Worship in Eighteenth-Century Anglicanism and Methodism

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S T Kimbrough, Jr., *Editor*  
President, The Charles Wesley Society

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Changing Patterns of Worship in British Wesleyan Methodism, 1780–1828

Timothy S. A-Macquiban*

Personal and Present Context

When I became first acquainted with Methodism some twenty-five years ago, I, as a regular Anglican attender at Communion, found it rather strange to go to another denomination I'd only known as "Free Church" or "Dissenting," and discover that they had our morning prayer service more often than we had it back at Christ Church, Chester, on Sundays. After all the Parish Communion movement had, by the 1960s, all but displaced Matins in most parish churches. Here, at St. John Street Wesley Methodist Church, Chester, they not only had the Book of Common Prayer (henceforth BCP) form once a quarter but sang the Te Deum and chanted the Psalms appointed for the day. This was at a time of liturgical revision in the Church of England which left many older people breathless and some angry. Not long after my Cambridge University days, I became a full member of the Methodist Church and started to become familiar with what the minister disparagingly called "the little red book," the Methodist Sunday Service, devised by one who later became first mentor and then friend, the Rev. Raymond George, containing resonances of much which was familiar to me in pattern and language. Not for me, a thoroughgoing liturgical revisionist, the archaic forms of the Book of Offices. In the subsequent two decades, I have been aware of the tensions within British Methodism which has seen but reluctant acceptance of the new forms. The Sunday Service has been used in the main in its eucharistic context and not as the basis for preaching services held more frequently. While the "hymn-sandwich" has been given additional fillings from outside influences, the formal structure of an Anglican-style office has rarely been adopted. I want to suggest that this oscillation between formal and free has been present with us in British Methodism for over two centuries, from our beginnings as a distinct denomination, an oscillation which has been politically explosive, particularly in the period I want to cover in this paper. For worship is not only the expression of the relationship of the people of God with their Maker but also of their relationship with each other. The work of the people has so often been hijacked by the professional pastor/leader that it has or some become a vehicle for the expression of rights.

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Leslie Church long ago pointed to the disparity between Wesley's intentions for his movement, for the Methodists to attend public worship of the Church of England in its set forms and to receive sacraments from its ordained ministers, and the way in which the worship issue was resolved. He writes:

Generally speaking the societies in rural areas did not use the Liturgy, but in London and some of the larger towns it was at once accepted either in full from the Book of Common Prayer or in John Wesley's Abridgement.¹

He highlights the changes in Conference rulings on worship in the last decades of the eighteenth century, recognizing that Methodist services were no longer to be regarded as supplementary or complementary but existing in their own right for the glory of God.

Horton Davies, in his magisterial account of *Worship and Theology in England from Watts and Wesley to Maurice*, implies that the "special" or occasional services dropped away after 1791 because the communion service became more popular, killing off the love feast.² He categorizes the triumph of the sacrament (of Holy Communion) as the unique and attractive combination of the liturgical and free types of worship, in which the hymns and extempore prayer added to the rite a new life. "As long as Wesleyan Methodism remained a united body," he wrote, "the Anglican Eucharistic legacy was preserved."³ Such a statement takes account neither of the internal dynamic of change within worship patterns nor of the external pressures which led many to adapt or ignore the Conference guidelines.

More recent research has been done by Dr. Stockton and Dr. Burdon.⁴ Stockton's thesis has restored interest in the extra-liturgical innovations and adaptations of Wesley, notably the watchnight services, the love feasts, and the covenant services. He picks out London and Bristol as places figuring prominently as centers of eighteenth century Methodist activity: "it was in these two places that all of Wesley's extra-liturgical worship innovations were first introduced and had their earliest development." What is less convincing is his assertion that "as Methodism moved from society to church it took on liturgical forms and dropped extra-liturgical innovations" whilst claiming that they survived much longer in Britain than in the United States of America.⁵ Making a strong

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³ Davies, p. 211.
case for Methodists’ devotion to such forms which made it difficult for them to rejoin the Church of England, he fails to explain the equally vigorous survival of such occasional services in both London, Bristol, and the provinces, despite the disparity of availability of the sacrament in the 1780s and 1790s.

Burdon’s thesis is on the surface more straightforward, asserting that it was the preaching service which was the glory of the Methodists (even the 5 A.M. service Wesley was referring to in the 1768 Conference minutes) and the source of the survival and vitality of Methodism. Whilst recognizing as Bunting did in 1824 that there was too much emphasis on preaching and too little on worship, with more extempore prayer and fewer formal prayers in worship, Burdon underestimates the value of the sacrament service in Methodism and the variations within the tradition. He rightly emphasizes the importance of hymnody and singing as an expression of Methodist piety and attempts a “what would it have been like to have been there” view of a preaching service in the 1790s. I will not try to describe it but rather confine myself to documentary evidence gleaned in my researches.

The conclusions I have reached are tenuous and limited by such evidence. Often we do not know much about the pattern of worship, for weekly bulletins with orders of service do not exist. We have only a handful of circuit plans for the period under review. The memoirs of preachers abound, so that texts are known, feelings expressed, and results evaluated, but little more. The contemporary descriptions of Methodist worship are often general in nature and polemical in style, defending an Anglican-style Methodism or denouncing a Dissenting-style revivalist sect. What I wish to focus on is a picture of the variety of Methodist worship life which cannot easily be categorized as free or formal. Just as Methodist polity underwent a revolution in the period 1790–1830, as highlighted in John Bowmer’s book and my own dissertation, so too worship was a barometer of change, of the consolidation of a distinct ministry and denomination using and adapting existing forms whilst closing the doors on more revivalistic methods and freer ways of expression. I shall describe in general the developments from the 1780s and then use examples from Bristol, London, and the provinces to illustrate such variety and the tensions in this area.

At the back of our minds there will be some key questions. Did extra-liturgical services supplant rather than supplement the liturgical forms as Methodists saw they met their needs? Or did the liturgical forms from the BCP remain in written form hardly ever used except in certain metropolitan and town areas?

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6 Burdon, p. 5.
7 Burdon, pp. 26–28.
9 Cf. Stockton, p. 300.
Was the Plan of Pacification (1795), and particularly Article 10, the tightening up of liturgical forms or the opening up of a free-for-all? It stated:

Wherever Divine Service is performed in England on the Lord’s Day in Church-hours, the officiating preachers shall read either the service of the Established Church, our venerable Father’s abridgement, or, at least, the lessons appointed by the Calendar. But we recommend either the full service, or the abridgement.  \textsuperscript{10}

Was this a political formula designed to keep Methodism together or a statement either of fact or intent? Twenty-five years later, Jabez Bunting wrestles with the need to draw up a paper “on the advantage of the \textit{occasional} [my italics] use of a Liturgy in our chapels.” He does not think that either he or Richard Watson has the time to do it but feels the need for “A vindication of that part of the Methodist Discipline, contained in what is called the Plan of Pacification, which recommends the use of the Liturgy in the forenoon service of the Lord’s Day.” \textsuperscript{11}

The fifteen years leading up to the Plan and the thirty years after are the subject for this review of Wesleyan Methodist worship forms in the context of what David Hempton has called “a decade of crisis” in which worship became the focus of the internal examination of what was Methodism and whether it could survive. \textsuperscript{12}

**The Historical Background—The Old Plan**

Clearly in the 1780s, John Wesley struggled to keep control of the Methodist movement, recognizing in his old age the need to share responsibility for its administration and the need for diversity of ministry to cope with the pressure of expansion, overseas and at home. At the same time he tried to maintain his allegiance to the Church of England and not to sever the links of Methodism with the Mother Church. \textsuperscript{13}

The “thunderclap” of the ordinations in 1784 later destroyed the illusion of such a bond of unity. While it can be viewed as a limited and pragmatic response to the immediate needs for pastoral oversight and sacramental provision in America and Scotland, two places beyond the immediate territorial jurisdiction of the Church of England, it did not stop there and opened up the possibility of further ordinations in England, to make up for the dwindling ministerial help John Wesley could call upon. There was at the same time a growing demand from within the Methodist movement for the sacraments from those previously denied.


Needless to say, Charles Wesley’s reaction was predictable in view of his high and entrenched attitude concerning the superiority of those in orders vis-à-vis the uneducated preachers. Long ago in 1762 he had penned the following lines expressing his fears of the desire of the preachers:

Raised from the people’s lowest lees  
Guard, Lord, thy preaching witnesses,  
Nor let their pride the honour claim,  
Of sealing covenants in thy name:  
Rather than suffer them to dare  
Usurp the priestly character,  
Save from the arrogant offence,  
And snatch them, uncorrupted, hence.¹⁴

The corpus of verse which flowed from his pen on hearing of his brother’s ordinations in the city of Bristol and elsewhere is published for us to catch a flavor of Charles’s outrage on behalf of those “Church” Methodists wedded to the “Old Plan,” i.e., the maintenance of an episcopally-ordained ministry at the pinnacle of a movement within the Church of England. He rails against his brother’s “mistaken way,” seeing that it might lead him to “ordain whom e’er you please.” He criticizes his inconsistencies in proclaiming the BCP as incomparable and then producing an abridgment. He heaps on “giddy Coke’s aspiring head” all the invective he can in highlighting the dangers of such innovations.¹⁵

Other clergymen who helped Wesley were more philosophical about such changes, perhaps sensing that their usefulness was becoming more limited. James Creighton, one of Wesley’s assistants at City Road, London, writing to his sister in Philadelphia in October 1788 wrote:

To preach or read prayers in Church hours, to have ordination, or administer the sacraments is, in some sense [sic] a separation from the Established Church, and contrary to what the Methodists were thirty years ago, and contrary to declarations they then made. That changes should come we need not at all wonder, when we consider the Church in every age.¹⁶

It was to such men as Creighton (1738–1815), John Richardson (1734–1792), and Peardie Dickinson (1758–1802), ordained within the Church of England, and Thomas Vasey (d. 1826), ordained presbyter by Wesley in 1784 for the American work and priest by Bishop White of Pennsylvania before returning to England, that Wesley looked for the provision of the liturgical services of which

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¹⁶Quoted in Stockton, p. 3. Original letter with the World Methodist Council at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.
he expected Methodists to avail themselves. But their ministry could only be
exercised in London and the immediate environs. They were unwilling to itiner­ate, and the Church Methodists of the metropolis needed their services, particu­larly with the failing health of Charles Wesley and his death in 1788. For that rea­son, Peard Dickinson was poached from Rev. Vincent Perronet at Shoreham in order to assist at City Road, taking part with John Wesley in a sacrament service in July 1786 with over 1,000 communicants. Only Coke and the Wesleys with a few occasional Anglican helpers could service the demand for the sacrament from the rest of the Connexion who might be unable or unwilling to get it from the local parish church.17

Such demands had surfaced in the 1760s and been squashed by the Wesleys who wanted to maintain strict ministerial control of both liturgical and extra-litur­gical forms. But with the ordination of men like John Pawson in 1785, set aside for the work in Scotland, the pressure for an extension of ministry was inevitable. Pawson typifies the inherent inconsistencies of Wesley’s actions which were to lead to renewed demands for the sacrament. He wrote from Glasgow in December 1785:

We have introduced no form of Prayer, that would answer no good end in Scotland.
. . . we are obliged to comply with the Kirk in every part of our public worship and also administering the Lord’s Supper. . . . Mr. Wesley would have been glad to have had everything done according to the Church of England, but it could not be. . . .18

He writes to Charles Atmore, his most frequent correspondent, of the great joy at administering the sacrament, even though Dr. Coke had to make the journey north for the first celebration in Edinburgh in September 1785. He is glad to have services in church hours and would be happy if Wesley would ordain more preachers “for those places where the bulk of the people desire it, and so go on from time to time as providence may open the way, and let those places remain upon the old plan who wish to be as they are.”19 He points to the example of revival in America and the success of the Methodist movement there which offered a sacrament that the people want from the hands of their own preachers.20

And at home when Pawson moves from Scotland to England in 1787, he finds that the people of Hunslet near Leeds, like many others, are “very desirous of having the sacrament.” He cannot in conscience deny them, by right of his ordi­nation which, he claimed, gave him the privilege of administering the holy sacra­ments.21

17 Stevenson, pp. 147–153, for details of Wesley’s “curates.”
19 Bowmer, p. 40.
20 Bowmer, p. 53.
21 Bowmer, p. 50.
Pawson's frustration is heightened by the final invective of Charles Wesley who sensed this dangerous development. He wrote to the City Road society the Sunday before the Conference of 1787:

I told you, forty years ago, that from among you grievous wolves would arise, who would rend and tear the flock. You now see my words fulfilled. These self-created bishops [Coke and Asbury] and self-made priests are the very men. But I charge you all, in the presence of God, never receive the sacrament from any of them.22

That Conference tried to stem the rising demands for more ordinations, by allowing the assistants (i.e., itinerant preachers) to read the prayer book services, but not during church hours when the sacrament was being celebrated at the parish church which was strongly recommended to all Methodist people.23

Pawson wrote to Atmore in frustration:

We are to be just as, and what we were, in every respect before we came to Scotland. No sacraments, no gowns, no nothing at all. . . .24

Yet for him, the issue of the sacrament was crucial not only for the affirmation of his ministry but also for the spiritual health of the Methodist people:

I cannot yet forget our Blessed Sacrament. It seems to me that very many of our people in this country have quite lost sight of that ordinance. They have so long received it so very seldom, and when they did, they got so little by it, that now many of them seem to care very little about it. Dr. Coke says that he lives in hopes of better times respecting this, but when these happy times shall come, the Lord only knows.25

One obstacle to change was soon to be removed. Charles Wesley's death was noted with characteristic feeling by Pawson who echoed those of his fellow preachers:

May all bigotry and high church zeal be eternally buried in his grave. Amen and Amen.26

The preachers now waited for the venerable Father to die, knowing that change would inevitably follow. Some, like Thomas Hanby ordained by Wesley, anticipated this, preaching in his gown at Nottingham and administering the sacrament there. This pleased Pawson greatly, though he warned Atmore: "I think that you should use the Prayer Book or the good old man will not be pleased with you."27 Hanby received complaints from Alexander Mather, recently ordained, but was quite unrepentant and determined to continue his action. The scene was thus set for the disruptions of the 1790s.

22Stevenson p. 89.
231787 Conference, Q[uestion] 21.
24Bowmer, p. 46. Letter to Atmore, 8 Aug. 1787.
27Bowmer, p. 68. Letter to Atmore, 16 Sep. 1788.
General Developments—The Providential Way

I want now to trace briefly the background to developments in worship during that and the previous decade setting the framework for the sacramental controversy which concluded with the Plan of Pacification in 1795 which settled everything and nothing.

There was in the 1780s concern not merely for the content and style of worship but also its quality. The 1782 Conference addressed the problem of noise and reflected that the previous year’s injunction to “prevent people’s talking” before and after sermons had been largely ignored, by people and preachers alike. Conference enjoined silence during and after the preaching service.28 Not only was uniformity of liturgy struggling to be enforced but also the use of the Hymn Book published in 1780. Clearly some were using hymns composed by others to tunes introduced from elsewhere.29 While congregational singing was exhorted, this was to be controlled by the preachers.30 They were to use the formal “Church” prayers in addition to “extempore prayer” and to desist from histrionics in the pulpit, screaming, and beating the Bible.

The frequency of such injunctions on worship indicate how far removed the hopes of the Wesleys were, expressed in such urgent exhortations, from the reality of worship conducted in the main by the preachers in mostly rural and small town preaching-places, far removed from the Anglican ethos of the parish church which they had either never thought to attend or from which they had by now mostly been excluded. Particular studies of some provincial towns and Bristol and London will indicate that these were the last battlegrounds for the preservation of Anglican liturgical forms in Methodism.

For much of the rest of the country, they had simply never been known. John Pawson reflects the growing disenchantment with the BCP among preachers. Writing to Atmore he offers advice on whether he should administer the sacrament to the people of the Colne Circuit. He goes on:

As to reading the prayers, I cannot tell what to say. We are a divided people respecting them. Some like them very well, others not at all. I have read them twice at Hunslet, but I think I shall soon be weary. They are so long, and take up so much time and strength, that really it makes it a long and hard service for one person, when one has to preach three times it quite tires one out, and I doubt that after all Mr. Wesley can say, they are only paper prayers when all is done, and it is still a doubt with me whether the Lord ever answers them.

If they were at liberty to preach extempore then the same should apply to the prayers and the choice of the hymns.31 And if the people desired the sacraments, then there was no reason in his mind for them to be denied. They should not be

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281782 Conference Q35.
291782 Conference Q34.
31Bowmer, p. 70. Letter to Atmore, 1 Oct. 1788.
required to attend the parish church for communion and they should be allowed to hold their own services in church hours.

Such were the issues which divided the Methodist people in the 1790s. At the Conference of 1791, the preachers agreed “to follow strictly the plan which Mr. Wesley left us at his death.” But there was no agreement as to which plan, the old one or the new “providential” way. The unresolved problems of the pattern of the government and ministry of Methodism tore the Connexion apart. The conference tried to keep control, through an annual presidency and shared power in Districts where senior preachers struggled to maintain discipline and unity. There were further ordinations. Some wore cassocks and bands and called themselves “Reverend.” The sacraments were celebrated by those not episcopally-ordained. It was, as outlined in my thesis, a struggle between a ministerial and lay aristocracy in the Connexion, between preachers and people, leaders and trustees, Church Methodists and innovating Methodists. And at Bristol, London, and elsewhere, the issue of who could administer the sacrament and under what conditions was at the heart of the crisis. Are the Methodists Dissenters? (1792) asked Samuel Bradburn, later to be Secretary of the Conference, while Joseph Benson, a senior more conservative preacher embroiled in the debate, wrote A Vindication of the People Called Methodists (1800) in answer to Lincolnshire clergymen who clearly regarded the events of the decade as demonstrating that the breach with the Church of England had been made. While Benson and others protested their links with the Church in order to retain the Church Methodists’ allegiance, many of the latter were lost to Methodism. The “Plan of Pacification” of 1795 which ended the first phase of the crisis decreed that

the Lord’s Supper shall not be administered in any chapel except the majority of the trustees of the chapel on the one hand and the majority of the stewards and leaders on the other belonging to that chapel . . . on the other, shall allow it. Nevertheless, in all cases, the consent of the conference shall be obtained, before the Lord’s Supper be administered.32

It was administered only by those authorized by Conference, and it was not to be within church hours unless already done so. In practice, this allowed the few chapels in the Connexion desiring episcopally-ordained clergymen to administer to do so, while increasingly extending the availability of Communion services elsewhere.

In these two decades, it is easy to lose sight of the general developments in liturgy and worship if we concentrate on the sacrament of Holy Communion. I want therefore to offer some observations on other aspects.

One area of disappointment for Wesley before he died was the decline of the early morning service among Methodists to which he was particularly partial. He

regretted that it had been given up at Stroud and elsewhere in 1784. If the preachers did not rise up early and call people to repentance then their health and that of Methodism would decline.\textsuperscript{33} When in 1787 he rose at 5:30 A.M. and found no preacher in the City Road chapel even though there were three or four in the house, he demanded an explanation. Told that they had sat up late, he ordered everyone to bed at nine so that they might all attend the morning preaching.\textsuperscript{34} Despite the Conference exhortations of 1784, 1789, and later, this preaching service often dwindled into a small and occasional prayer meeting for the faithful early risers.\textsuperscript{35}

Such a pattern of change made greater the reason for a service in the morning during church hours, despite Wesley’s reservations. The 1786 Conference allowed as much, if one could demonstrate the inability or inactivity of local Anglican clergymen to offer evangelical services or the distance of the parish church. The growth of Methodism and the need for preachers to preach more services was clearly evidenced by the 1790 Conference regulation that

\begin{quote}
No Preacher shall preach three times the same day to the same congregation
No Preacher shall preach twice on a weekday, or oftener than three times on the Lord’s Day.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

Methodists were becoming a people who went to chapel for more formal times of worship at set hours (hence the need to publicize such details in a circuit plan). It became noteworthy when Wesleyan preachers went out of doors as did Charles Atmore in Marylebone Fields in 1788 during the Conference in London,\textsuperscript{37} or Joseph Entwisle preaching in the open air in Leeds in 1793 during the Yorkshire Revival, declaring that “this is the best day I ever saw.”\textsuperscript{38} After 1800, the Wesleyans were to set their faces against such informal gatherings and retreated inside the chapel walls.

Fewer Anglican ministers attached to Methodism meant that the Connexion had to burn its boats and extend the pattern of ministry, allowing at the 1794 Conference for the possibility of baptism, as well as communion, being administered by the itinerant preachers “for the desirable ends of love and concord.”\textsuperscript{39} That such sacraments became more common is evidenced by the list of places being authorized to have communion services. In the first year 100 places in 48 different circuits, including Bristol and London, are listed. Six years later a further 33 places were listed, mostly served by itinerant preachers.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{34}Quoted in Stevenson, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{35}Cf. Burdon, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{36}1790 Conference Q.
\textsuperscript{37}Stevenson, p. 412.
\textsuperscript{38}Memoirs of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle by his Son, Bristol, 1848, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{39}1794 Conference, Circular letter dated 8 Aug.
\textsuperscript{40}1800 Conference, Q17.
leader of the Penistone chapel in Yorkshire “lately erected . . . a society of fifteen
members who I believe are unanimous in their desire to have the sacrament of the
Lord’s Supper administered to them, therein, four times a year” requested
Conference to grant the ordinance, which the President endorsed.41

Who was to receive the sacrament? All who desired the ordinance? Again,
worship became the focus of a demonstration of ministerial control. In 1789
Henry Moore was Superintendent of the London City Road circuit. He tried to
debar a gentleman who was not a member, who had attended the theater, from the
sacrament. The said gentleman obtained a note from Mr. Wesley who believed
his story but Moore challenged Wesley and threatened not to receive the sacra­
ment if Wesley gave the note to the fun-loving adherent. Wesley explained that
he would take the sacrament if the devil himself was present. But Moore ripost­
ed that he too would do so, but not if he had a ticket of admission. Wesley burned
the note.42 While the controversy raged in the 1780s regarding the administration
of Holy Communion, it is clear that some preachers took the matter into their own
hands. Communions in the home were celebrated by the Entwisle family, which
were “a blessed time;” while Atmore and others appear to have shared
Communion in classes and bands at times other than Sunday public worship.43

There is plenty of evidence too for the survival of the extra-liturgical services
beyond the centers most influenced by the Wesleys. Indeed the 1789 Conference
tried to regularize the conduct of love feasts along the same lines as the
Communion, with admission by Society ticket or note from the assistant.44 In
many circuits, such occasions were held either four times or twice a year, often at
Easter or associated with the Quarterly Meeting and a watchnight as at York in
1802.45 Despite Wesley’s attempts to keep it under ministerial control, there are
indications that it was seen as a powerful tool for revival, where the people were
more involved in prayer and testimony as well as in singing. For this reason, they
were regarded with suspicion by the Anglican authorities. Wainwright, a
Cambridge don writing unfavorably of the Methodists, regarded the monthly or
quarterly gatherings, or “nocturnal assemblies,” as occasions for emotional
excitement only.46 Along with the watchnight services which survived not mere­
ly at New Year but also attached to the quarterly days of fasting and prayer, they
could be represented by outsiders as disorderly meetings prone to over enthusi­
asm.47 The memoir of William Bramwell has details of love feasts in Sheffield

41 Certificate in Wesley Historical Society Library archives, Portraits Volume V at Westminster
College, Oxford.
42 Stevenson, p. 376.
43 Entwisle, pp. 86, 161.
44 Quoted Stockton, p. 126. See also F. Baker, The Love Feast in Methodism.
45 Entwisle, p. 197.
46 L. Wainwright, Observations on the Doctrine, Discipline and Manners of the Wesleyan
47 Stockton, quoting Nightingale’s description.
which are the occasion of renewal and revival when "the fire broke out in a most extraordinary and engaging manner" in 1793–94. In a more conservative vein, Joseph Benson used the watchnight services at New Year while making the most of the days set down by the government for a general fast or day of thanksgiving, including preaching and prayer appropriate to the occasion.

Covenant services too, formerly the preserve of John Wesley from their introduction in 1755, became, after 1780 and the publication of a revised text in response to its use in the Sheffield circuit, far more widely used, though not initially in conjunction with a sacrament service. Although such services lasted four or five hours, with the reading of the Directions and sermon, people came in large numbers to renew their covenant with God at the beginning of the year. The eight editions of the text issued up to 1800 demonstrate the vitality of the service which was not restricted to the major urban centers. The reasons for its earlier limited use were overturned once the preachers took control of its development. Many accounts speak of increasingly large congregations, of the solemnity of the occasion, of the glorious presence of God displayed in a spirit of unity, a sense of pardon, and a renewed strength.

While such a text was both used and admired, it is less clear whether the BCP, or Mr. Wesley’s Abridgment, continued to be used to any great extent. Goldhawk outlines the way in which by 1840 it was questionably the staple diet of worshipping congregations even in Wesleyan Methodism. Had the preaching service, with a freer pattern, supplanted the more formal Anglican structure? And what of the third option, that at least the services should follow the readings of the lectionary prescribed in the BCP? Swift concludes that some circuits in the early nineteenth century printed the lectionary readings for each Sunday either from BCP or Wesley’s Abridgment but “many superintendents omitted the appointed lessons from the Plan.” Of pre-1830 plans I have examined, mostly of urban centers, only one contains a printed lectionary. Significantly this is the Manchester South circuit in 1826, where Jabez Bunting was superintendent. It contains the lessons for the day, taken from the BCP abridged by Wesley, which had been republished again the year before. Did this mark a revival of interest? The sacrament was to be celebrated once a month at two of the circuit churches and once a quarter at other chapels. There was a Quarterly Fast with public prayer meetings at 8 A.M., noon, and 8 P.M. While the watchnight services have disappeared (the plan covers the summer months), the love feast appears as a

50Stockton, pp. 268 ff.
quarterly event the Sunday after the Fast at the main chapel. No doubt a covenant service was held in January. Amongst the books on sale at the main chapel were the Methodist hymn books (presumably most needed by members or attenders), the Sunday Service of the Methodists, the Youths’ Instructor, the Wesleyan Methodist Magazines, and copies of Wesley’s Journals and Benson’s Commentaries.\(^{53}\) Compare this with the list which survives of Henry Moore’s requirements for his congregation (at Bath?) in 1794. He orders (from the Book steward in London?) mostly Methodist Magazines and the twelfth volume of Wesley’s Works but also “1 Sacrament hymns, 1 Benson’s Hymn Book and 1 dozen of Clasped Hymn Books”\(^{54}\)

On the surface, the Wesleyan legacy is intact, but to what extent our view is distorted by the evidence we have from mainly urban areas cannot be clear. How much such services reflected the Anglican practices Wesley knew and loved cannot easily be demonstrated.

Adam Clarke was another liturgical devotee. In a document covering September 1 December 31, annotated “Sepr. 15 [17]96,” prepared for the Arminian Magazine and sent to Richard Edwards, printer, of Bristol, he lists texts for each day, noting various holy days and saints’ days in the period.\(^ {55}\) Of him, Frances Pawson, his Superintendent’s wife, wrote that he was “an extraordinary preacher” who generally took texts “from some part of the lesson for the day (in the evening) and in the Sabbath morning from the Gospel for the day.”\(^ {56}\)

Samuel Bradburn, who was regarded as one of the innovating Methodists who favored reform, is nevertheless recorded as giving his opinion on the BCP thus:

>a book I prize next to the Bible and consider as a useful national guardian of our doctrines in many respects, among other things, in keeping remembrance.\(^ {57}\)

But did he use it in public worship? I think not, though further examination of his and others’ sermons might demonstrate the extent to which the language of BCP influenced the Methodist preachers.

I would suggest, on the evidence available, that those so inclined to the formal Anglican style were in a minority. A contemporary description of “The Mode of Performing Divine Service Among Methodists,” published in the Arminian Magazine of 1796, fails to mention such occurrences at all, focusing instead on the singing, extempore prayer, and sermon, also extempore, which provide a “very plain and simple” service in most places. Indeed the author extols the

\(^ {53}\)Manchester South Circuit Plan, among Bunting papers in the Baker Collection, Box 3, Duke University, North Carolina.

\(^ {54}\)From Perronet papers, Baker Collection, Box 6.

\(^ {55}\)Clarke papers C/21, in the Baker Collection, Box 3.

\(^ {56}\)J. Telford, Wesley’s Chapel and Wesley’s House (London, 1871), pp. 41–42.

\(^ {57}\)Copy of quote of Rev. S. Bradburn in Steele MSS, Baker Collection, Box 2.
virtues of such extempore prayer over the formal: "a constant repetition of the same prayers begets sometimes an habit of indifference." 58

Sarah Wesley writing to Mrs. Peard Dickinson makes the same sort of contrast between Methodism and Anglican worship, describing a visit with her mother to Brighton:

... as the Royal Chapel does not convey much edification, indeed it is throng'd with people who come to see the King, which interrupts my profit greatly—Nor am I partial to Quire Service, tho' my mother finds it particularly tend to her Piety—and Mrs Shepherd had a long argument with me, on the excellence of her Church, because it addressed the Senses and Imagination as well as the heart. I contend that it was so adapted to please these, that the heart was quite left out of the question—and that a simple Meeting, and village Church, would be likely to have more effect that was salutary than all the Pomp and Ornament of the Popes Chappel [sic]. . . . let those who love chanted Prayer hear it. . . .59

James Lackington writes of a typical Methodist Sunday in his Memoirs published in 1791:

A.M. preaching, 8 A.M. prayer meeting, 10 A.M. public worship at Foundery: hear Mr. Perry at cripplegate at two, be at the preaching at the Foundery at five; met with the General Society at 6; met in the United Bands at 7 and again at the prayer meeting at 8; and then come home and read and pray by yourselves.60

Such a primitive pattern—of early morning worship, of prayer, of the formal service and preaching and the more informal meetings in society—was the distinctive Methodist contribution to the place of worship on the Sabbath. By the early nineteenth century, it was under threat.

**Particular Case Studies—Testing the Waters**

The examples of a cluster of Northern industrial towns and the two Methodist strongholds of Bristol and London will illustrate how these developments worked out in the places most likely to hang on to the Old Plan and resist the providential way. Joseph Benson in his *Vindication of the People Called Methodists* excused such developments with the plea that it was in response to urban need

where the lower classes of people are very numerous, very ignorant and very wicked, and where the Churches . . . will by no means contain all the inhabitants.61

In *Halifax*, the introduction of Wesley’s Abridgment into all chapels in the Circuit in 1786 under a young preacher, Alexander Suter, pleased the congregation at the main town chapel but, in this the largest parish in the North, the country folk were quite unused to attendance at the parish church and resisted the introduction of “Anglican” services, especially when conducted by the preacher

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59 Perronet papers, Box 6, Baker Collection.
60 Stevenson, pp. 174–175.
61 Benson, *Vindication of the People Called Methodists*, p. 21.
in surplice and bands. Walker records that after one year such services were dis­continued and, up to 1836, were not re-introduced.62

After Wesley’s death, John Pawson was appointed to the Circuit. He greatly upset the Church Methodists “on account of the innovation he made in the order of the Services and his preaching during church hours. . . . What rendered the appearance of things much worse, was, the attempt which Mr. Pawson also made to administer the sacrament in the chapel . . . in a gown with bands.” This was the start of a troubled period of dissension which resulted in an outbreak of hostilities in 1795, led by Samuel Waterhouse, a wealthy member of the town society, “rigidly attached to the church.”63 The consequence of such changes was to force him and others back to the Church while a division of the Society along Kilhamite lines also occurred.

Such a pattern was replicated elsewhere. At Leeds, the Old Boggard House chapel, center for supporters of the Old Plan, held its services at 7:30 A.M. and 5 P.M., thus avoiding those at the nearby parish church. A more progressive chapel, Bethel, had been opened in 1793 where 10:30 A.M. and 2:30 P.M. services were held, according to the 1796 Circuit Plan.64 Joseph Entwisle records the administration of the Lord’s Supper in 1793:

the place was exceedingly crowded. . . . The service continued three hours, yet none seemed weary. It was like another Pentecost.

The Leeds Conference, he goes on, under the Presidency of John Pawson, voted by 86 votes to 38 for permission to be granted to societies unanimous in wanting to have the sacrament.65 His account of time in Yorkshire indicates that such services of Holy Communion and love feasts were the instrument of great revival, despite the opposition of the Church Methodists.

In Manchester, Samuel Bradburn in 1791 decided to change the hours of the Sunday service at the Salford chapel from 8 A.M. to 10 A.M. This upset the members of the Oldham Street Chapel who threatened to resign. Bradburn went to preach at their 7:30 A.M. service and “gave out for myself at Salford, and advised all to go to Church that preferred it to hearing their own ministers.” At 10 A.M. at Salford, he had a congregation of about 1,000 for his preaching service (not the Liturgy). He went back to Oldham Street at night to defend his action, taking as his text Isaiah 9:6 and talking of the government of Christ as Head of the Church “which greatly served my purpose. . . . I held it stoutly for two hours and have reason to believe a good end will be answered.” The Oldham Street congregation continued to use the services of an Anglican minister to maintain their devotion to the Old Plan.66

65Entwisle, pp. 116–117.
The political importance of the Society at Bristol in the sacramental controversy has been well documented and its implications for the wider Connexion fully discussed in my thesis and articles published. The worship life of the New Room and Guinea Street chapels was fed by able preachers, by the occasional presence of Wesley on his West Country visits, and by Anglican helpers like Rev. Bryan Bury Collins; it was a “high church” mix of evangelical piety and sacramental fervor. In 1789 there were still a vibrant 5 A.M. service, classes which met in the evening and weeknight services. The love feasts and watchnights were observed. But a sizable segment of the Society went to the parish church for Holy Communion or waited for Wesley to be in residence at the New Room. Prayers were read in the lower part of the pulpit deck according to the Abridgment of the BCP. The unity of the society and the independence of the trustees was threatened first by the action of the building of a new chapel at Portland and then by the administration of the sacrament there. This drove the society into open war in 1794 with the exclusion of Henry Moore, the preacher who assisted Dr. Coke, from the pulpit at the New Room. The society and the Connexion was divided. A new chapel was built only twenty-five yards from the New Room to challenge its stand. The Church Methodists stood their ground but struggled to maintain their membership. Many drifted back into the Church of England, and the chapel was lost to Methodism. Such action did not affect the growth of Methodism in Bristol where numbers increased:

the congregations at Bristol [in 1802] in the mornings at 5 o’clock and in the evenings at 7, were very numerous, but were especially so at the Sunday services. The power of God very manifestly accompanied the preaching of the Word, and the Sacramental Services were unusually large.

I want to conclude my account with a more detailed description of the worship life of chapels in London which may help to display the variety of practice still prevalent in line with the general developments outlined above.

Those few plans which survive for London indicate the dominance of the main chapels (City Road and West Street) by ordained Anglican ministers and senior preachers chosen for their ability. One of the Wesley brothers was planned at each chapel every Sunday in the period 1786–1787. This had sometimes led to tensions with the lay preachers who were excluded by the preference for those Anglican clergymen who rendered services, particularly reading the Liturgy and administering the Sacrament in Church hours. Nevertheless other smaller chapels were served by afternoon and evening preaching services where the indication is that the Liturgy was not read but the familiar preaching service pattern

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69 R. Burroughs, A Centenary History of Ebenezer Chapel, King Street, Bristol (Bristol, 1896), pp. 28ff.
of more informal worship was followed. By 1791, a 9 A.M. morning service was held at both main chapels with a 5 P.M. at City Road and afternoon and evening services at 3 and 7 P.M. at West Street. The ministers were paid for their services, receiving between 10 and 15 pounds a quarter; four are recorded as receiving payments in March 1791 including a final payment of 15 to John Wesley. They were expected to meet with all the preachers of the London Circuit every Saturday when the business of the circuit was conducted and preaching appointments determined. Such was the reputation of the City Road chapel, more through the social composition of its congregation than through its size, that Joseph Entwisle felt uncomfortable when asked to preach there in July 1796:

My own mind was in a good state, and I was enabled to get on tolerably, but there was such a number of men with black coats present, that I did not find myself at home. However, that trial is over.

That the sacrament was celebrated regularly at both chapels is evidenced by entries in the Stewards’ Book for January 1791. Wesley appears to have had two such services per month, which necessitated regular payments for wine. At West Street, the sacrament cups of the French Huguenot Church were still being used. At City Road, the ability still to call upon the services of Anglican clergy, particularly Richardson (to 1792), Dickinson (to 1802), and Creighton (to 1815), meant that this cathedral of Church Methodism, where unordained preachers were excluded from administration till 1826, was able to hold out against the forces of change for longer than elsewhere. The Plan of Pacification enabled the Society, however, to continue within Methodism while others availed themselves of the greater variety of forms.

James Creighton, one of those so employed, was anxious to defend the old ways. One of his printed sermons, of July 1793, entitled *Solemnity in Divine Worship Recommended* is an indictment of the dangers of informal practices creeping into worship. One assumes that his hearers at City Road, who mostly approved of it, were thinking more of the sins of others. He listed nine ways in which divine worship was diminished:

1st Bills for announcement were handed to the pulpit during the progress of Divine Service
2nd Hapers for the pulpit were dropped from the gallery into the body of the chapel
3rd Whispering or talking, during the intervals of the service, or whilst coming in, or going up and down the aisles

71 Stevenson, p. 118.
72 Stevenson, p. 166.
73 Entwisle, pp. 169–170.
75 Telford, p. 73.
Bustle and hurry during the administration of the sacrament, some rushing before others, rudely rushing home to dinner, without waiting for the post-communion

Persons lounging in the vestry during the time of celebrating the Eucharist, talking of temporal matters, of the politics of the day

Those not communicating to employ their time with some good work

The singing for two years past “has often been little better than mere abomination”

The necessity to give up the anthem singing, the chanting and “vain repetitions, wherein, though the music may be good, the heart is very little engaged”

The necessity to strive to be possessed of holy tempers and lowliness of heart and life.  

Benson too complained of the practice of communicants leaving as soon as they had received the elements “which renders the ordinance far less solemn and less profitable than it would otherwise be.”

Such inconsistency in the preservation of the solemnity and decency of public worship as enshrined in the following of the Liturgy makes one wonder whether the real explanation of the differences over worship are more to be found in terms of social class than in theological understanding. Certainly the problem of controlling large numbers at the sacrament services was highlighted. Once Wesley records that there were so many present that he had to consecrate the elements three times.

Most services were shared by more than one preacher, a luxury London could afford. One, an Anglican minister, would read prayers (i.e., the Liturgy) and the other would preach on the lectionary text for the day. When all the preachers were at the 1791 Conference, the City Road chapel had to pay 10s 6d for another minister (Mr. Lievre) to read prayers. By the end of the 1790s it became clear that such practices could not last for ever. Nevertheless in 1799, the Great Queen Street Chapel trustees, stewards, and leaders, meeting under the chairmanship of an ex-President (Pawson), met to consider the best plan of avoiding disappointment in the reading of prayers because of Mr. Dickinson’s ill health. They resolved that

when it shall so happen we cannot have a pious clergyman of the Church of England to read prayers on the fourth or vacant Sunday, then . . . it shall be lawful for an itinerant preacher in full connexion to read the prayers

if from sickness, accident or other hindrances, the regular clergymen are ever prevented from attending their duty, in that case the stewards . . . shall be at liberty to call in any other pious clergyman . . . to read prayers and administer the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.
By the time the Hinde Street chapel was opened in 1810 however, the monthly sacrament service was to be conducted “by the Preacher.” Even so, the City Road trustees had reservations about Thomas Vasey, twice ordained, administering the sacraments, limiting him to the office of “reader,” his task being “to perform the liturgical service.” The first time that Methodist preachers were permitted to administer the sacrament was in May 1826 when Henry Moore, ordained presbyter by Wesley, and Joseph Entwisle, a very senior preacher, conducted the service, in response to demands from the leaders not to import Anglican clergymen any more.81 Jabez Bunting, as a young and able minister, was still unable even to read the prayers at City Road in 1803, but allowed to preach and to receive the sacrament afterwards. It was in 1820, when stationed again in London that he was finally allowed to read the Liturgy, as he did on the visit of Dr. Thomas Chalmers to preach “to an immense assemblage of three thousand people.”82 He also records not only the decline of interest in the formal liturgy but also of the prevalence of the early morning service, “the glory of the Methodists.” The preaching service at 5 A.M. had to be given up in favor of a prayer meeting with numbers dropping from over 20 to as few as four. As such it survived for a further twenty years.83 The preachers disliked such an early start in view of the heavy duties of the rest of the day, preferring the weeknight meetings instead.

The premise that more communions meant the demise of the extra-liturgical services is not borne out. Clearly the love feast as an occasional service was still popular, with over 900 attending Hinde Street in 1842 as part of a revival, and watchnight services continued to draw the crowds.

It is interesting to look forward to an account by Rev. Samuel Keeble of his attendance at the City Road Chapel in the late 1860s. The main service of Sunday is by then in the evening when the chapel was full. A prayer meeting followed. Worship was assisted by a choir around a Precentor’s desk under the pulpit, leading the singing by a tuning fork and fine voice. The lower pulpit, originally used for the reading of the Liturgy, had been removed to leave one pulpit in which to preach. Class tickets were issued for admission to the monthly sacrament services and annual covenant services. There were weeknight services for the Band of Hope and occasional love feasts which were “heavenly.” There is nothing left to distinguish this chapel from most other town center chapels in mid-Victorian Methodism. The cause of the Church Methodists was all but dead, waiting for the revival of liturgical interest in this our twentieth century.84

81 Stevenson, pp. 152–153, 196.
82 Stevenson, pp. 169, 193.