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The Wesleys and Manchester

Henry Derman Rack

Introduction

Manchester and certain Manchester people had a significant influence on the Wesleys' early development and beliefs, perhaps more than has always been fully recognized. This is particularly true for John Wesley. For Charles it is more difficult to be sure for lack of documentation, but some influences and contacts can be discerned for him as well. There is, too, the development of Manchester Methodism to be considered which, like the Wesley brothers' personal development, was also affected by some peculiarities of the local religious scene. In this paper I shall be looking more especially at the Manchester influences on John and Charles in their pre-conversion period and at what became of these influences later. The rise of Methodism in Manchester I shall treat only briefly as I have published a detailed account of the early years elsewhere.¹

Religion in Early Eighteenth-Century Manchester

A few words must first be said about the character of the town when the Wesleys visited it in the 1730s. It was a growing town and already the center of the emerging cotton industry, though we must remember that this was long before the rise of the great cotton mills and warehouses which dominated the townscape in a later time.

We have to picture a compact town containing gardens as well as houses and surrounded by open fields. A picturesque map from the 1740s has a rather romanticized panorama of the town across the fields together with pictures of the newer and bigger Georgian houses round its border; and there were to be streets of such houses too.² But the bulk of the houses and streets in the older part of the town would have been of the earlier half-timbered type and not very smart. Only one pair of these has survived—the Wellington Inn and Old Shambles, recently shifted to a new site. A few other buildings with Wesley associations also survive: the medieval Collegiate Church (now the Cathedral); the medieval buildings nearby which now house a school and the Chetham Library founded in the seventeenth century; the Trinity, Salford Church, also seventeenth century; and the eighteenth-century St. Ann's Church.

Before the Methodist society was founded here in 1747, the religious provision in the town comprised the following: Anglicans high and low; Nonjurors who had left the Church of England after the deposition of James II in 1688; a powerful Presbyterian chapel in Cross Street; small numbers of Baptists,

¹"Between Church and Sect. The Origins of Methodism in Manchester," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 80 (1) (Spring 1998): 65–87.

²R. Casson and J. Berry map (1746), Manchester Central Library.

Quakers, and Roman Catholics. But our immediate concern is with the Anglicans and Nonjurors. The old Manchester parish contained some thirty townships stretching well beyond the town and it was only broken up in the 1850s. In Wesley's day the parish church was the present-day Cathedral which was then a collegiate church. That is to say it was staffed by a Warden, four Fellows, and two chaplains. It was not an educational institution but run by this body of clergy rather like a cathedral chapter to provide daily services by rota and had little concern for pastoral duties. It was supplemented by St. Ann's Church founded in 1712 at the newer end of the town, plus a number of chapels of ease—Trinity in Salford and a number of others in outlying villages.

Religion in Manchester had a political edge. The Wardens of the College were appointed by the Crown but the Fellows elected themselves which caused divisions. For after James II's ejection in 1688 and more especially after the accession of the Hanoverians from 1714, the Wardens were low church Whigs but the Fellows high church Tories with Jacobite sympathies. St. Ann's has traditionally been seen as the product of an attempt to provide a low church Whig rival to the College.³ This, we shall see, is an over-simplification for its rector in the 1730s was a moderate man, an old friend and neighbor of the high church Wesleys.

I said that religion in Manchester had a political edge. But it is equally true that politics in the early eighteenth century had a religious edge. Those most convinced that James II and his descendants were kings by divine right could not stomach his ejection. These Nonjurors initially included six bishops, some 400 clergy and an unknown number of laypeople who left or were ejected from the Church of England. As often happens with seceding groups of this kind, the Nonjurors split among themselves. All of them had a special veneration beyond that of other Anglicans for the authority of what they saw as "primitive Christianity" of the first three to five centuries. But the so-called "Essentialist Nonjurors" took this further. They saw some of the practices retained from Catholicism in the First (and most conservative) Edwardian Prayer Book of 1549 as being more truly primitive and sounder than the more Protestant book of 1552, revised and authorized in 1559 and again in 1662. Four points or "usages" in particular were emphasized for the eucharist: mixing water with the wine; prayers for the dead; an invocation for the descent of the Holy Spirit (*epiklesis*); and an oblatory prayer. They believed that the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions* (in reality a rather eccentric fourth-century compilation) contained genuine apostolic practice and teaching. Hence they upheld the need for "station fasts" on Wednesdays and Fridays—the Anglican norm was Friday only; and triple dipping in baptism. They also held high views of the need for bishops in apostolic succession for valid orders and sacraments thought this was also true of conforming high church Anglicans.

³For its history see C. W. Bardsley, *Memoirs of St Ann's Church* (Manchester, 1897).

Manchester was an important center for Nonjurors where they were led by Dr. Thomas Deacon, a nonjuror bishop and father of three sons who tragically suffered for their part in the 1745 Jacobite invasion. (Deacon's tombstone can still be seen outside the east end of St. Ann's Church). He was a devotee of the *Apostolic Constitutions* and published liturgies and devotions drawing on this source.⁴ He is significant for us because one of his Manchester disciples was John Clayton, though Clayton was a conforming Anglican clergyman. It was through him that Deacon influenced the Wesleys.

Clayton's example is a reminder that views like Deacon's on the authority of the Fathers and their effects on church practice were not confined to the Nonjurors. Many high churchmen had remained within the Church of England after 1688 but with uneasy consciences and Jacobite sympathies, while Nonjuror devotional works were read well beyond their own circle. Wesley's Manchester circle of friends included Jacobite Nonjurors like Deacon, the layman John Byrom and others; but also conforming clergy like Clayton, close to Deacon in politics and theology; plus more moderate churchmen like Joseph Hoole, the rector of St. Ann's and former Lincolnshire neighbor of the Wesleys.

Some of those mentioned as meeting Wesley on his Manchester visits are little more than names. The four I have listed are better documented and more directly influential on him. Clayton in particular was a significant member of Oxford Methodism and the main link between the Wesleys and Manchester. He was clearly imbued with a passion for conforming to "antiquity" and "primitive piety" and also had an interest in mystical writers and attracted Wesley for a time. He founded a Holy Club group in his own college and encouraged his colleagues in charity work, educating the poor and visiting the Oxford workhouse. He also introduced Wesley to the London-based S.P.C.K. He seems to have done much to keep the Oxford Methodists going when Wesley was absent from Oxford. In January 1733 he returned to Manchester to become rector of Trinity, Salford; became a chaplain in the Collegiate Church in 1740 and eventually a Fellow in 1760. His surviving correspondence with Wesley shows him answering Wesley's queries about early church teaching, primed by Deacon.⁵ Some evidence, we shall see, shows that Charles was influenced in a similar way. The other point about Clayton is that he was a Jacobite. During the 1745 invasion of Manchester he is reputed to have prayed for the Pretender on his knees in the street; and he certainly said grace for him privately.⁶ In late life Wesley claimed that neither he nor his father nor brother Samuel were Jacobites, but Tories. However, his mother was a Jacobite, his brother had strong Jacobite associations and there are

⁴For Deacon see H. Broxap, *A Biography of Thomas Deacon* (Manchester, 1911).

⁵Examples in John Wesley, *Works* (Bicentennial Ed. = B.E.) (Oxford and Nashville, 1975), 25:352, 255-256, 391-433.

⁶S. Hibbert-Ware, *History of the Foundations in Manchester* (Manchester, 1834) II, 100; J. Byrom, *Private Journal and Literary Remains*, Chetham Society O.S. XLIV (1857), I (2) 394.

some indications that John may have flirted with the same opinions at Oxford. Apparently he was only convinced of the legitimacy of Hanoverian rule in 1733 and even in 1734 he preached what Charles called a “Jacobite sermon” in Oxford.⁷

Close to the Wesleys also was Joseph Hoole, the rector of St. Ann’s, whose tombstone also survives outside the east end of St. Ann’s.⁸ He had become rector of Haxey in Lincolnshire in 1712 and was a friend of the Wesley family there, consulted by them about Old Jeffery (the Epworth poltergeist) and the Holy Club. It has been suggested that he was the “serious friend” who told Wesley that “the bible knows nothing of solitary Christianity” though the evidence does not seem to fit this claim. Hoole does not seem to have shared the Deacon circle’s enthusiasm for advanced “primitive piety.” Rather, he was a moderate high churchman who seems to have been able to remain on good terms with higher men, so he may have been a restraining influence on Wesley’s enthusiasm for extreme “primitivism.” In 1732 or 1733 he moved to Manchester at St. Ann’s and in 1730 became its rector. Wesley, and high church, and Nonjuror friends significantly attended St. Ann’s as well as the College and Trinity. He was no Jacobite either, for he preached loyalty to the government against the Pretender and died—perhaps fortunately—shortly before the Jacobite entry into Manchester in 1745.

Another notable Manchester friend of the Wesleys was John Byrom.⁹ Byrom was the younger son of an old Manchester family though to make his living he spent much of his time in London selling his shorthand system which was used by the Wesleys. Though a cautious Nonjuror, Byrom was a clubbable and genial man whose delightful diaries and letters show him to have been in tolerant contact with a wide variety of religious figures from Deists to Methodists and Moravians, as well as all types of Anglicans. He was also a prolific, if minor, poet, and the author of the Christmas hymn “Christians Awake.” He dabbled in Deacon’s “primitive piety” but above all he was fascinated by the mystics, notably the seventeenth century German Jakob Böhme (Behmen) whose work came to him through William Law. Law was one of John Wesley’s mentors until their estrangement after the latter’s conversion.¹⁰

⁷For a discussion of Wesley’s politics see my *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 2nd ed. (London, 1992), 371–372.

⁸For some details on Hoole and other points about Wesley’s associations with advanced high churchmen and Nonjurors I am greatly indebted to an unpublished manuscript account by the late Rev. Alan Keighly which I hope may be published before long.

⁹Byrom’s journal and letters were published by the Chetham Society O.S. XXXII (1854), XXXIV (1855), XL (1856), XLIV (1857). A convenient selection is in H. Talon (ed.), *John Byrom* (London, 1950). The most recent study by J. Hancox, *The Queen’s Chameleon* (London, 1994) has to be read with caution for highly speculative theories and unfortunately has little on his religious interests.

¹⁰For Wesley and Law see J. B. Green, *John Wesley and William Law* (London, 1945) and E. W. Baker, *A Herald of the Evangelical Revival* (London, 1948).

Wesley Visits to Manchester before Conversion

Before describing the influence of the Manchester circle on the Wesleys I will sketch in the record of John's visits to Manchester before conversion. So far as I can discover, Charles did not share in these visits though he certainly came under some of the same influences at second-hand or perhaps by correspondence; and we shall see later that references by Byrom in 1738 show that they were acquainted. John's visits seem mainly to have been to seek advice about important decisions and took place during his journeys between Oxford and Epworth and back.

His first visit was probably soon after Clayton had left Oxford to take up his new post in Salford. The pattern of this visit in May 1733 is typical. He preached at the College, St. Ann's and Trinity; met Clayton and Hoole at Clayton's house; called on Byrom and another friend and discussed self-denial. There were also conversations with others including Deacon; and Clayton showed him round Chetham's Library, one of the circle's meeting places. Clayton, Deacon, Byrom, and a Mr. Salmon accompanied Wesley part of the way to Buxton en route for Epworth. There was a similar pattern of preaching and visits on Wesley's return via Manchester to Oxford.¹¹ In 1734 he visited Clayton to discuss the sordid affair of the Wesleys' polygamous brother-in-law Westley Hall and in 1735 visited again for advice about the Georgia missionary proposal.¹² A letter from Clayton shows that Dr. Deacon was to supply or recommend a catechism for use in Georgia; and Clayton added "Be sure to remember to dip when you baptize, if it can possibly be done, according to the church's recommendation."¹³

It appears that there was some correspondence between Clayton and Wesley while in Georgia though none has survived.¹⁴ With the Wesleys back in England Byrom wrote on March 8, 1738, a very interesting letter to Charles Wesley. He discusses Charles's proposal to publish a volume of hymns (probably *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, published anonymously that year). Byrom says that he does not wish to discourage him from going public "but when you tell me that you write not for the critic but for the Christian, it occurs to my mind that you might as well write for both, or in such a manner that the critic may by your writing be moved to turn Christian, rather than the Christian turn critic." (You will recall that in the preface to the *Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780) John Wesley claimed for them the spirit of poetry as well as piety). Byrom added that before Charles published he "might lay before some experienced Christian critics or judges the design which you are upon; but I speak this with all submission, it is very likely that in these matters you may want a spur more than you want a bridle." He then refers to shorthand friends and Charles as a master of that art.¹⁵

¹¹V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr Wesley* (London, 1961), 185–186.

¹²Green, 228, 239, 254; John Wesley, *Journal*, ed. N. Cumock (London, repr. 1938), 8:147.

¹³John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 25:433.

¹⁴John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 25:740, 741, 744.

¹⁵John Byrom, *Journal*, II(1) 1995–1996.

That same month John visited Clayton in Manchester, once again officiating at the three churches and preaching on the significant text “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.”¹⁶ Then, on May 1, 1738, less than a month before John’s conversion, Clayton wrote anxiously to Wesley that “all your Manchester friends” are very uneasy about him. They rejoice at his zeal but are disquieted at his “using no notes and so very much action” in his preaching. Byrom had said that he wished he would “preach by book and cut off his hair.” Both Deacon and Byrom thought he should not publish anything until “his difficulties were over” and Clayton thought he needed a spiritual director.¹⁷ Clearly Wesley was showing Moravian influence and was on the verge of estrangement from his old friends.

On June 1, 1738, Charles records meeting with Byrom in London and explaining his new view of the doctrine of faith, which Byrom, he says (I suspect rather optimistically) “received with wonderful readiness.”¹⁸

Though no further letters from Clayton have survived, John Wesley probably wrote to him in March 1739 in answer, it seems, to a further critical letter. It looks as though Clayton had advised him to settle in college or to take up a parish living and found it hard to reconcile with “Catholic principles” Wesley’s interference in other men’s parishes. Wesley’s response was his famous letter saying that he adhered to “Scriptural principles,” was never likely to have an Anglican parish and now “looks upon all the world as my parish.”¹⁹

It is true that as late as December 1738 Clayton had had Whitefield preaching in his Salford church, but Whitefield was still (just) a star visiting preacher and had not yet blotted his copybook by field preaching.²⁰ In June 1739 Byrom wrote to his wife from London giving news of Whitefield’s field preaching there; spoke of John Wesley being in London and publishing his *Journal*. He was reticent about his view of these irregularities but one senses disapproval.²¹

At this point John was beginning his post-conversion evangelistic career and had alienated his old friends. His theological views and religious behavior were clearly becoming very different from what they had been before his conversion. So what had these views been and how had they changed?

Nonjuror Influences on the Wesleys

An essential clue to Manchester Nonjuror influences on John Wesley can be found in a manuscript memorandum written by him as he approached England on his return from Georgia in January 1738 and showing how he had become disil-

¹⁶John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 18:230.

¹⁷John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 25:538–540.

¹⁸Charles Wesley, *Journal*, ed. T. Jackson (London, 1849), 1:201.

¹⁹John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 25:614–617. Though this letter is usually thought to have been addressed to James Hervey, Frank Baker gives good reasons for believing it was really to Clayton.

²⁰G. Whitefield, *Journal*, ed. I. Murray (London, 1960), 185.

²¹John Byrom, *Journal* II(1), 245–246.

lusioned by a series of different schools of religious thought. It is much more specific on their character than in the famous retrospective survey prefaced to his Journal account on May 24, 1738. The memorandum is headed: "Different views of Christianity are given (1) by the Scriptures; (2) the Reformers; (3) the Lutherans and Calvinists; (4) the English Divines; (5) the Essentialist Nonjurors; (6) the Mystics."²² His "English Divines" were some seventeenth century high churchmen and Robert Nelson who was a Nonjuror for a time but widely read by conforming Anglicans. The "Essentialist Nonjurors" as we have seen were the more extreme party wishing to revise the Prayer Book and admiring the Apostolic Constitutions as conveying the apostolic tradition.

Wesley describes them as claiming a sure rule for interpreting Scripture, namely the Vincentian Canon of "what has been believed by all, everywhere and always." But now he had come to think they erred "by making antiquity a coordinate (rather than subordinate) rule with Scripture; by admitting doubtful writings as undoubted evidences of antiquity; by extending antiquity too far, even to the middle or end of the fourth century"; and by making temporary practices universally and permanently binding.

Apparently disillusioned by these Nonjurors, Wesley was then drawn away by the mystical writers' "noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion." But then he had come to see that they bypassed the commands of God in favor of obtaining love by any means that came to hand.²³

The exalted view of antiquity described by Wesley, including reverence for the Apostolic Constitutions, and the details of where he found it now to be in error are precisely those held by the Manchester circle around Deacon. This is confirmed by Clayton's letters to Wesley between 1732 and 1735 on primitive practices and Wesley's own actions. It is true that Clayton in several cases seems rather in awe of Wesley's spiritual achievements and rather dependent towards him. It is, nevertheless, also clear that Wesley was concerned to obtain answers on a number of points about the nature and binding authority of "primitive antiquity." Clayton certainly saw *Apostolic Constitutions* as interpreted by Deacon to be a great authority. Thus in July 1735 Wesley seems to have proposed drawing up formal rules for the Holy Club. Clayton responded that Deacon thought that "avowing yourselves a society and fixing upon a set of rules" would be undesirable. The "station fasts" on Wednesday and Friday and weekly communion are on a "much higher footing" than the rule of a society and those who set aside the authority of God and his church will not be bound by a mere society rule. On the "Mixture" (of water with communion wine) Clayton thought it desirable but its absence is not a bar to communion.²⁴

²²MS at Wesley College, Bristol, printed in John Wesley, *Journal* (B.E.), 18:212n.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 25:352.

Nonjuror influence can also be seen in Wesley's first publication, his book of prayers, and rules for self-examination of 1734. A careful examination of this book has shown that a substantial source for the prayers and their arrangement is a collection of Devotions edited by the Nonjuror (though not "Essentialist") Nathaniel Spinckes. The rules owe much to Robert Nelson, though in both cases Wesley added and adapted a good deal as was to become his habit with his sources.²⁵

Like the essentialist Nonjurors Wesley was much preoccupied with the *Apostolic Constitutions*. The high point of this influence can probably be seen in a manuscript by him which unfortunately cannot be dated with certainty. Some have put it in 1736 or earlier; others as somewhere between 1739 and 1742.²⁶ The earlier date seems more probable. Wesley's notes seem to imply that at least the *Constitutions* testify to "primitive" authority not later than the fourth century. Some practices in them he believes he has a duty to observe as far as he can without breaking communion with his own church, *i.e.*, baptism by immersion, mixing water with wine, oblation of the elements, invocation (of the Holy Spirit), alms, a prothesis in the eucharist (a table for ritual preparation of the elements as in the Eastern Church), prayers for the faithful departed; praying standing on Sunday in Pentecost, and even abstaining from blood and things strangled. (Can this be one source of his adoption of vegetarianism on the way to Georgia?) He also thinks it "prudent" ("our own church not considered") to observe the "station fasts" on Wednesday and Friday, in Lent, and especially Holy Week, and turning to the East at the Creed.

Parallel with this there is an undated manuscript by Charles Wesley on weekly communion, citing among evidences for this from the early church the *Apostolic Constitutions*. Though he denies that they are actually apostolic he thinks that they are "most valuable records of antiquity" and datable no later than A.D. 368. He also speaks of the "holy sacrifice of the eucharist" and the "unbloody sacrifice." This echoes an advanced high church treatise by John Johnson which influenced Nonjurors.²⁷

In Georgia some of Wesley's practices which offended the colonists as un-Anglican, if not "popish," reflect Nonjuror beliefs along with a very severe interpretation of the Prayer Book. Some obvious signs are mixing water with wine in the eucharist, triple dipping of infants in baptism, and regarding baptism of dissenters and German Pietists as invalid. Wesley's Georgia critics also alleged that he was a Roman Catholic because he enforced confession, penance, and mortifications, and appointed deaconesses following the *Apostolic Constitutions*. It has

²⁵I owe this account of Wesley's sources to Mr. Keighley's MS (n. 8, above).

²⁶Printed and discussed from the MS at Wesley's house in City Road, London, by J. C. Bowmer, *The Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London, 1951), 233-237.

²⁷Printed and discussed from MS in Methodist Church Archives, John Rylands Library, Manchester in J. C. Bowmer, 223-232.

also been surmised that Wesley revised the Book of Common Prayer on the lines of the 1549 book. Charles Wesley used prayers for “energumens” over a sick girl, which in the ancient liturgies favored by Deacon were applied to demoniacs, the desperately ill and insane.²⁸

Then there is the attraction to mysticism which is also connected with the Manchester circle. Byrom, as we have seen, was a devotee and Clayton shared some of his interest. Wesley, in his January 1738 review shows that he went through a period of being captivated by the mystics and then retreated. Manchester had a recurring record throughout the eighteenth century of individuals and groups with such interests and we shall see that they were a divisive element in early Manchester Methodism. Wesley was already acquainted with some writers classed as “mystics” before he met the Manchester circle and he spoke of a “contemplative man” influencing him further. It has been suggested that this was Hoole but in fact Hoole shows signs of not being attracted by this literature as recommended by his Manchester friends. William Law is a possibility but the most likely candidate may be James Garden, of Scottish origin but another Lincolnshire neighbor of the Wesleys, a correspondent of the Manchester circle and a proven devotee of mystics.²⁹ From 1732 Wesley seems to have become more directly acquainted with mystical writers and here the Manchester circle’s influence may be suspected for Clayton’s letters show him writing about Law, Poiret (a French propagator of mysticism), the philosopher Malebranche (who taught of “seeing all things in God”), and the Quietist Antoinette Bourignon. Clayton, however, had reservations about “mental” as against vocal prayer and advised steering between the “monkish mysticism of the fourth century and the lukewarm indifference of the present age.”³⁰

Whatever had led Wesley into studying these writers, a letter to his brother Samuel from Georgia in November 1736 shows who they were and why he now distrusted them. He gives a short account of their teaching drawn from writers like Tauler, Molinos, and the *Theologia Germanica*, and his diary shows him to have been reading them in 1732–36.³¹ The same writers were read by Byrom and his circle. Now Wesley sees them as too quietistic, too prone to play down the means of grace and works of charity. One suspects that this in any case conflicted with Wesley’s innate activism and love of disciplined piety. The disillusionment

²⁸L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists* (London, 2nd ed., 1871), I,147 quoting *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia* (1741). These charges were not included in the indictment by the Grand Jury in Savannah (see John Wesley, *Works* [B.E.], 18:190f., 555f.). The Moravians noted that Wesley re-baptized those from churches not in the apostolic succession: M. Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), I,138n. For the claim that Wesley revised the Prayer Book from the 1549 version see Bowmer, 36.

²⁹I owe this identification to Mr. Keighley’s MS.

³⁰John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 25:392.

³¹Wesley, 25:487–489.

recorded in the review of January 1738 was already setting in and would be dismissed as salvation by works in May 1738.

As to the Nonjuror obsession with the authority of antiquity, the January 1738 review, as we have seen, shows Wesley retreating from this because it ascribed to antiquity a “coordinate” rather than “subordinate” authority with Scripture.³² But how complete was the revulsion? Did the influence of the Nonjurors and antiquity cease completely after Wesley’s conversion in May 1738? The answer to this question is best considered as part of a more general assessment of how far Wesley’s conversion signaled a complete and permanent rejection of his previous piety as a vain attempt at salvation by works.

The Wesleys and Manchester after 1738

Before considering this we will have a look at the Wesleys’ dealings with Manchester and their friends there after 1738.

As we have seen, the onset of Wesley’s new “enthusiastic” pattern of behavior in 1738, even before his conversion, had alarmed and alienated his Manchester friends and the advent of field preaching will have worsened matters still further. In August 1739 Byrom records the intriguing fact that he had consulted a Mr. Bray in London about a tea-kettle! This was the man who had influenced Charles Wesley’s conversion.³³ There Byrom met Charles Wesley and drank tea with him. Though he evaded Wesley’s invitation to hear him preach in the open air he would not condemn him and said that men are free to choose in religion. He prayed that “God would bring us all to a true sense and feeling of it in our dear Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁴ But in the same month Byrom met William Law and discussed Law’s response to a recent letter from John Wesley condemning him for not teaching salvation by faith. Byrom was critical of Wesley and prayed that God would “convert him to a true faith indeed, that may show itself more faithful with regard to his neighbour”: a very different reaction to that shown towards Charles.³⁵

As to Manchester itself, neither of the Wesleys appear to have visited the town again until 1747. In October 1744, en route for Newcastle, Charles met “my old friend Dr. Byrom” (he says) at “D.”—possibly Derby—and “lost an hour in dispute about his sacred mystics.”³⁶ But on a visit to the Manchester area in 1745 John seems pointedly to have avoided the town itself, though he did tour Methodist societies in the surrounding area. It has generally been supposed that in the year of the Jacobite invasion he prudently avoided that notoriously Jacobite town. This may well be so but it is in any case clear that he was visiting societies

³²Wesley, 18:232n.

³³Charles Wesley, *Journal*, 1:86, 91.

³⁴Byrom, *Journal*, II (1), 261.

³⁵Byrom, *Journal*, II (1), 270.

³⁶Charles Wesley, *Journal*, 1:384.

founded by John Bennet in the north-west and Bennet had not yet been able to create a society in Manchester. The Manchester society was only begun in 1747, following a visit by Charles Wesley in January.³⁷ The entry in Charles's Journal is cryptic. He apparently addressed some kind of house meeting. Here he baptized a child and one present, evidently a Baptist, "found a divine proof that infant baptism is of God."³⁸ The young men Charles met in Manchester then asked to be formed into a society and Bennet began to supervise them. John Wesley followed in May but there is no sign that he visited his old friends. When preaching at Salford Cross he told his hearers that they behaved as if they had never seen him before though some of them (he said) must have seen him preach and administer communion in the nearby (Trinity) church.³⁹ In April 1751 on Easter Day he attended the "new church" (St. Ann's).⁴⁰ In 1752 he attended the College and heard Clayton read prayers seriously.⁴¹ In his many subsequent visits John does not even mention Clayton or other Manchester friends from earlier days.

At this point, however, we can turn to Charles once more. His next visit after 1747 seems to have been in 1751 when he records meeting a "mystic" and also Byrom who criticized Methodism. Charles thought such reprovers "our best friends."⁴² More informative, however, was a three week visit during Charles's last northern tour in late 1756. The Manchester Methodists had been devastated by wandering evangelists of all sorts—predestinarians, renegade Methodists, apostles of Moravian "stillness" and "dippers" (Baptists). A new young Baptist "teacher" was drawing away Methodists. We know that this was Caleb Warhurst who would soon be ordained as the founder and first minister of a new Independent (Congregationalist) church. This church was drawn from a variety of religious backgrounds, including Methodism. Parts of Warhurst's diary survive and include remarks on the Wesley brothers. John he thought "a judicious good man, but not a popular preacher." Charles, he said, "has some oddities, but I hope he is a Christian"! He had closer affinities with some local ex-Methodist preachers like Bennet, who had turned Calvinist.⁴³

Charles's Journal of this visit also gives us a final glimpse of the relationship with Clayton as well as Byrom. He took tea with Byrom "and was hard put to it" (he said) "to defend my brother's book against Mr Law." (This was a letter attacking Law's mysticism). Later he dined with Byrom whom he describes as

³⁷For details see my "Between Church and Sect" (note 1), 78–79.

³⁸Charles Wesley, *Journal*, 1:440.

³⁹John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 20:173.

⁴⁰Wesley, 20:382–383.

⁴¹Wesley, 20:413.

⁴²Though Jackson summarized this northern journey in his *Charles Wesley* (London, 1841), 1:587, he did not include the relevant journal entries in his edition. This part of the journal is in Methodist Church Archives MS DDW6/27.

⁴³Charles Wesley, *Journal* 2:129–138; Warhurst MS journal October 21, 1756, March 16, 1758, in Manchester Central Library MS. M185 Box 1.

“my candid friend and censor.” So Charles, as often happened, tried to keep old friendships in better repair than John, though not with Clayton. He heard “my former friend Mr Clayton” read prayers at the College “with great solemnity.” But later when Charles stood close to Clayton in the Collegiate Church “not a look would he cast towards me; ‘so stiff was his parochial pride’ and so faithfully did he keep his covenant with his eyes, not to look upon an old friend when called a Methodist.”⁴⁴

One later visit of John Wesley’s deserves to be mentioned. Almost from the start the Manchester Methodist society was much troubled by people influenced by Moravian “stillness” ideas and local mystical tastes. In the 1760s some said you could not be a Christian if you “dressed neat or wore a watch.” Salvation by faith they rejected in favor of the belief that everyone had a “seed of faith” within them—clearly the teaching of Böhme and Law.⁴⁵ In 1761, in an incident recorded by Byrom but not in John Wesley’s *Journal*, Byrom says he called Wesley “Pope John” for expelling six Methodist members for reading Böhme and Law, though Wesley characteristically claimed that it was only for forcing their opinions on other people.⁴⁶ Yet despite its problems Manchester became the center of a strong Methodist presence and as early as 1765 was the first place to host the Methodist Conference outside the original trio of London, Bristol and Leeds.

Wesley and the Nonjuror Legacy after his Conversion

But what about the Manchester Nonjuror legacy? The self-examination of January 1738 and the record of lack of contacts since then seem to suggest a religious and personal alienation from old friends. Does this mean that the Nonjuror influence, still so marked in Georgia, had finally evaporated? It was clearly weakened and in some respects drastically reversed, yet some features survived into the early post-conversion period and perhaps even longer, though on some issues there is insufficient evidence to be sure.

If Wesley had once flirted with Jacobitism it seems likely that he was already a loyalist “Hanoverian Tory” like his father before he left Oxford. Both Wesley brothers seem to have developed doubts about the *Apostolic Constitutions* being truly “apostolic.” Yet it is also clear that for a time they had great respect for them as a witness to the consensus of the church at least in the fourth century. The Georgia record seems to show their influence still prevailing. It is only in the January 1738 memorandum that a principled retreat can be seen on the issue of the “coordinate” authority of antiquity.

What happened after that seems on the face of it to be more like the persistence for a time and in some respects of a stiff high church attitude rather than a specifically Nonjuror position. But there may be more to it than this. In

⁴⁴Charles Wesley, *Journal* 2:129, 137 on Byrom; 2:134, 137 on Clayton.

⁴⁵“Life of John Morris” in *The Arminian Magazine* 18 (1795): 74.

⁴⁶Byrom, *Journal* II (2), 629–630.

November 1738, Charles Wesley was interviewed by the Bishop of London who complained that the Wesleys re-baptized Dissenters. There had been controversy between mainstream official Anglicanism and the Nonjurors on this and the bishop condemned it. The Wesleys had clearly done it in Georgia, though John had now apparently softened and claimed that he only did it if a Dissenter requested it.⁴⁷ But the Methodist Conferences between 1745 and 1747 pictured the church's organization and ministry as having developed by a natural process and in 1747 Wesley stated explicitly that no form of ministry had been ordained by God for all ages and that to unchurch Continental Protestants for lacking episcopacy would be a "shocking absurdity." In 1746 he had also declared himself convinced that bishops and presbyters were originally of one order by Lord King's account of the primitive church. It was probably also about this time that reading Stillingfleet's *Irenicum* convinced him that no one form of church order had been laid down by divine fiat for all ages.⁴⁸ As to baptism, he followed the Prayer Book's indications of baptismal regeneration and printed his father's treatise on baptism in this sense in 1756. This was a high church, not merely a Nonjuror, belief. Yet in 1750 he had already avowed that baptism was not necessary for salvation or it would, absurdly (he said), exclude Quakers from salvation.⁴⁹ He continued to believe that rebirth could come in infant baptism but that this was not inevitable and in 1760 he concluded that whatever had happened through it then, the call now is "you must be born again."⁵⁰ Here conversionist theology was in conflict with regeneration through baptism.

There was less apparent ambiguity about Wesley's notorious "irregularities," despite his attempts to affirm conformity as far as possible with the church. His connexional organization, lay preaching, invasion of other men's parishes, field preaching and the rest seemed to violate Anglican order let alone Nonjuror notions of the authority of "antiquity." Then came Wesley's ordinations in the 1780s. Yet there was an ambiguity here too. For Wesley, the residual high churchman, still affirmed that ordination was required to administer sacraments (though not for lay preaching) and he adhered to a form of threefold ordination in the ordinations he conducted. He claimed power to ordain by virtue of the alleged early church identity of bishop and presbyter and it was logically in accord with this that he ordained Coke as "superintendent" which to Wesley was clearly not a superior "order" of ministry but literally a supervisory office. This was what he evidently regarded now as truly "primitive" practice. He also invoked alleged "primitive" tradition for some of his other practices like the love-feast and watch-night. This is to some extent misleading for he actually borrowed

⁴⁷Charles Wesley, *Journal*, 1:135.

⁴⁸John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 20:112; on Wesley and Stillingfleet see F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London, 1970), 145–146.

⁴⁹John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 26:425.

⁵⁰Sermon 45 "The New Birth" in *Works* (B.E.), 2:196–200.

these practices from the Moravians or elsewhere so the “primitive” parallel looks like a rather transparent cloak of respectability and perhaps also marks a reluctance he sometimes showed to admit to debts from the Moravians.

The record on fasting is more complicated. It should be remembered that this was as much a biblical and Puritan as a high church practice. The Anglican norm apart from special occasions was for a Friday fast only. It was the Wednesday and Friday “station fasts” that the Nonjurors pressed as “primitive.” I have skimmed Wesley’s diaries to try to discern a pattern and it appears to be as follows. Fasting for Wesley, following early church precedents, appears to have meant abstaining from anything but tea and perhaps some bread and butter until an evening supper, omitting his usual “dinner” at around 1:00 P.M. It seems that in Georgia he did usually observe Wednesday and Friday fasts in this sense and he was still doing so up to the point in August 1741, after which his diary has been lost for many years. Yet in August 1739 he advised the Methodists simply to fast on Fridays according to Anglican rule.⁵¹ The late surviving diaries in the 1780s show no sign of him omitting his usual 1:00 P.M. “dinner” on Wednesdays or even Fridays though he does seem usually to have dined at 2:00 on that day. Yet he did recommend fasting in general as a valuable aid to devotion and Methodists were urged to fast on special occasions or for national fasts. In 1785 he lamented that they seldom fasted now as they had in the early days.⁵² Though we cannot be sure, it seems likely that he abandoned the Nonjuror Wednesday “station fasts” within a few years of his conversion.

It is in the Wesleys’ eucharistic doctrine and practice that the most lasting effects of Nonjuror influence can be seen. His sermon on “Constant Communion,” though published as late as 1787, was based on an adaptation from Robert Nelson, the Nonjuror, made in 1732 and Wesley directly quoted from the *Apostolic Constitutions* about frequency.⁵³ His own practice was at times more than once a week like some Nonjurors but very unlike most Anglicans, even high church ones. Then there was the Wesleys’ *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* published in 1748 with an extract from Dr. Brevint’s treatise.⁵⁴ This reveals what they then accepted in doctrine at least (practice not being discussed) and it locates the Wesleys within the “high” end of Anglican doctrine plus at least one Nonjuror belief. The sober prose of John’s version of Brevint received treatment in remarkably vivid and physical imagery in Charles’s hymns. Here we find an Anglican version of the real presence and sacrifice. The presence is “real” though inexplicable, which is typically Anglican of that time:

⁵¹John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 19:88.

⁵²Sermon 122 “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity” in *Works* (B.E.), 4:94.

⁵³John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 3:427–430 and n.

⁵⁴The “Extract” and hymns are conveniently reprinted in J. E. Rattenbury, *The Eucharist Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London, 1948).

Who shall say how Bread and Wine
 God into Man conveys?
How the Bread his Flesh imparts,
How the Wine transmits his Blood.⁵⁵

Yet “The sign transmits the signified.”

The sacrifice is not repeated as the Romans claim but in the eucharist it is “re-presented” “mystically” as still fresh and powerful for salvation. The Wesleys had read the advanced high churchman John Johnson’s *Unbloody Sacrifice*, which had argued for the need of a material “sacrifice” in the form of bread and wine which has the mystical power of the original sacrifice. Charles, we have seen, had used the phrase in an undated manuscript and it also occurs in an early hymn, though his main belief seems to have been that Christ is perpetually offering his sacrifice to the Father in heaven, which is represented in the eucharist. John speaks in a letter of 1745 of an “outward sacrifice” and in his *Reply to a Roman Catholic* speaks of an “unbloody sacrifice” which is not, however, to be seen as propitiatory, unlike the Mass.⁵⁶ Johnson’s idea had been rejected by mainstream Anglicanism and it is not clear how far the Wesley’s had accepted Johnson’s view despite Charles’s vivid language. Nor is it clear how far and long they continued to observe the four Nonjuror “usages” with one notable exception. The *epiklesis* (invocation of the Holy Spirit) clearly appears in the well-known lines:

Come, Holy Ghost, thine Influence shed,
 And realize the Sign,
 Thy Life infuse into the Bread,
 Thy Power into the Wine.⁵⁷

But it should be observed that there is no evidence that at any time the Wesleys introduced a prayer expressing this doctrine into the Book of Common Prayer or into the American service book. Prayers for the faithful departed Wesley still defended in 1751 but this was in any case included in the Book of Common Prayer.⁵⁸ Wesley’s most striking departure from Anglican doctrine was in quite a different direction from the Nonjurors and came after his conversion. This was the notion of the eucharist as a “converting ordinance” as well as a “confirming” one. This was clearly derived from observation of Methodist experiences of such conversions and had hardly any support from church tradition.⁵⁹ In fact, it first appeared prominently in the course of Wesley’s conflict with the “stillness” Moravians and used to disprove their claims.

⁵⁵*Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, Hymn 57, p. 41.

⁵⁶John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.) 26:173; “A Roman Catechism—with a Reply” in *Works* (London, 1856), 2:116 reply to Qu. 70.

⁵⁷*Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, Hymn 72, p. 51.

⁵⁸John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. J. Telford (London, 1931), 3:326 to Bishop Lavington.

⁵⁹For a discussion of this see my *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 450–457.

Unfortunately we have little evidence of the Wesleys' later views and practices concerning the eucharist and modern interpretations are liable to be colored by the authors' theological preferences. The revised Prayer Book for the Americans which one might think would give crucial evidence on John Wesley's late views gives ambiguous testimony because it is uncertain what the motives for the changes were and particularly how far they can largely be seen as adapting to supposed American prejudices. Certainly the book reflects Wesley's passion for brevity and simplicity, though one supposes that there would be some tension between this and his typically Anglican glorying in the Liturgy as the best and most Scriptural in Christendom plus his distaste for the extemporary effusions of Dissent.

There has been some discussion of possible sources for Wesley's revision which cannot be pursued in detail here. A number of revisions were suggested in the eighteenth century but most of these were influenced by a desire to remove Trinitarian elements and other features disliked by Arians. It has also been claimed that he closely followed the Presbyterian Savoy Conference proposals of 1661.⁶⁰ Wesley knew about these and noted that some of his own criticisms resembled those of the Puritans. But this was in 1755 when he was trying to resist the preachers' pressure to leave the Church of England. Amongst other things they objected to various points in the Liturgy and Wesley admitted that he could not defend all of them. He even went so far as to say that he could not now subscribe to the Prayer Book in the terms required of Anglican clergy.⁶¹ Neither then nor after the further thirty years of reflection which had elapsed by the time he revised the book for the Americans did he really require a model for revision. His alterations did not always conform to the Savoy proposals in any case. I would agree with Frank Baker that although he may have had an eye to American tastes, in the main he simply seized the opportunity to remedy defects he had noted in the book over many years, just as he reduced the Thirty-Nine Articles to Twenty-Four by eliminating such old bugbears as the article on predestination. With hardly any exceptions the revision of the Prayer Book was towards a "lower" rather than "higher" churchmanship and the result, as Frank Baker said, was a remarkably "liberal" book.⁶² It is really impossible to see any residual Nonjuror or even high church influence here.

So far as Wesley's interest in the mystics was encouraged by his Manchester friends we have seen that his memorandum in January 1738 suggested a complete rejection of such piety. Yet this is partly misleading. Certainly he attacked

⁶⁰See F. Hunter in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 23 (1941-1942): 123-133; John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 26:593-594 shows that Wesley had read a book with an account of the conference.

⁶¹John Wesley, *Works* (B.E.), 26:593-594, 612.

⁶²*Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 23 (1941-1942): 173-175; F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, 234-251.

Böhme's writings more than once and on occasion Madame Guyon too; but in 1776 he gave a much more discriminating review of her life.⁶³ His doctrine of Christian perfection, he often asserted, went right back to 1725, though he modified it later by adapting Moravian notions of conversion to create a picture of the gift of perfection as a kind of second conversion.⁶⁴ His language of perfection also reflects that of French Quietists like Fénelon and I think that, whatever his own experience may have been, he was attracted to Madame Guyon's "short and easy" way to perfection with its promise of a more direct route to that gift than by his old laborious disciplines. Despite the highly "evangelical" dismissal of "works" in 1738, the mature Wesley doctrine of redemption was an extended scenario of salvation in stages which represented a partial resumption of his pre-conversion views though crucially incorporating justification by faith as part of the process.

Conclusion

Wesley's relationship with Manchester illustrates an important aspect of his career. The earliest phase helps to explain why he adopted an extreme kind of antiquarian high churchmanship. In all but its political aspects he was virtually identifying with the Nonjurors. The fairly rapid decline, though not the complete elimination of that influence is a testimony to the impact, especially the initial impact, of his evangelical conversion. The reversal of his more general high church prejudices in favor of strict church order and high Episcopalian notions of ministry testify to the pressure of practical evangelistic needs, the priority of mission over order and the recognition of "true" Christianity in people of many backgrounds. Yet in some areas of his piety the early high church inheritance persisted. Wesley's later contacts with Manchester were also significant but in a very different way. They illustrate the confused, turbulent and often bewildering way in which the impact of evangelical religious experience cut across old ecclesiastical and theological allegiances and led converts into pilgrimages in search of a new stability. The Manchester example also shows the growing importance of the north in the spread and distribution of Methodism as it moved away from its original centers in London and Bristol.

In telling this story I have tried to review the evidence afresh and in doing so found that I was coming to a rather less positive view of the lasting effects of the Manchester Nonjuror influence than I had expected. I have long held that Wesley's drilling in high church piety was not as completely and permanently obliterated by his evangelical conversion and discovery of justification by faith as many Wesley biographers have claimed. There were real grounds for his Calvinist critics to suspect that, especially in his later years, Wesley was balanc-

⁶³On Böhme see Wesley's "Thoughts on Jacob Behmen" (1780) in *Works* 9 (1856), 486–91 and on Guyon, *Works* (1872), 14:275–278.

⁶⁴For this point of view see my *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 398–399.

ing his belief in justification by faith with what they saw as a dangerous stress on good works. His long love affair with the notion of perfection was deeply rooted in his Oxford experience and his sacramentalism was the product of his high church and Nonjuror connections and his selective use of Roman and Anglican sources. But the full force of specifically Nonjuror influences, largely emanating from the Manchester circle, was a temporary phase, though, like other temporary phases reviewed in January 1738, it left later traces. There were apparently dramatic reversals of his old views after Wesley's conversion, as during the mid-1740s he rejected apostolic succession and played fast and loose (more than he really liked to admit) with Anglican order. Though paying lip-service to tradition and antiquity, Wesley came avowedly to test ecclesiastical order and laws by Scripture and the needs of the gospel and by experience of what worked to those ends. Ultimately it is hard to escape the conclusion that as time went on Wesley's real authority became his own will and his own selective interpretation of Scripture, antiquity and experience.

Yet no one can entirely escape the legacy of his/her own past and this is why, very sensibly drawing on what he still found valuable in his previous experience and earlier mentors, Wesley still mixed elements drawn from all periods of his life with his newer evangelicalism. It was in this eclectic and syncretistic way that traces of the high church and near-Nonjuror phase of his career survived within a broadly "evangelical" framework. This represented a very different version of "apostolic" practice from that to which the Manchester circle would have liked to bind him. He was trying to return to the New Testament rather than the more developed beliefs and practices of the early Christian centuries.