ecumenical if possible) between men and women in all parts of the whole Church. It is only in this way that deepset prejudices and inhibitions on both sides are removed, and people learn to treat each other simply as people, working together for the same ends, recognizing their sexual natures and varying gifts, and using them to enhance and not to distort all human relationships.

Serious notice must also be taken of the theological insights of Christian Feminism - which is quite distinct and different from the literature of secular feminism. 'Liberation Theology', which is becoming all-pervasive among the theologians and other church leaders of the Third World, is now at last making itself understood by all Western minds which are open to the possibility that European and American thinkers do not have the monopoly of truth. Feminist Theology is the type of Liberation Theology which challenges the tradition that the Bible's meaning is accessible only to men.⁷ The Bible was indeed written by men; Christian theology has been shaped almost entirely by men. But could it not be that new truths will be uncovered by an approach which has scarcely yet been tried? So far as non-Western theology is concerned, the theologians of Latin America, Black America, and Africa answer that question with an emphatic affirmative, and have gone far towards proving their point. Feminist theologians give the same answer about their thinking, and are proceeding to prove their point also. Among other things, Liberation Theologies make the prospect for theology in England, which has for so long been contained within European modes of thought, much more exciting.

RUPERT E. DAVIES

⁶ Margaret, my wife, was the British Methodist representative at the Consultation, and she and I put together a study-booklet on its theme, under the title *Circles of Community* obtainable from us.

⁷ See, for instance, *Sexism and God-Talk*, by Rosemary Radford Ruether (SCM Press 1983).

A Correction

In the October 1991 issue, page 74, note 22 gives the author of *Never At Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (1980) as Robert S. Westfall. This should read Richard S. Westfall.

WESLEY'S TAUNTON OCTAGON

THE last of Wesley's preaching houses built during his 'octagonal phase' was that in Taunton and opened by him in 1776.



WESLEY'S OCTAGON, MIDDLE ST. TAUNTON 1776

As was the case with the Heptonstall Octagon (1764) the construction, especially of the roof, presented difficulties. For Heptonstall, the roof was made in Rotherham and hauled over the hills to the site. In Taunton Wesley had to cast a wider net:

At one of the 5 o'clock meetings which Mr Wesley conducted at the Foundery, in London, Mr. Wesley said he had a work for Mr. Perrett to do, viz., to go to Taunton to build a chapel. He immediately gave up his business and started for Taunton. He built the chapel and established a first-rate business in the town having as many as 40 workmen in his employ.¹

Having decided to settle in Taunton, James Perrett and his wife were amongst the first members of the new society, he being a class leader, and in 1808 was appointed Circuit Steward.

¹ From a newspaper report of a paper on Taunton Methodism given by Mr J. Hammet 'for 38 years Chapel Steward and Treasurer of the Taunton Wesleyan Body'. March 1891

The site chosen for the new preaching house was a plot of land situated behind the dwellings that stood on the south side of Middle Street which divides the town's two parishes of St. Mary Magdalene and St. James. Initially the land was leased from a publican, John Ridge, but after two years the lease was bought from him for £100. The deed of purchase describes the site as being situate

in or near Middle Street in Taunton St James on part of which is lately erected a Chapell or House for publick Worship for the people called Methodists known by the name of the Octagon Chapell

and limited to the use of

the Rev John Wesley late of Lincoln College Oxford clerk, and such other persons as he should from time to time appoint that they may therein preach and expound God's holy word.

Those who have written about Wesley's octagons are agreed that no contemporary descriptions of their interiors exist. At Taunton a brief contemporary description of the interior has come to light, as well as one of the chapel yard.

The Somerset Circuit Book (1771-1806) contains on its inside cover this note:

The length & Breath of Taunton Chappel yard the North Side Fronting Middle Street is 58 Feet the South Side 48 feet facing the Garden Part of the said Premises, now in the Occupation of Mr John Ridge 102 feet in Length the East Side Abounded with Houses and Gardens of him ye sd John Ridge or his undertents, on ye West Side A Timber Yard all ye Property of John Ride - together with the Brick Walls on ye South & West - Mrs. Devisine new Wall is 17 feet in length & 14 Inches in Breath at ye North End & 9 Inches at ye South End.²

In his book, *A History of Taunton* (1791) Dr. Joshua Toulmin gives this brief description of the interior:

The Octagon Chapel, situated in Middle Street, St. James' is under the direction of the Rev. Mr John Wesley. It is a neat building, 40 feet in diameter, conveniently pewed. Twelve handsome windows, six of which are circular render it light and chearful [*sic*]. It is furnished with a curious timepiece, and accommodated with a good vestry room. Before it is a spacious court, enclosed towards the street with a large iron gate and pallsades.³

The Taunton circuit records also contain a manuscript history of Methodism in Taunton, written anonymously for the Wesleyan centenary of 1839. Referring to the Octagon it states that

it had no galleries and was filled with stools - the men occupying one side, and the females the other .

According to the same source, in 1796

there was a gracious outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God, the congregation so enlarged that the trustees were obliged to erect the present galleries.

² The Taunton Circuit Book 1771-1806 is with the Circuit Records in Somerset County Record Office, Taunton.

³ J.A. Toulmin, *A History of Taunton* (1791) pp 32-33.

Illumination was by candle, as the Octagon account book regularly testifies:

Oct. 11 1798 1 Duson of Candles 0 - 10 - 6

Nov. 21 1798 1 Dus of Cands 10 - 6

The 'curious timepiece' alluded to by Toulmin is evident:

Dec. 12 1800 repairing the chapel and cleaning the Dial 0 - 10 - 5

Feb. 8 1804 Paid for cleaning Dyal 0 - 3 - 6

Small but regular payments throw light on some of the practicalities involved in running the chapel: 'open the doors 2d'; 'cutting the grass 0 - 1 - 0d', and 'sweeping street before Chapple Gate 1-0d'.

From this and other sources, it is also possible to catch a glimpse of Methodist life at the Taunton Octagon during the years it was a Methodist chapel (1776 - 1812). As noted, James Perrett and his wife were leading members. Another entry from the account book shows Mrs. Perrett busy behind the scenes and hints at the bustle and excitement that accompanied a circuit event:

1 shilling and 4 pence Paid to Mrs. Perrett for Ale and Bread layd out at the quarter meeting supper.

Also prominent in the membership were Mr and Mrs. Dickinson, the parents of the Rev. Peard Dickinson, one of Wesley's Anglican assistants at City Road, London. At the time of the opening of the Octagon, Mr Dickinson was the Superintendent of Excise at Taunton. His wife was the recipient of a 'My dear Suky' letter from Wesley.⁴

Matthew Lindon of Creech St. Michael, a village near Taunton, was one of the original Octagon trustees, a preacher, and, as he inscribed in the Circuit Book under the date 1792, 'upwards of 30 years the Methodists unworthy County Steward & Servant for Christ's sake.' His wife was the Dickinson's daughter, Susanna.

Another member of the Octagon society when it opened was David Burford, whose godly life had made such an impression on the eccentric James Lackington. A native of nearby Wellington, Lackington was advanced £5 from Wesley's lending fund which he used to set up in business first as a boot seller and then as a book seller, eventually setting up a huge bookstore in Finsbury Square, London, which he called the Temple of the Muses, and which brought him a large fortune. On retirement, Lackington returned to Taunton and built new premises which he named The Temple, hoping they would replace the Octagon which had become too small for its membership. In his *Memoirs* Lackington speaks movingly of 'the good David Burford'⁵. Burford's Bible, inscribed with his name and dated 1767, is kept in the Temple Church, Taunton. It describes him as

a poor weaver, whose house... was duly licensed for public worship in the year 1774 the Revs Mason and Brisco being the first ministers, appointed 31 years after Mr. Wesley had preached his first sermon in Taunton.

⁴ *Letters*, vi, p. 227

⁵ James Lackington, *Memoirs* (1792)

The inscription also states that on the death of David Burford the Bible became the possession of Mr J. Smith, the first superintendent of the Sunday School.

John Smith was a pioneer of Sunday School work in Taunton and the one which he ran at the Octagon consisted of more than 200 pupils. So successful was his work that when the Octagon society moved to new premises in 1812, the Octagon building was retained for another 20 years for use by the Sunday School. Ann Smith, who died on her 25th birthday, was John Smith's daughter. Parts of her diary were published in the [Wesleyan] *Methodist Magazine* of 1813 and they contain some tantalising glimpses of the Octagon society:

Dec. 31 1795. Our Quarter Meeting was held today, and in the evening we had a solemn time renewing our covenant with God. We sung in the New Year. I for the first time received the sacrament, but it was with fear and trembling.

Dec. 26 1800. At our love feast this evening my soul was very much refreshed indeed. I believe that it was with much reluctance in general that the meeting was broken up so soon, 'tho' it was eleven o'clock and the preaching had begun at six.

Oct. 24 1802. We began our Sunday School and the Lord exceeded our most sanguine expectations in inclining the hearts of the parents to send their children, and the hearts of the children to come.⁶

One of the last entries in Ann Smith's diary 'praised God to all eternity' that her father had received the Preachers into his house But what did the Preachers think of the Octagon society?

In August 1780, John Pritchard came to the circuit when the Octagon membership stood at 28:

I found here but little of that warm and lively affection for the Gospel I had known in other parts... This is one of the most fruitful counties in England for good eating and drinking, but the most unfruitful as to religion. Amongst the few in society I knew but one that had attained the whole mind that was in Christ... This year, with the assistance of Conference we paid off a debt of near two hundred pounds which was on the Taunton house.⁷

Five years later, John Wesley made one of his 13 visits to the Taunton Octagon, expecting little good, but 'agreeably disappointed' and preaching to a full house at five in the morning - 'a sight never seen here before'.⁸

When Jonathan Cousins came in 1788 he found

... a lively, loving people. When Mr Wesley visited he expressed much satisfaction on finding them in such a prosperous state.⁹

Thomas Coke had close links with Taunton Methodism and was a frequent preacher at the Octagon. After preaching in the new building in August 1776, Wesley rode the three miles to Kingston St. Mary for his first meeting with Coke. Within a year he had been dismissed his curacy

⁶ *The Methodist Magazine* 1813, pp 926; 950; 952

⁷ T. Jackson, *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* (1872), vi, pp 269-270

⁸ *Journal*, vii, p. 107

⁹ *The Methodist Magazine* 1806 p. 304

at South Petherton and thrown in his lot with the Methodists. In spite of frequent preaching, and even baptising 15 infants during one service in the Octagon, the people thought him 'course and vulgar.' Dr. Coke, in turn, and on a visit in 1806 with his wife, were offered no hospitality. 'All the inns were full;' complained Coke, 'no-one said, We have a bed and lodging at your service,' so they set off into the darkness with no lamps.¹⁰

As noted, by 1796 an increased membership necessitated the building of a gallery, and in 1812 the Octagon society moved to the Temple which had been built by James Lackington. The Octagon remained in Methodist hands for use by the large Wesleyan Sunday School, but from 1812 until 1826 it was also used by a group who went under the name of Baringites. Their leader, an Anglican priest named George Baring had seceded on the issue of adult baptism by total immersion. Their baptistery was unearthed during the recent renovation work.

When the Baringites ceased to meet, Methodist services at the Octagon were recommenced in the evenings, and the Sunday School continued to meet in the afternoons. This arrangement lasted until 1832 when the building was sold for £350 to raise money for repairs at the Temple and to build schoolrooms there. The purchaser of the Octagon rented it to the Bible Christians until 1840 when the local press reported that it was being used by

...the Plymouth Brethren, a new sect increasing in the town with evening preachings at the Octagon Chapel.¹¹

The Octagon remained with the Plymouth Brethren until sold by them in 1965 when, after 189 years it ceased to be used for religious purposes and was turned into a night club.

The following years will have been among the many occasions that have caused turnings in the Wesley grave. The interior of the building was gutted and painted black all over, although the galleries remained; it was illuminated by flashing disco lights and licensed for alcohol. In fact, these developments were to lead to the club's downfall and it was forced to close.

A commemorative stone was affixed to the wall of the adjoining preacher's house which stated, with an economy of factual accuracy:

THE
OCTAGON
1st METHODIST
PREACHING HOUSE
OPENED BY
JOHN WESLEY
6th MARCH 1776

This was unveiled by the Rev. The Lord Soper who, afterwards, led a large group into the former chapel where, ignoring all the apparatus of

¹⁰ J.A.Vickers, *Thomas Coke Apostle of Methodism* (1969) p. 253

¹¹ *Somerset County Gazette*, 18 July 1840

darkness they self-consciously sipped tea kindly provided by the management of the night club.

Once disused the old building soon took on the appearance of decay but fortunately, in 1986 it was acquired by Eversfield Properties a firm specialising in the restoration and development of old buildings. Their plan was to restore the Octagon to something of its former glory and to make it an office at the centre of a residential development in keeping with the Georgian environment. This was completed in 1989.

The outcome of the Taunton Octagon development has been to awaken the local church and community to a piece of its history that had largely been forgotten, and much of which was taken into account by the developer. An instance of this is that when the Plymouth Brethren sold the premises they called their new place of worship elsewhere in the town, the 'Octagon Chapel'. To avoid confusion the developers thought of calling the original Octagon either 'Wesley House', or 'Wesley's Chapel'. I advised them against this to avoid further confusion, this time with our Cambridge college and City Road. My suggestion, 'Wesley's Octagon' was immediately accepted, and it is by this name that the development is now officially designated. An offshoot to this is that the local authority have recently named a road on a new housing estate, Wesley Close.

When the development was finally complete Wesley's Octagon was again placed at the disposal of the Methodists who held a service of thanksgiving during which the history of the chapel was retold. The interest and responses shown by local Methodists to the initiatives of the developers led them to announce that the new Octagon deeds would contain a clause that future owners of the premises must make the building available every five years for a Wesley Day service.

Methodism owes an enormous debt to Mr Talbot-Williams and his firm for everything they have done to help preserve and enhance this historic Methodist building, and to make it a landmark in the county town of Somerset.

HERBERT W. WHITE.

(The Rev. Herbert W. White, B.A., is Head of Religious Studies at Kingsmead School, Wiveliscombe, and resides in the Taunton Circuit. This article marks his 40 years as a member of the Wesley Historical Society. His booklet, *Wesley's Taunton* (pp 33) is available from The Temple Methodist Church, Upper High Street, Taunton, Somerset TA2 6DY. (£1.50 inc. P&P))

The Hand on My Head is an autobiographical memoir of William R. Chapman (1893-1991) who began his ministry in the Primitive Methodist church. His reminiscences range from the trenches of the First World War to Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s. Copies, price £5.00 post free, are obtainable from Mrs. D. Jeffries, Albert Cottage, Pin Mill, Ipswich, Suffolk, I 19 1JT

A NEW WHITEFIELD LETTER

WESLEYAN historians, as Arnold Dallimore lamented, have over the years done scant justice to George Whitefield's contribution to the Evangelical Revival, and for that reason the relationship between him and the Wesleys has never, perhaps, been satisfactorily evaluated. We have for the most part been content to compare him unfavourably with the intellectual and administrative superiority of John Wesley and to dismiss his Calvinism as irreconcilable with the gospel of universal love.

With the evidence for the earliest years of their association still fairly limited, any new material that throws light on their relationship at Oxford is to be welcomed. The letter printed below is in the Frank Baker Collection in the Manuscript Department of the William R. Perkins Library at Duke University and does not seem to have been published before.

Whitefield was a late-comer to the circle of 'Oxford Methodists', being introduced to it by Charles Wesley in the summer of 1733. At that time he was an undergraduate, still in his first year at the university and a mere Servitor at Pembroke College. John Wesley, eleven years his senior, was by this time a fellow of Lincoln College and Charles, though not yet ordained, was a tutor at Christ Church across the road from Pembroke. In such circumstances Whitefield's diffidence was fully understandable, quite apart from any natural shyness or any sense of insecurity he may have derived from his father's early death.

The student-tutor relationship exemplified in the letters that survive from the 1730s is particularly evident in the letter printed below. Whitefield was destined before very long to enter upon an evangelical ministry in many ways more striking and more immediately successful than that of the Wesley brothers, and even to give John Wesley a decisive lead by persuading the older man to take to the fields in Bristol. Nevertheless the deference which he showed to Wesley during his student days persisted long after both had left Oxford. It comes through even in his impassioned contributions to their later controversy over predestination.

Both Wesley brothers were away from Oxford during the early part of 1735. Their father's health had declined and they were with him when he died on April 25th. In a letter written from Oxford on April 1st, Whitefield consulted John Wesley on the state of his physical and spiritual health and on the affairs of the Holy Club.¹ By the time Wesley returned to Oxford, Whitefield had left for Gloucester, from where he wrote once again for advice.

The letter is mainly concerned with two topics which are still of interest. There is firstly the scruples of an evangelical Anglican about

¹ *Proceedings*, x, pp. 17-19

dissenting baptism, from which, even though Wesley's reply has not survived, some legitimate inferences about the churchmanship of the Oxford Methodists can be drawn. It is interesting that the question of baptismal regeneration or the manner of administering the sacrament is not raised. Before long, in Georgia, Wesley's main concern would be to insist on baptism by triple immersion, as the Anglican rubrics required, and the question of the validity of dissenting baptism does not seem to have arisen there.²

The second half of the letter throws some light on the problematical second marriage into which Whitefield's mother had entered and through which the family found themselves impoverished, though the full details of this sorry domestic wrangle are no doubt lost for ever and need hardly concern us.³ Whitefield's reason for consulting Wesley is the moral rather than the practical issues involved, though the financial implications in an age when women virtually forfeited all property rights by marrying were of serious concern for both his mother and himself.

Finally, Whitefield's postscript reminds us of the moral hothouse in which the seeds of early Methodism germinated. To be fair to Whitefield himself, we should not only recall that he was still a young man, feeling his way in the world of Christian discipleship, but note that his reference to his 'frivolous scruple' implies a realisation that this was hardly one of the weightier matters of the law.

It is frustrating to have only one side of this correspondence. Nevertheless, what does remain enables us to glimpse John Wesley and his closest associates in Oxford through the eyes of a young and respectful disciple, at a period when Methodism as we know it was still only a foetus in the womb of time.

JOHN A. VICKERS

² Wesley's later views are expressed in a letter to the Rev. Gilbert Boyce, May 22, 1750: "You think the mode of baptism is 'necessary to salvation'. I deny that even baptism itself is so. If it were, every Quaker must be damned, which I can in no wise believe." (*Oxford Letters*, ii.424) When he adapted and republished what his father had written on baptism, he omitted "an episcopal administrator" from the list of things that were "essential to Christian baptism". (A.C.Outler, *John Wesley*, pp. 317-18)

³ See Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield* i.1970, pp. 52-55

GEORGE WHITEFIELD TO JOHN WESLEY

Glouc[este]r, July 11th 1735

Rev'd. Sir,

Presuming you have by this time reached Oxford, & hoping I should be favour'd with a line from you e'er long, I have taken the freedom of troubling you with another letter that you might answer both this & my former in one. Mr. Hall has informed you I suppose Sir how matters stood with me when He heard from me last, & I think they now continue in the same situation only a particular circumstance or two has since happen'd to me, in which I must beg Your speedy

advice, & which will be the import of the subsequent part of this letter. Know then Revd. Sir that there is a young Man in this town with whom formerly I had contracted some small acquaintance, on account of his moral & Intellectual accomplishments. He is by profession a plush weaver, but as for Knowledge in the speculative part both of Philosophy & divinity fitter to be one of the 'Sons of the Prophets'. He was bred a dissenter, but about three months ago he came over to our Church, tho never as yet received the Holy Sacrament. The second time I conversed with him, I gave Mr. Norris's extract on Learning which wrought such a conviction in him, that he began to condemn his former deep researches into Nature, & is now almost resolved to lay all such speculative studies aside, & apply what he has read to practice. Since that, He has had ye other Extract on Xtian Prudence & approves of it exceedingly. He really seems wonderfully well grounded in the principles of Religion, having made the Scriptures his constant Study. I advis'd him as soon as possible to prepare for the Sacrament, which he seem'd to refuse only out of a humble opinion of his own infinite unworthiness, this I trust He will soon get over. But the case I want your advice in Sir in reference to this Young man is this. Whether the Baptism he received from the Dissenters is valid or not. If not, why or wherefore. Or whether he may presume to approach the Lord's table before he has been baptized into our Church. And if he cannot, how I had best proceed to get him baptized as soon as possible. The Bishop confirms very speedily, so that you'll be pleased to send me a quick answer. I trust God will incline his heart to submit to everything You shall advise him to. I told him of my intention to propose his case to You, & he seem'd very willing. May G-d enable you Dr. Sir, to give me a full & satisfactory answer.

The other particular I beg leave to trouble You with concerns my poor Mother, who (as I think I have formerly acquainted You) has been greatly reduced by marrying a second Husband. They always lived (on account of My Mother's having so many Children who wanted that mony he had spent to settle them in the world) a very uncomfortable life. And for these 2 Years past have not cohabited together. He tells me it was her fault, she going down to Bristoll to see my Sister without asking a formal leave of Him. But to my knowledge she has been willing to come again several times would he have come [*sic*] to any reasonable terms. [When] my Mother marryed Him Sir He had an estate of about 40 [pounds?] years which my Mother had made over to a friend by his consent, who was to give her the rent, allowing him 5 pounds a Year, but since he has found a flaw in the writings, has recover'd almost the whole estate, & has not allowed my Mother a farthing for now almost these three Years. My Brothers have ever since paid her board at my Sister's in Bristoll where she lives a very jovial but alas too lukewarm a life. She seems really very desirous of retiring from the world & would willingly cohabit with her husband. I have talked with him once or twice, but he seems neither desirous of her company, nor willing to allow her any more than 5 pounds a Year. All we desire is but ten & that not for a separate maintenance but to board with him here in town. Now what I want to be instructed in is this Sir. Whether my Mother on any terms can justify living separate from her husband. Or whether if she be willing to live with him & he will not allow her maintenance she may not lawfully keep from him. I have been very solicitous Sir, & have put up my prayers incessantly that they might spend the remainder of their days together, but really Sir He seems to be so very unreasonable that I cannot see any probability of bring[ing] about so wish'd for

a Union. If you think they may still live separate, I believe my Mother will come up with me & board at Oxford, where I trust she may prepare her soul for heaven. I have been more particular, in order that You might have a better insight into the affair & so [be] better able to judge between them. May God direct your judgment.

I should now have done only I must first have leave to trespass a little longer whilst I inform You that Yesterday I paid a visit to a Dissenting Tradesman in all proba[bil]ity a most Spiritual man, & who seems to be a solid thorough establish'd Xtian. I trust our Correspondence will be sanctified. One of their Brethren has bought both Mr. Law's books, & I find others have seen them. I hope e'er long they will grow pretty intimate. By that time You are pleased to answer this, perhaps something extraordinary may happen w[hi]ch I shall not fail informing You of as soon as possible, till when, Give me leave only to subjoin my hearty Love to all my Dr. Brethren, & with my earnest petition for their most importunate prayers to subscribe myself Revd. Sir

Your very Humble Servant
George Whitefield

P.s. I have a little frivolous scruple Sir which I should be glad if You would resolve. I am invited frequently out to breakfast to some tepid acquaintance, who seem very indifferent about asking a Blessing on the food they are about receiving. Now I have doubted whether I should beg them to ask a solemn blessing, or be content to ask one privately myself. Sometimes I have did [*sic*] one, sometimes the other. I fear I have been to blame.

I hope to answer Dr. Mr. Harvey's letter next week.

To
The Revd. Mr. John Westley
Fellow of Lincoln College
in
Oxford

LOCAL HISTORIES

Methodism in Stithians (Cornwall) (40 pp): copies, price £2.95, from Mrs. J.A. Green, Kerrow, 16 Gordon Close, Stithians, Truro, Cornwall.

A History of Mickleton Methodist Church, to mark the centenary of the present chapel 1891-1991 (28 pp): copies, price £2.50, from W. A. Warrington, Westington Corner, Chipping Campden, GL55 6DW.

From Broughton Street to Burn Park (Sunderland): copies, price £3 post free, from Rev. Keith Phipps, 93 Dunelm South, Sunderland, SR2 7QX.

The Church on the Corner: The story of Oldfield Park Methodist Church, Bath by Roy and Margaret Wilcox (28 pp): copies, price £3.40 post free, from Roy Wilcox, 17 Verwood Drive, Bilton, Bristol BS15 6JP.

The Saints Before: A History of the Shoreham Society of Methodists and their Wesley Church. by Norman Davies. (112 pp): copies, price £3.00 post free, from the author, 1 Adur Avenue, Shoreham-by-Sea, BN43 5NN.

Crediton Methodist Church Centenary 1892-1992 by Sidney O Dixon (32 pp): copies, price £2.30 post free, from the author, 16 Lennard Road, Crediton, Devon, EX17 2AP.

BOOK REVIEWS

At the Heart of the City. A Methodist Mission in the Twentieth Century by Nicholas Farr. (Victoria Hall, Norfolk Street, Sheffield, 1991, pp. 147, £3.99 plus postage. ISBN: 0 9517332 0 6)

The Sheffield Wesleyan Mission was established in 1901 and in 1908 the Victoria Hall was opened on the site of the Norfolk Street chapel of 1780, following similar developments in other urban centres at this time. Under its first minister George McNeal, it became a centre for evangelism with a paternalistic attitude towards poverty; his successor Percy Medcraft developed a different ethos towards the poor and became a city councillor. After 1945 the Victoria Hall has had to wrestle with the implications of the welfare state and the decline in church attendance. All this and more is described in this well-illustrated account of one of Methodism's great and continuing central missions adapting its work and witness to a changing society. However, it is not always easy reading and in places the author seems to digress from his central theme. Further, references to former mission centres, such as Ebenezer, are perhaps confusing to those without a prior knowledge of Sheffield Methodism. Nevertheless the book is a welcome addition to the more recent history of Sheffield Methodism and a further contribution to the growing literature on Methodism's central missions.

D. COLIN DEWS

Die Evangelisches Allianz als okumenische Bewegung by Karl H. Voigt. (Stuttgart, Christliches Verlagshaus, 1990, pp.165, DM 19.80. ISBN: 3 7675 7743 7)

With this interesting little book the present Berlin Superintendent of the Evangelical-Methodist Church in Germany adds to the series of valuable monographs he has contributed over the years, works which combine an intimate knowledge of the history of German Methodism (or rather Methodisms) with a sharp eye to their international ramifications in Switzerland, England and America. The title of his latest book will bring English readers up with a start; surely the author, who is not a wet ecumenist plucking pedigrees out of the air, cannot mean what he says. In the British background to the foundation of the Evangelical Alliance in 1845 was indeed a desire to get away from very bad church relations by realising an evangelical unity of the old 'Catholic Christianity' kind, and also the urgent need of the new Free Church in Scotland for outside sympathy and support. But the opportunity to launch the Alliance was provided by the anti-Maynooth agitation, and the assembly which did the launching was properly described in the Wesleyan Conference as 'a great evangelical anti-Popery meeting'. Not much ecumenism here.

What gives the author his theme, however, is that in Germany the situation of the Methodists and Baptists was like that of the Scottish Free Church but far more acute. Much of the book is taken up with a sorry catalogue of the intolerance and bigotry they had to face. The Baptists appeared to Hengstenberg as the sixteenth-century Anabaptists returned to plague their persecutors. The Methodists suffered from the fact that Lutheran confessionalist suspicions of the union churches had been brought to new heights of hysteria by the activities of Frederick William IV, king of Prussia, who, in the wake of the Jerusalem bishopric, was on the look-out for links with England like the Evangelical Alliance, or even Methodism, which might conceivably become a movement

within the Protestant establishments as it had once been in England. But there was also an immense amount of establishmentarian bigotry, reinforced by the fact that the more the friends of the Alliance committed themselves to holiness of the Pearsall Smith stamp, the more they represented a foreign import. In the end there was no room for the free-churchmen even in the fellowship movement, and in 1914 they tried desperately to dissociate themselves from the patriotic outbursts of their English fellows. The result of all this was that whereas in Britain the Evangelical Alliance was largely an effort to bring together mutually sympathetic parties within separated churches, in Germany it was a vehicle by which free churches attempted to escape from isolation and secure less unpalatable conditions for their mission. And eventually through the German equivalent of the S.C.M., its friends made contact with John R. Mott who seems never to have grasped the difference between associations of this sort and what he entailed on himself in the ecumenical movement. This unfamiliar story is well told by Superintendent Voigt on the basis of original materials and the monographs in which German historiography is so rich. Wouldn't it be nice if British Chairmen of Districts wrote a little history (or even a little anything) to this standard?

W.R. WARD

Wesley Quotations: excerpts from the writings of John Wesley and other family members, by Betty M. Jarboe (Scarecrow Press, 1990, £20.65 distributed in the UK by Shelving Ltd, 127 Sandgate Road, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN)

This volume very usefully serves as a replacement for the 'sayings' section of John Telford's long out of print *Sayings and Portraits of John Wesley* (though we badly need a new study of the portraits). In some ways Ms Jarboe improves on the older volume since she gives more quotations, including some from other members of the Wesley family; a very full analytical index; and texts drawn as far as possible from the new Bicentennial Edition of Wesley's works. A select chronology of Wesley's life is supplied though it repeats the claim that Charles Wesley founded the so-called 'Holy Club' which now looks more than dubious in the light of Professor Heitzenrater's researches. John Wesley is often eminently quotable, especially in some of his shorter and more aphoristic sayings, and a good selection is provided here at least on directly religious concerns though there is not much on his more general interests. The book would make an acceptable present but for the price.

HENRY D. RACK

John Wesley's Experimental Divinity, by Robert E. Cushman (Nashville, TN, Kingswood Books, 1989, pp.217, \$15.95)

Borrowing the phrase 'experimental divinity' from John Wesley's Preface to his 1780 *A Collection of Hymns* etc., Cushman sets out to discover just what Wesley meant by that phrase, a theological investigation not before done. From the results of that enquiry he asks two questions. First, how closely does this 'Wesleyan core' relate to the theology and practice of the early American Methodists, and, secondly, what is the relation between this core and the current theological debates in American Methodism? Although, therefore, the greater part of this investigation concerns American Methodism, the volume as a whole, and Cushman's treatment of Wesley's theology in particular, makes it

profitable reading for non-Americans. For John Wesley 'experimental divinity' meant 'the scripture way of salvation' and Cushman discovers four essential truths of this *fides qua creditur*; the present work of the Holy Spirit, Christian holiness as a way of life, penitence and justification. In summary this is justification and newness of life. But John Wesley was equally concerned about 'the faith', *fides quae creditur* and to this end he reduced the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles to Twenty Four as statements of 'the faith' for American Methodists. Cushman argues that the Methodism transplanted to America in the 1760s and 1770s was authentic 'Wesleyanism', it was enthusiastically propagated by the early preachers and it continued 'to inspire and empower...until well into the 19th. century' (p.63).

Throughout the book there are hints that Cushman is gently chiding contemporary American Methodists for having, by and large, abandoned Wesley's 'experimental divinity.' Even where the essential doctrinal core is intact there is danger that the 'living faith' may be lost. 'For Wesley and his authentic succession, mere orthodoxy or canonical doctrines and discipline may screen out the vitality of "living faith," the new creation, and a dedicated life going on to perfection' (p.187). In his 'Epilogue' Cushman speaks of the spectacular losses in membership of the United Methodist Church and, in more than a hint, attributes it mainly to people growing weary with their church having become 'doctrinally shapeless'.

There is no passage in the book that states plainly and unequivocally how the author envisages the recovery of lost ground and evangelistic enterprise but the nearest to it is on page 188. 'For Wesley and his successors the truth of the Christian religion has its verification *only by way of the experience of God's saving grace in Christ* opened to acceptance by the inner working of the Holy Spirit' (reviewer's italics). Only those who personally 'take the cure', that is, who experience forgiveness and the indwelling of the Spirit, are aware of how relevant the gospel is in today's world. In summary, three things in Cushman's book will get the reader's attention, the first negative but the second and third quite positive. First, there is a lot of repetition as the author keeps returning to his main contention even though the perspective is different. Second, his search for and examination of Wesley's experimental core is well done. Third, the book is shot through with the conviction that the author is not just a detached theologian examining historical Wesleyan theology but a practitioner who longs to see his church recover both doctrinal certitude and experimental spiritual vitality.

HERBERT MCGONIGLE

Hedge of Wild Almonds. South Africa, the Pro-Boers and the Quaker Conscience 1890-1910, by Hope Hay Hewison. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann; Cape Town: David Philip; London: James Currey 1989. pp xviii, 389, cloth £25.00, paper £12.95. (ISBN 0-85255-030-8/0-85255-031-6).

Jan van Riebeeck, who sailed to the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, used wild almonds 'to make the hedge between his settlement and the Hottentots'. (p.xviii).

In the Kirstenbosch Gardens today in Cape Town there stand some old wild almond trees, immense and luxuriant, which were once part of a hedge. They have grown mightily during the past 300 years...(p.3)

The book's subtitle, and its immense wealth of documentation, suggest a doctoral thesis, but its presentation is much more appetising. Its squarish format (7¼" x 8½") allows the wide outer margins to be used for photographs, facsimiles of documents, and other illustrations. The complex material is admirably arranged: the major divisions follow a chronological sequence, and sub-divisions into chapters and sections allow the author to move smoothly between South Africa and Britain, and between general and Quaker history. The style is consistently clear. The wide use of literary sources (Kipling!) and personal letters, as well as newspapers and official records, adds life as well as depth to the narrative. Addenda include concise biographical notes on almost a hundred people; a mere four pages of other notes; a bibliography; and an index which runs to 82 columns, while still contriving to omit most of the references to Methodists, Wesleyans, and the American Methodist Episcopal Church. Misprints are few and venial (the date of J.W. Rowntree's death is misstated in the caption on p. 46).

So much for the book's external form. What is it about? At first sight, the subject might appear thin, since throughout the period in question, there were never more than a hundred Quakers in South Africa. Appearances are however deceptive in at least three ways: first, because of the sustained interest of British Quakers in South Africa:

If a count were taken it is possible that we should find that the Society of Friends in Britain from the beginning of the Anglo-Boer War till now has uttered more words on South African affairs than on any other single subject... (p.26);

second, because the Quaker story is set in a broad perspective of secular and church history (if any reader were so perverse, he could skip the chapters and sections dealing expressly with Quakers); and third, because, as the author puts it in her Preface,

... this book is intended not simply as a piece of Quaker history but as a contribution to the history of ideas (p.xiii)

Enough has been said already to show that it is a major contribution to the study of a crucial period of South African history, and one still essential to the understanding of South Africa today. Although the author disclaims originality in this respect, her account of political and military events during the period is a valuable introduction to the subject. It is introduced by a summary of earlier South African history, and ends with a chapter entitled 'African Conclusion', which reproduces statements at least one of which, in the light(?) of later developments, one can scarcely read without an audible 'ouch!':

"When I consider the political future of the natives in South Africa I must say that I look into shadows and darkness; and then I feel inclined to shift the intolerable burden of solving that sphinx problem to the ample shoulders and stronger brains of the future" (Smuts, 13 March 1906; p.329).

The nature of the sources, and to some extent of the events themselves, make this a predominantly European story; the 'Anglo-Boer War' (as the author accurately calls it) was, after all, predominantly a war between white and white. Only six of the biographical notes, and 13 of the 92 people depicted in photographs (excluding groups of more than three persons), relate to non-whites. The sustained pressure of British Quakers on their own government, and their indefatigable efforts to give practical help, leave members of larger denominations almost breathless with admiration.

In other respects, however, the Society of Friends behaved for good or ill like a microcosm of the church universal. Its respect for minorities made it appear as divided as the rest of Britain over the war, though in fact Quaker imperialists such as John Bellows were untypical. Like other religious groups, the British Society of Friends could behave in a manner calculated to try the patience of Job, if not the Lord himself: at the height of the conflict, the peace session of the 1900 London Yearly Meeting became bogged down in controversy about the intrinsically important, but only indirectly relevant, question of the fatherhood of God (just as, in calmer times, the 1989 LYM narrowly escaped grounding on the phrase 'The living Christ').

Perhaps one's dominant impression, however, at the end of an outstandingly enriching book, is of Quakers' ability, then as now, to test over-simplified and sectionally motivated stereotypes, and come nearer than most people to the unattainable goal of objectivity: even about the concentration camps, there is more than one story to tell.

PAUL ELLINGWORTH

Charles Wesley, A Reader edited by John R. Tyson (Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. vi, 519, £40.00. ISBN: 019 503959 9)

John Tyson's anthology is a valuable successor to his earlier work, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification. A Biographical and Theological Study*, and continues one man's mission to remedy history's neglect of the co-founder of Methodism. He describes his book as an 'autobiographical tapestry', which attempts to weave together a variety of writings to create a complete picture of the man who first received the name of Methodist. In this endeavour he has been highly successful.

The book begins with an introduction to Charles Wesley's life and thought, paying particular attention to the theological and literary background. This section is an illuminating essay in itself, but is also a useful point of reference when dipping into the extracts which make up the greater part of the work. I applaud Professor Tyson's disciplined use of external criteria alone to determine vexed questions of authorship. In a book which is likely to become a resource for future studies, it is more helpful to leave the issue open than to allow a mistake to be perpetuated.

The main body of the *Reader* consists of 302 extracts drawn from Charles Wesley's writings, many of which have not previously been published. Professor Tyson has grouped his extracts thematically rather than chronologically, so Charles Wesley's immediate impressions and later reflections on a given event or topic can be more easily compared. This is most effective in those chapters which relate to specific events in Charles's life, for example his unhappy period of ministry in Georgia. Contemporary journal accounts are placed within the context of an autobiographical letter written nearly fifty years later in 1785. There are also chapters which detail his contribution to the early days of the revival, and others which provide a personal perspective on the various controversies which accompanied the development of eighteenth-century Methodism. A thread running through the whole is Charles's concern over the growing division between Methodism and the Church of England, a concern which Professor Tyson believes accounts for the younger Wesley's neglect by contemporary Methodists. The chapters which deal directly with the issue of separation allow Charles to speak for himself, as does the chapter which details his differences

with John over the doctrine of Christian Perfection. Charles has generally been viewed through the lens of John, so this attempt to redress the balance is to be welcomed. I very much appreciated the chapter which focuses on his domestic life, because they reveal aspects of his personality which are not usually explored.

Professor Tyson's method in each section is to mix extracts from Charles's literary corpus, drawing on the sermons and hymns as well as his letters and journal. The effect of this juxtaposition of sources is to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange - the reader is likely to react very differently to the well-known hymn, 'O for a thousand tongues', when it is set in the context of the conversion experiences of 1738 and all eighteen verses are quoted in full. The editor's arrangement of his material is generally very effective, revealing both imagination and skill. I was especially struck by the interpolation of two hymns in an extract from the journal describing Charles Wesley's work with condemned criminals; understanding of the hymns is deepened by awareness of the context in which they were written and sung, and the beliefs expressed in the hymns explain the motivation behind the prison work. By contrast the chapters in which the arrangement of material is more conservative are less illuminating. The section dealing with Charles Wesley as an expositor of Scripture is composed entirely of hymns, and might perhaps have been improved by direct quotation of relevant prose passages outlining Charles Wesley's views on, and approach to, the Bible. For me the chief merit of the book is the way in which the editor awakens interest by encouraging the reader to explore connections, and this is most effective when a variety of sources is used.

The only quibble I have with this anthology is that the care taken in deciphering and transcribing manuscript material is not matched by attention to detail in references to published works. There are occasional errors in the bibliographical references, and the final bibliography of secondary sources is not as full as it might be. Yet the book remains a fascinating contribution to Wesley studies, making available material which is normally only accessible to users of the Methodist Archives and Research Centre. It may either be used as a source book, or simply read and enjoyed.

ALISON PEACOCK

The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley. Volume 2: Hymns and Poems on Holy Scripture, edited by S.T. Kimbrough Jr., and Oliver A. Beckerlegge. (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1990; pp. 475, \$22.95 ISBN: 0 687 43311 8)

This volume contains Charles Wesley's unpublished poems on biblical texts, mostly written after the *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* of 1762. Some of them were published by George Osborn in the *Poetical Works*, but this the first satisfactory edition of Charles Wesley's manuscripts. Wesley grouped the poems methodically according to the texts, with five large collections on the four Gospels and on Acts; a short section at the end includes other work, with poems on Old Testament and New Testament texts.

By far the longest sections are those on St. Luke's Gospel and on Acts. Some two-thirds of the book is taken up with these two groups, and they constitute a kind of running dialogue between the gospel writer and the eighteenth-century clergyman. Wesley makes the original text sound severe and uncompromising, and he always sees the drama latent in it. A verse such as Luke 12:46, 'The Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, &c.', ends in Wesley's version with the terrible knock.

- The Judge is at the door,
And heaven or hell is here!

In some cases, the dramatic process continues through several verses. Luke 13:6 acknowledges the poet's unworthiness:

I the barren figtree am,
Planted here in sacred ground:...

The next verse, 13:7, 'Then said he - Cut it down, &c.'. becomes an attack on formal Christians (or 'professors') .:

...Cut the formal Christian down,
Let his gracious day be o're,
Let him clog the church no more.

Then comes the answering voice of 'the Advocate', and at the end of the process the cry of the soul, in a gardeners' variation on the fig-tree metaphor:

Jesus, dig about my root,
Shower thy blessings from above...

Some verses have fine isolated images, such as the one on the Incarnation, Luke 2:7:

Wrapp'd himself in swaddling bands
Who with darkness swathes the sea,
Who the universe commands,
Comprehends immensity!

though even here there is some confusion: the infant Jesus can hardly have wrapped *himself* in swaddling bands, and the last two lines allow for a confusing ambiguity of interpretation. And what is noticeable is that these are fine isolated moments: because they are engaged with the biblical verse, and take their structure from it, the poems lack the ordered progression of thought and feeling towards the final vision, which is found in Wesley's greatest work.

The sections on Matthew and Mark are much shorter; that on John fuller, but still shorter than that on Luke. They produce few surprises, but maintain the same tone of fierce intensity. In the poems at the end, however, there is one astonishing piece, an example of Charles Wesley's enthusiasm for the Church of England. The versification of Psalm 80 gives an account of the Reformation as the new Exodus, and as a new beginning in the Promised Land:

Thou didst the Heathen Stock expel,
And chase them from their quiet Home,
Druids, and all the Brood of Hell,
And Monks of anti-Christian Rome.

This is surprising; but Wesley goes on to see his church as threatened on all sides, by Protestants as well as Catholics:

The Boar out of the German Wood
Tears up her Roots with baleful Power;...
Deists and Sectaries agree,
And Calvin and Socinus join
To spoil the Apostolic Tree
And Root and Branch destroy the Vine.

His loyalty to the Church of England can rarely have been expressed so strongly, or so exclusively; the force of the poem, as so often in Wesley's work, is the result of a striking intensity of feeling.

This valuable edition will not provide the worshipping church with new material: its theology is too strong and its system of belief too uncompromising for a church which has been too feeble to print (in *Hymns & Psalms*) the last verse of 'A charge to keep I have'. But precisely because it is out of key with present-day Methodism, it takes the reader very close to Wesley himself. This is Wesley without the corners rubbed down, a Wesley who is dramatic, committed, passionate, opinionated, intense, and intelligent. The editors have put all students of Charles Wesley in their debt.

J. R. WATSON

NOTES AND QUERIES

1451. 130 YEARS OF ITALIAN METHODISM

In the same year that the Kingdom of Italy was created, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society took the decision to send missionaries to assist in the work of the evangelisation of Italy. An International Study Congress recently held in Rome marked the celebrations of 'Italian Methodism 1861-1991'. The Rev. Dr. Donald English gave the initial keynote address on Methodism in the 18th century and later in the week gave the opening lecture at the beginning of session gathering of the Waldensian Theology Faculty, on the Aldersgate Experience and its importance for the Methodist mission, then and now.

The Rev. Tim Macquiban, (Wesley College, Bristol), gave a lecture on attitudes in the British Methodist press towards Italy before 1861. The Rev. Dr. Peter Stephens, (Professor of Church History, Aberdeen University), traced the origins and development of Italian Wesleyan Methodism, its motives and methods, with particular reference to the work of William Arthur, Richard Green and Henry Piggott. Among other contributions was one by the noted Methodist scholar and local preacher, Professor Giorgio Spini of Florence University, on William Burt, a Cornishman by birth, whose 'Grand Design' for the evangelisation of Italy was an important feature of the Episcopal Methodist work, whose operations 1870-81 were further described by Franco Chiarini. Key people in the development of Methodism, Teofilo Gay, Enrichetta Caracciolo and Ernesto Buonaiuti, brought out themes of anti-Catholicism and involvement with freemasonry and radical politics, while two outstanding papers by Renato Moro, nephew of Aldo Moro the politician, and Giorgio Rochat traced the anti-Methodist movement of the 1930s, which opened up a wider debate on the relationship of Church and State in the Fascist era. Two papers dealt with the Methodist diaspora in Canada and Switzerland.

The proceedings will be published and can be obtained by writing to OPCEMI, Via Firenze 38, Roma 00184.

T. S. A-MACQUIBAN

1452. THE EARLIEST METHODIST LICENCES?

C. J. Podmore (Note 1441) recently focused attention on Thomas Sydebotham's registration of his Bredbury, Cheshire, house as a place of worship for the Methodists under the Toleration Act. Since this registration occurred in 1745, a full three years before a licence was obtained for the New Room in Bristol, Podmore's tacit suggestion was that the Bredbury licence may have been the earliest one obtained by the Methodists. It is now possible to push back that date by two years. Among the records in the Cheshire Record Office (QDR 7, Register of Places Certified for Worship under the Toleration Act, 1689-1853), there are the following two entries: (1) Thomas Lockwood for Heavily House, Stockport, 9 July 1743; and (2) Jeremiah Royle for his Bramhall (Stockport parish) house, 9 July 1743. For good measure, these entries are repeated in another source (Public Record Office, RG 31/6, Registers of Places of Worship). Thomas Lockwood can be identified as an early Methodist active both in Stockport and in the adjacent township of Bramhall. Jeremiah Royle was also an early Methodist, but he seceded to join the Moravians in 1744. These two men had presumably been inspired in 1741-43 not by the Wesleys but by such visiting preachers as David Taylor, Benjamin Ingham, John Nelson, and John Bennet. Indeed, Bennet noted in his diary that he preached at Royle's in Bramhall on 3 July 1743, and on 16 July he 'Settled a Society there' numbering forty-three persons.

This clustering of early licences in and around Stockport deserves a brief comment. It suggests that historians of Methodism should not conclude that John Wesley's evolving views on registration were the sole (or main) determinants of licensing patterns. The attitudes and behaviour of local officials were also of great significance. The autobiographical sketch of another early Stockport Methodist, John Oliver (*Arminian Magazine*, II [1779], pp. 417-32), shows that Stockport's local elite was hostile in the extreme to early Methodism. It seems plausible to infer that this hostility prompted Lockwood and Royle to register their houses in order to give their religious activities official sanction and hence, greater legitimacy. In these instances, therefore, local conditions probably outweighed Wesley's theoretical opposition to the practice of registering Methodist places of worship as Dissenting meeting houses.

Since hostility towards Methodists was especially widespread and virulent in the period between the start of field preaching (1739) and the abortive invasion of the 'Forty-Five,' Methodist licences dating from before July 1743 may yet turn up. But until (or unless) they do, the Lockwood and Royle licences can be regarded as the earliest registrations of Methodist places of worship in England.

ROBERT GLEN

1453. A JOHN WESLEY MARKER AT WROOT

At a ceremony on May 18th 1991, the Rev Alan Davies, Chairman of the Lincoln and Grimsby District, unveiled a stone marker beside the gates of the Wroot parish church, Lincolnshire. The two-foot-tall York stone marker bears the following inscription:

Remember JOHN WESLEY founder of Methodism who served as curate in the Parish of Wroot during the years 1727-1729, when his father Samuel Wesley was rector of Epworth. LORD LET ME NOT LIVE TO BE USELESS.

The lettering was incised by Susan Hufton, whose husband is a Methodist minister in Scunthorpe and the project owes much to the initiative and enthusiasm of Peter and Mary Greetham of the Old Rectory, Epworth.

EDITOR

1454. WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY LECTURES

In 1979 we published a list of Annual Lectures (see *Proceedings*, xlii. p.100). The following continues the series to 1991.

46. Barrie S. Trinder: *Methodism in its Industrial Context, 1750-1850*. (Sheffield, 1980)
47. John D. Walsh: *John Wesley and the Poor*. (Norwich, 1981)
48. Rupert E. Davies: *Fifty Years On: the Fruits of Methodist Union*. (Plymouth, 1982)
49. Geoffrey E. Milburn: *Piety, Profit and Paternalism - Methodists in Business in the North East of England, 1760-1920*. (Middlesborough, 1983) - *Proceedings*, xliv. pp. 45ff.
50. Frank Baker: *John Wesley and America*. (Wolverhampton, 1984) - *Proceedings*, xlv. pp. 117 ff.
51. John A. Newton: *Samuel Annesley, 1620-1696*. (Birmingham, 1985) - *Proceedings*, xlv. pp. 29 ff.
52. Norman W. Taggart: *Methodist Foreign Missions: The First Half-Century*. (Stoke-on-Trent, 1986) - *Proceedings*, xlv. pp. 157 ff.
53. William Leary: *A Man of One Book: John Wesley's Reading*. (Portsmouth, 1987) - WHS Publication.
54. J. Munsey Turner: *Victorian Values: or Whatever happened to John Wesley's Scriptural Holiness?* (London, 1988) - *Proceedings*, xlvi. pp. 165 ff.
55. John A. Vickers: *Good Red Herring: Methodism's Relations with Dissent*. (Leicester, 1989) - *Proceedings*, xlvii. pp. 77 ff.
56. E. Alan Rose: *The Methodist New Connexion 1797-1907: Portrait of a Church*. (Cardiff, 1990) - *Proceedings*, xlvii. pp. 241 ff.
57. John C. English: *John Wesley and Sir Isaac Newton's 'System of the World'* (Bolton, 1991) - *Proceedings*, xlviii. pp. 69 ff.
Addendum
34. A. Kingsley Lloyd: *The Labourer's Hire: The Payment and Deployment of the early Methodist Preachers, 1744-1813*. (London, 1968) - now a WHS Publication.

JOHN C. BOWMER

A curious story involving a will which had been torn up, a legacy of £200 and a pile of neglected books once housed in a Methodist chapel is told by Raymond Elvin and James Muckle in 'Caroline Lockwood and the Radford Woodhouse Free Library' published in the *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, 1990. Offprints of the article may be obtained from Dr. J.Y. Muckle, School of Education, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD.

The July 1991 issue of *Methodist History* prints five papers given at the founding meeting of the Charles Wesley Society, held at Princeton, NJ in October 1990. The contributors are Frank Baker, Oliver Beckerlegge, Raymond Glover, Frederick Maser and Wilma J. Quantrille. Topics range from Charles Wesley's shorthand to a comparison of Charles Wesley and the American hymnwriter, F. Bland Tucker. Enquiries for copies should be addressed to Methodist History, PO Box 127, Madison, NJ 07940, USA.