

# 'A CLOUD OF PERFECT WITNESSES: JOHN WESLEY AND THE LONDON DISTURBANCES 1760-1763

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In the early 1760s, the London Methodist society was struck by a crisis that crippled its membership and seriously damaged the possibility of a closer more constructive relationship with the Church of England. At the centre of the controversy was an extreme interpretation of Christian Perfection, which doctrine has been described as the 'distinctive hallmark of Methodist theology in the eighteenth century.'<sup>1</sup> Examination of this episode reveals a great deal about important aspects of John Wesley's personality and the radical interpretation of one of the foundation stones of Methodist doctrine. This article will use primary sources from the British Methodist Archives to examine in detail the events of those years and the central role played by Wesley himself.

The concept of perfection centred on the premise that the ultimate goal of Christian living was 'sanctification...even to the point of perfection.'<sup>2</sup> John Wesley stressed the necessity of this attainment as early as 1733 in his sermon on 'The Circumcision of the Heart'<sup>3</sup> and it was a message that he reiterated throughout his ministry.<sup>4</sup> In the minutes of the first Conference of 1744, in reply to the question if 'perfection' implied that 'inward sin' was removed, the response was an emphatic 'without doubt.'<sup>5</sup>

The extant spiritual testimonies of lay people, many of which remain unpublished,<sup>6</sup> refer constantly to this all-important quest for sanctification.<sup>7</sup> The searching interrogations conducted in bands and classes were, in part at least, designed to promote the self-awareness through which such a condition could be achieved.<sup>8</sup>

While the doctrine was not contrary to Anglican teachings<sup>9</sup>, the emphasis placed on it by the Wesleys was very unusual.<sup>10</sup> Charles, no less than John, was a staunch advocate,<sup>11</sup> and his religious verse contains many allusions to the importance of this aspect of the Christian life. The following stands as an example:

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*By faith we see our Lord descend,  
 And every obstacle give place:  
 He comes, he comes, our sin to end,  
 With all the omnipotence of grace!  
 He comes, He comes, His house to build,  
 He bids the inbred bar depart:  
 And tempted then, we cannot yield,  
 We cannot sin, when pure in heart<sup>12</sup>*

There was however differences in the detail of the brothers' interpretation. John believed that it was possible to achieve perfection in this life<sup>13</sup> and that it could be an instantaneous experience.<sup>14</sup> From as early as 1739,<sup>15</sup> Charles argued that perfection could not be attained until the point of death.<sup>16</sup> This subtle difference within the Wesleyan leadership underlines the potential for disagreement concerning this fundamental doctrine. To this was added the controversy that came in the wake of the emphasis on perfection even before the events of the early 1760s. Before examining the London disturbances in detail, it is necessary to sketch in the background, with particular regard to the place of perfection in the evolution of anti-Methodist opinion.

One of the aspects of Methodism that was shocking to many people, was the extravagant displays of religious fervour that the struggle through the conversion and sanctification process seemed to inspire. This was apparent from the earliest days, as the ministry of the Wesleys and their co-workers induced a state of emotional and spiritual collapse in some of their listeners.<sup>17</sup>

Conversion testimonies regularly refer to the transition from the feeling of utter misery brought on by the realisation that one was damned,<sup>18</sup> to rapturous joy upon receipt of God's saving grace.<sup>19</sup> The several stages of the quest for perfection, which could last for years, were often accompanied at crucial moments by weeping,<sup>20</sup> involuntary shaking<sup>21</sup> and physical collapse.<sup>22</sup> So common were these experiences that people fully expected them as a sign of the new birth and were surprised if conversion came about in other ways.<sup>23</sup>

'Enthusiasm' was a constant theme of anti-Methodist literature. For some observers, evangelical excess offered a wonderful opportunity to satirise and mock. Comedies making fun of this strange new sect appeared on the London stage as early as 1739.<sup>24</sup>

Others regarded the Methodists with a more jaundiced eye, particularly within the Church of England. Methodism's parent denomination prided itself on avoidance of extremes, and many of its champions were deeply offended by evangelical excess. A manuscript letter of May 1740 reinforces very vividly the point that some Christians regarded Methodism as nothing less than an abomination:

Lord Jesus's cause constrains me to speak...to cry aloud against these lying dreamers, who cause his people to err & thereby to pervert their ways; these false dissembling hypocrites, who by falling into divers strange postures, & their frightful shrieks and groans, & other ridiculous gestures, would make the world sensible, that the

work of conversion is manifestly wrought upon their souls<sup>25</sup>

A recurring theme is criticism of the implicit claim by evangelicals to possess divine inspiration beyond that of the generality of ordained clergymen. It was feared that such an assertion would lead to confusion and instability within society at large. In 1741, the Bishop of Lichfield addressed his clergy on the subject:

I cannot think it improper to obviate the contagion of those enthusiastical pretensions that have...betrayed whole multitudes either into an unreasonable presumption of their salvation, or into melancholy, if not desponding opinions...Enthusiasm indeed, when its false pretensions are detected, in the course of things is very apt to create infidelity; and infidelity is so shocking a thing<sup>26</sup>

Opponents certainly felt that the Wesleyan emphasis on perfection fell within the category of 'enthusiastical pretensions.' In 1744, Bishop Gibson of London turned his attentions to this point:

Whether those exalted strains in religion, and an imagination of being already in a state of perfection, are not apt to lead men to spiritual pride and to a contempt of their fellow Christians...Whether the same exalted strains and notions do not tend to weaken the natural and civil relations among men, by leading the inferiors into whose heads, those notions are infused, to a disesteem of their superiors<sup>27</sup>

It was common for Victorian historians of early Methodism to treat with contempt the views of such critics, regarding them as representatives of a spiritually stagnant Church.<sup>28</sup> Yet fears that Methodist teachings possessed potential for harm were justified by events. No-where did this exist to a greater degree than with regard to perfection. A fundamental area of debate centred on the term itself. Was the perfect individual, someone who was henceforth unable to commit sin? This was discussed at length by the Conference of 1758<sup>29</sup> and in John Wesley's *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in which he states his views as follows:

They are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible than omniscient. They are not free from infirmities; such as weakness or slowness of understanding...impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation, to which one might add a thousand nameless defects...From such infirmities as these none are perfectly freed, till their spirit returns to God<sup>30</sup>

Rather, a perfect Christian is one who 'loves the Lord his God, with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind...God is the joy of his heart and the desire of his soul.'<sup>31</sup> This unequivocal statement seems sufficient to satisfy the doubts of even the sternest critic, but its practical effect was tempered by other seemingly contradictory pronouncements. How, for example, were Methodists to interpret the following lines by Charles Wesley:

*He comes, He comes, our sin to end,  
 With all the omnipotence of grace!  
 He comes, He come, His house to build,  
 He bids the inbred bar depars:  
 And tempted then we cannot yield,  
 We cannot sin, when pure in heart*<sup>32</sup>

Trained theologians could, no doubt, find grounds to argue that these standpoints were not incompatible, but ordinary Methodists, many of who were barely literate, could be forgiven a certain amount of confusion. John Wesley himself felt misgivings to the extent that he was unwilling to talk in terms of 'sinless' perfection.<sup>33</sup>

The controversy in London represented the breaking of a storm that had been gathering for some time. The concept of sanctification leading to perfection was potent, mixed as it was with charismatic worship and the heady possibility of spiritual superiority. To this volatile mix was added a catalyst in the person of George Bell, who came to prominence at the beginning of the 1760s.

Few details of Bell's early life have survived other than that he was born in County Durham and had been a corporal in the regiment of Life Guards.<sup>34</sup> In April 1761 while resident in the capital and a member of the Methodist society, Bell sent his spiritual testimony to John Wesley.<sup>35</sup> His experiences included visions and an overpowering feeling of love.<sup>36</sup> Finally one Sunday, he reached the point of crisis:

I cried vehemently to God...I offered up my soul to him incessantly, till in a moment, he sealed me for his own. I knew he had saved me from all sin, and left none remaining in me. I felt, he had given me a clean heart...I now truly ceased from my own works. I found no more self-will, no anger, no pride: nothing in my soul but pure love alone. On Monday I saw the Lord at the right hand of God, ready to answer and hear my prayers<sup>37</sup>

The language is emotionally and spiritually charged, although not unusually so when compared with similar accounts of the period.<sup>38</sup> Bell was not alone in claiming perfection.<sup>39</sup> By April 1761 it was stated that the majority of London Methodists were seeking this attainment with renewed fervour and impressive results.<sup>40</sup> Not surprisingly, some Anglican critics regarded this development as yet further evidence, if any were needed, that the Methodists were mad. As early as January 1761, John Wesley wrote to the editors of the *Westminster Journal* and the *London Chronicle*, refuting the views contained in a letter published in the former, attacking the Methodists for their 'ungoverned spirit of enthusiasm, propagated by knaves and embraced by fools.'<sup>41</sup>

News of the revival spread to other areas. In July 1761, the London preacher John Downes responded to Charles Wesley's enquiry concerning the significance of what Charles referred to as this "cloud of perfect witnesses."<sup>42</sup> Downes stated his conviction that God was at work while sounding a note of caution that care must be taken to test the truth of the claims. Nor was this phenomenon restricted to the capital. In March 1761 during a visit to Wednesbury, John Wesley noted approvingly that five people were



claiming 'remission of sins.'<sup>43</sup> A week later, he examined the claimants to perfection in his home village of Epworth and concluded that 14 were authentic.<sup>44</sup>

There can be little doubt that many people were genuinely and beneficially affected; however, from an early stage disturbing elements began to appear, which were to lend considerable weight to criticism of Methodist enthusiasm. In a letter to Charles Wesley of August 1762,<sup>45</sup> the layman John Walsh described how three years previously, what he referred to as his 'besetting sin' was fully destroyed in a single moment. He had been confident that it would never return and when it did, he experienced a crisis of faith, highlighting one particular danger of perfectionist views. Walsh acknowledged that in seeking perfection he had believed that he 'should sin no more; because the propensity to sin would be taken away.'

Bell's letter of 1761 to John Wesley affirmed that he was also convinced of his sinless condition. These opinions were of course contrary to the teachings of Wesley himself. It is evident that conference debates and published sermons had only a limited effect when people were offered remarkable spiritual attainment and were encouraged in this quest by their ordained leaders.<sup>46</sup>

Events in London began to take an unhealthy turn at too early a date for it to be solely attributed to Bell's influence. Indeed in February 1761 before his own experience, Bell had opposed the extravagant claims of some at West Street chapel.<sup>47</sup> People began to assert not merely sinless perfection but deviations based on their own interpretation and visions. In a letter to the Anglican evangelical John Berridge dated 28 May 1761 (transcribed within the text of Walsh's letter to Charles Wesley), Walsh recorded the following:

Mrs Burroughs of Deptford told me, she rejoiced so much when made perfect as to shed many tears: & saw daily, sometime before & ever since, the air full of spirits; the good, resembling stars, or pieces of silver coin, & fewer in number than the evil; which resembled eels or serpents, & entered the mouth, nose & ears of every person, or almost all she met with...the shadows of the evil appeared to her also in the water when passing the Thames

I met in band...with Mr Joyce...who has long counted himself perfect. He said, Satan brought the figure of a naked woman to tempt him every night; but on his praying, it disappeared; & a round light above a foot diameter then appeared till he fell asleep.

Mrs Crosby was desired to talk to me, on account of her eminence among the perfect, when I had experienced & lost what is called perfection: but being unable to speak of any thing above what I knew, she fled from me soon after in the chapel...

Mr Wake of the Life Guards, whom I always thot a well-meaning honest man, has told me, that his perfection is compleat with regard to his body, but his mind still roves from God<sup>48</sup>

Walsh stated that while he knew personally of only eight people who claimed perfection there were many others elsewhere in London.<sup>49</sup> Berridge was so disturbed by Walsh's account that he turned against the doctrine, a reversal of his previous position.<sup>50</sup>

Walsh named George Bell among his eight perfectionists and he also stated that since Bell had made the claim, he seemed less conscientious, presumably in his religious observances. This hint of quietism ties in with Bell's letter to John Wesley, written the previous month, in which he stated that after he had received justification in 1758, he had been told by Satan that he 'need not pray, nor communicate, nor go the chapel any more. But it was not long before the snare was broken, and I continued in all the ordinances of God.'<sup>51</sup> It is significant that Walsh described Bell as 'always ready to imbibe some new notion.'<sup>52</sup>

The leadership role that Bell was increasingly to adopt, was centred in personal magnetism and the attractiveness of his message. To these advantages, as we shall see, was added John Wesley's advocacy of Bell's ministry. Among other prominent supporters was the pioneering itinerant Thomas Maxfield and the ordained evangelical Benjamin Colley.<sup>53</sup>

By July 1761, Bell was organising prayer meetings in a location close to Grosvenor Square.<sup>54</sup> The atmosphere in such gatherings was highly charismatic<sup>55</sup> with the emphasis on the attainment of perfection. In his recent work on enthusiasm, Gunter states that Bell introduced these separate meetings because of the cool reaction of the Methodist leadership;<sup>56</sup> this is however contradicted by the primary evidence at least as far as John Wesley was concerned. He attended the meeting in Grosvenor Square on 14 November and expressed his approval in glowing terms; 'For many years this has been the darkest, driest spot of all in or near London. But God has now watered the barren wilderness and it is become a fruitful field.'<sup>57</sup> Also, while the perfectionists met separately, they openly propagated their views in chapels like West Street.<sup>58</sup>

Even as John Wesley was applauding Bell's work, claims of spiritual superiority were causing upset.<sup>59</sup> During his band meeting on 9 July, Walsh noted that six out of eight present proclaimed their perfection.<sup>60</sup> Walsh was denounced in their prayers as 'an advocate for the devil' because he urged caution and unspecified accusations were made against the bandleader because he too doubted their claims.

Bell's own position was growing more extreme. In a letter written to him by Walsh on 28 September 1761, he is described as declaring that he could not fall from his 'perfect state unless God himself could fall from his throne.'<sup>61</sup> This proved to be a foretaste of even more extravagant views that were circulating in Bell's meetings within two months of the Methodist patriarch giving his wholehearted seal of approval.

In years to come, John Wesley would publicly downplay the extent of perfectionist influence. The testimony of men like Walsh reveals something of the true extent of the problem and sounds a cautionary note to historians not to accept all Wesley's declarations at face value. It would seem from Walsh's letter that wherever he moved in London Methodism in the 12 months to July 1762, he was surrounded by perfectionist agitation. This was partly a result of his own spiritual state which can best be described as tortured—on one occasion he describes running up and down stairs in a frenzy of despair because of the return of his 'besetting temptation.'<sup>62</sup> There can however be no doubt that the desire of many London Methodists to be perfect was reaching epidemic, and in some instances, unhealthy proportions.

John Wesley can to a certain degree be excused his failure to give sufficient weight to such worrying omens. Perfection was an object that he had been pressing on his followers for over 20 years and there is an air of self-congratulation in his journal record of this suc-

den fruition. On a more practical point, he was not continually resident in the capital and may have been unaware at this time of what was truly going on in the intimate band meetings and semi-autonomous groups like that in Grosvenor Square. However, he must bear some measure of responsibility. He did not like to be contradicted<sup>63</sup> and would have seen only what he wanted to see. This is a point that was made by his followers at a later stage of the Bell controversy.<sup>64</sup>

In December 1761 John wrote to his brother, acknowledging that there was inherent danger in falling into enthusiasm but that he did not think the risk was greater now than it had been for 20 years. He also pressed Charles to visit the city and witness the good that was being done 'on every side.'<sup>65</sup> Despite this positive note, John was made aware at this time of cause for concern, although he was careful not to share this worry with his suspicious brother. On 29 December, he met with some of the advocates of perfection 'in order to remove some misunderstandings.' In his journal, he recorded his fears that Maxfield's refusal to attend the meeting heralded the first stages of a possible separation.<sup>66</sup> Earlier that month John talked with John Downes who reported the gist of the conversation to Charles:

In talking of the present work of God we agreed much better than I expected. In general, that it is evidently a work of God...but that the subjects thereof have great need of wisdom...*He seems* to take the affair in my point of view & while they are *weakly* imagining that they are *above* every stumbling. He *endeavours* to remove it out of their way, & by degrees to bring *these* to a more sober way of thinking...This I gather from his exhortations & preaching.

He seems to have a very high opinion of several & tells me that a *few* he can find no fault with. I suppose those of a moral kind<sup>67</sup>

It is interesting that Downes underlines such words and phrases as 'He seems' and 'He endeavours,' implying that he had reservations concerning John Wesley's judgement and resolution. Regardless of any private doubts, John continued to be publicly optimistic for a year after this meeting took place.

Charles was always more cautious. His description of the perfectionists as a 'cloud of perfect witnesses' in July 1761<sup>68</sup> does not suggest confidence in their claims, while John's letter written in December, was an obvious attempt to soothe his brother's misgivings. This is in keeping with what we know of Charles' opinion of previous charismatic manifestations. As early as 1739 he had clashed with Mrs Lavington, one of the leaders of the 'French Prophets' whose beliefs included the possibility of absolute perfection. The Prophets had enjoyed some success in recruiting from evangelical circles and on 7 June 1739, Charles wrote the following in his journal:

Many of our friends have been pestered by the French Prophets & such-like *pretenders* to inspiration...To-day I had ye happiness to find at his [John Bray's] house the famous Prophetess Lavington...The Prophet Wise asked, "Can a man attain perfection here?" I answered, No. The Prophetess began groaning...she lifted up her voice...and cried out vehemently, "Look for perfection; I say absolute perfection." I was minded to rebuke her<sup>69</sup>



He was so disturbed that he wrote a 27-page account of his dealings with Lavington. This unpublished document<sup>70</sup> survives as a remainder of the extremism that characterised some quarters of the revival. Lavington placed great emphasis on visions and revelations and claimed to be able to call on angels and archangels ' & command Christ himself to come unto her.'<sup>71</sup> She also described the sacrament as a 'beggerly element'<sup>72</sup> which believers had no need to attend. Charles makes no recorded reference to the prophets at the time of the Bell controversy, but it would be unrealistic to assume that he failed to make the connection.

It is not surprising therefore that Charles was reluctant to accept some of the claims being made in the early 1760s.<sup>73</sup> He was himself highly emotional and able to detect such workings in others; John on the other hand was more detached<sup>74</sup> and this may have caused him to accept spiritual testimony at face value, a facet of the credulity for which he has been criticised.<sup>75</sup> There is certainly a suggestion in Charles' papers that he did not trust his brother's judgement in such matters.<sup>76</sup> He was not alone as will be seen later.

In a letter of 1 February 1763 to the itinerant Joseph Cownley,<sup>77</sup> Charles claimed that it was four years since he had first warned of the 'flood of catharism which has now overflowed us: & of the sect of ranters yt shd arise out of the perfect witnesses.' This was exaggeration, as what may be termed the perfectionist revival did not start until 1760.<sup>78</sup> However, he was certainly cautioning the London society to beware of 'gross enthusiasm' as early as the spring of 1761.<sup>79</sup> In his usual forthright manner, Charles made a public stand with the publication in 1762 of *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*.<sup>80</sup> In the preface, he states that:

Several of the hymns are intended to prove, and several to guard the doctrine of Christian Perfection...In the latter sort I use some severity; not against particular persons, but against enthusiasts and Antinomians, who by not living up to their profession, give abundant occasion to them that seek it, and cause the truth to be evil spoken of.

Such there have been, in every age, in every revival of religion. But this does in no wise justify the men who put darkness for light, and light for darkness<sup>81</sup>

John did not agree with the theology expressed in some of these hymns; in a letter to Dorothy Furdy written on 25 September 1762, he warned her to 'take care you are not hurt by anything in the *Short Hymns* contrary to the doctrines you have long received.'<sup>82</sup>

On 12 January 1762 John Walsh and the clergyman John Berridge met with Bell at Whitefield's chapel in Tottenham Court Road. They were told by Bell that;

God had given him the gift of healing, which he had already practiced, & of raising the dead, which he should perform in God's time. That the millennium was begun, & he shd never die, that he & several other men had seen Satan bound & cast into the bottomless pit...all Mr Berridge's excellent observations did not at all shake his confidence<sup>83</sup>

On 17 February a member of a West Street band declared that Bell laying his hands



upon him had made him perfect. A week later Walsh experienced the same whereupon John Wesley registered his approval by stamping S.S. I standing for 'Select Society'<sup>84</sup> on his band ticket.<sup>85</sup> This was a fascinating development as lying on of hands has traditionally symbolised the invocation of the Holy Spirit and Bell's action, which has no known parallels in early Methodism, appears to foreshadow subsequent developments in Holiness Theology. The fact that Wesley did not appear to object to this action is intriguing, although it is of course possible that he was unaware of the background to Walsh's claim. In any event, it is obvious that Wesley was placing few restrictions on the activities of the 'enthusiasts' although he was aware that the earlier difficulties had yet to be resolved. He made the following journal entry on 5 February 1762:

I met at noon, as usual, those who believe they are saved from sin, and warned them of the enthusiasm which was breaking in by means of two or three weak though good men, who from a misconstrued text in the Revelation, inferred that they should not die. They received the warning in much love<sup>86</sup>

He was however pleased by what he saw in the city, remarking with satisfaction that membership had reached a new height of over two thousand seven hundred;<sup>87</sup> when he left for Ireland on 15 March it was with regret.<sup>88</sup>

By focussing their attentions on the climax of the controversy in late 1762 and early 1763, some historians have given the impression that the unhealthy aspects of perfection surfaced principally at a late stage<sup>89</sup> and that John Wesley's toleration represented a display of Christian patience.<sup>90</sup> The blame for causing disruption has been placed squarely on the shoulders of Bell and Maxfield,<sup>91</sup> despite the fact that Anglicans had been publicising their worries concerning Methodist extremism for two decades. The sole criticism that historians have until recent years made of John Wesley was of his excessive forbearance; this might equally be described as blindness to reality. Signs of the impending crisis were detected nearly two years before matters came to a head by Charles Wesley, William Grimshaw,<sup>92</sup> John Berridge and laymen like John Walsh. Yet John seems to have been impervious to the pressing need for firm action.

Despite John Wesley's mild reprimand and the fears of his ordained colleagues, the spiritual temperature of the London society continued to rise. According to Walsh's account, the meetings of the Select Society were particularly affected and blasphemous opinions were often expressed.<sup>93</sup> On 21 August 1762 the Wesley brothers met Maxfield to discuss their concerns. John recorded in his journal that the brothers 'were thoroughly satisfied ...believing all misunderstandings were now removed.'<sup>94</sup>

Charles may have given the impression that he was content, but this was not reflected by his actions. Within a few weeks of the meeting, he was trying to prevent Maxfield from preaching perfection.<sup>95</sup> He also continued to gather information, a process that is documented within his personal papers. In late October 1762, the layman William Briggs, at Charles's request, attended a meeting organised by Bell and Maxfield. He wrote of his experiences on 28 October.<sup>96</sup> Briggs had heard strange things of the perfectionists although he was reluctant to believe the reports, especially as John Wesley obviously approved of the group.<sup>97</sup> He was deeply shocked by what he discovered. In his introduc-

tory address, Bell declared that his objective was to raise people to perfection:

He next prayed, & soon ran into such an extraordinary strain, screaming in such a violent manner to compel a blessing upon the present meeting, that he seemed to be in a rapture &...raving with agony.... In the midst of his rhapsody, he fell into an hymn, which brought on an universal shout of singing...he again ran into a kind of talk[?] about the priviledges enjoyed by those who had clean hearts – and in the midst of his discourse he fell into a prayer again with most surprising familiarity & vociferation, screaming for some token of almighty power<sup>98</sup>

After Bell became worn out, Maxfield took his place and was soon praying with 'loud, familiar and rapturous expressions.'<sup>99</sup> The meeting was then interrupted by followers of George Whitefield who shouted blasphemy and engaged in a violent altercation with the people standing near them. Briggs could bear it no longer and left what he described as a 'scene of the most diabolical frenzy.'<sup>100</sup>

Briggs stated that in his opinion, John Wesley was not suited to deal with the situation:

His tender regard for the good of souls will make him bear with some evil where he thinks there is much good. Had he been at the meeting...he must have done violence to his conscience if he had not immediately...renounced the promoters[?] of such indefensible extravagencies. But now he will hear all from second hand...no doubt, but he will lay the blame upon the accusers<sup>101</sup>

Briggs's last remark provides a valuable insight into an important aspect of John Wesley's personality, namely his inability to accept the truth of anything that did not fit his own preconceptions. This casual observation made to John's brother indicates that Charles himself was under no illusions about John's idiosyncrasies.

John wrote at this time, several letters seeking to clarify his views and reassure concerned individuals. His correspondents included his brother,<sup>102</sup> the clergyman Samuel Furlly<sup>103</sup> and Furlly's sister Dorothy.<sup>104</sup> His tone was defensive, reflecting the criticism that was now coming his way.

On 2 November 1762, John wrote to Maxfield laying out in detail what he liked and disliked concerning the enthusiasts.<sup>105</sup> He approved of the emphasis on perfection although he rejected the belief that, having attained such a state, one was henceforth infallible. He was also dismissive of the assertion that one who was imperfect could not teach a sinless person; this had implications for Wesley's own authority as he never himself claimed to be perfect.<sup>106</sup> Yet Wesley was not entirely condemnatory, approving the 'general tenor of your life, devoted to God and spent in doing good.' He liked the fervent prayer in the public meetings but was disapproving of some of the more extreme worship traits such as 'improper expressions.' His tone remained conciliatory; Tyson describes it as 'surprisingly moderate.'<sup>107</sup> Wesley testified in his journal a few days later to his unwillingness to take decisive action with regard to the controversial prayer meetings that were taking place in several parts of the city.<sup>108</sup> On 24 November, he attended one of Bell's meetings while taking care not to be seen, and expressed admiration for his 'fervour of

spirit' but disliked his screaming and his 'thinking he had the miraculous discernment of spirits.'<sup>109</sup> On 8 December, he again attended a meeting and professed himself satisfied that 'there was nothing dangerously wrong, I do not yet see cause to hinder him.'<sup>110</sup> Two weeks later however, he changed his mind after hearing Bell for a third time and decided that he must be barred from preaching at the Foundery.<sup>111</sup> However, even at this critical juncture, Wesley refused to disown Bell entirely. On 5 January 1763, he told Charles that despite the opposition of close friends and colleagues, he was determined to 'go on my own way. I have a sufficient answer as to G. Bell. But I will not give it before the time.'<sup>112</sup>

It is valuable to recall some of the things that the enthusiasts were doing and teaching at a time when John Wesley was unsure as to whether he would check their activities. On 23 December, the layman William Ellis wrote to Charles,<sup>113</sup> complaining that during his band meeting, the previous week, the perfectionists had declared that 'they could not say the Lord's prayer themselves, neither did they stand in need of the atoning blood.' Ellis stated that their blasphemies and refusal to entertain criticism was the talk of the society. Briggs in his letter of 28 October wrote that Bell had given his listeners 'an assurance that they should never fall by taking away the occasions of stumbling.'<sup>114</sup> The extent of John's reluctance to curb the perfectionists is surprising. It has already been mentioned that this has been attributed to John's willingness to 'bear with some evil where he thinks there is much good.'<sup>115</sup> This probably played a part; however, a more disturbing possibility should also be entertained, namely that he had more sympathy with the Bell brand of enthusiasm than Methodists would like to acknowledge. It was after all, his teachings and particularly his unusually strong emphasis on perfection that fuelled extremist views. He attended four of Bell's meetings and yet remained reluctant to curb the extravagancies that were tearing his most important society apart.

In 1767, Maxfield published a reply<sup>116</sup> to John Wesley's account of the London disturbances.<sup>117</sup> In response to the claim that Wesley had opposed Bell towards the end of 1762 "both in public and private,"<sup>118</sup> Maxfield had this to say: 'the fact is false, for when several judicious people, in the society, desired their meetings might be silenced, in November and December, 1762, Mr Wesley would not permit it.'<sup>119</sup> Both men were of course seeking retrospective justification and their statements should be treated with caution; however, unpublished letters from the Charles Wesley collection suggest that on this point at least Maxfield has greater credibility. On 10 March 1763, two weeks after Bell's arrest by the civil authorities, John Downes wrote the following to Charles:

[the layman] Mr Kemp...gives his reasons that your B. [brother] seems bewildered & he believes is rather *afraid* of your coming [to London], as he leans towards the disaffected brethren, and yet wishes to be rid of them. He speaks against them in public & yet in private, bids his friends be tender over them<sup>120</sup>

Three months earlier on 23 December 1762, William Ellis expressed his own disillusion in very strong terms;

my heart ackes for him...for giving way to the spirit...for not laying a restrant upon his sons...God will not leave those unpunished who restrain not the sins of others,



when in their power, and more so if they deceive or suffer his people to be deceived...God has took my idol [John Wesley] from me, and now I am constrained to cry out all men is failable, ye liable to fall into gross errors<sup>121</sup>

In light of the above, it is intriguing to read that Maxfield claimed to have parted from Bell by the end of 1762 or just a few days into the New Year.<sup>122</sup> He also warned Wesley that Bell had declared 'that God had done with all preachings, sacraments etc and was to be found nowhere but in their meetings, he would not hear, but still encouraged them...And continued to do so, until they left him in January following.'<sup>123</sup> The strict truth of Maxfield's statement will probably never be known, but it is worth pointing out that after October 1762 he is rarely bracketed with Bell in contemporary accounts, except those written by John Wesley. After he left Methodism, Maxfield founded his own congregation and did not remain in contact with George Bell. This illustrates the important point that too often John Wesley's version of events is accepted without question and alternative interpretations dismissed out of hand.

Henry Rack in his biography of John Wesley called him the 'Reasonable Enthusiast,' this was certainly an impression that John liked to give,<sup>124</sup> but subconsciously his tendency towards extremes of enthusiasm was more marked than is commonly supposed, as was recently commented upon by Stephen Gunter.<sup>125</sup> Early Methodism was often on the fringes of acceptable behaviour, a charge that was regularly made by her opponents. This offended the sensibilities of a later Victorian Wesleyan leadership that deliberately abandoned the movement's charismatic roots<sup>126</sup> in favour of an alternative establishment;<sup>127</sup> the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century historians should be viewed in this context.

On 7 January 1763, John with one or two friends met Bell and some of his followers to try to 'convince him of his mistakes, particularly that which he had lately adopted "that the end of the world was to be on February 28"...we could make no impression upon him at all.'<sup>128</sup> The same day the Methodist leader wrote a letter to the editor of the *London Chronicle*,<sup>129</sup> stating that because of Bell's excesses, he could not permit his followers to meet in Methodist chapels. Again, the letter is notable for its caution and it is clear that Wesley even at this stage did not exclude the possibility of retaining Bell and his followers within the movement. Contrary to the statement by the historian Abel Stevens,<sup>130</sup> Wesley never formally ejected Bell who left the society of his own accord and that was not until 4 February.<sup>131</sup>

Bell's prophecy caused uproar and as the date for the end of the world approached, there was widespread panic. Such was the threat to public order that Bell was arrested for disturbing the peace on 27 February.<sup>132</sup> Seriously embarrassed, John had already disavowed all connection. He wrote to the editor of the *London Chronicle* on 9 February:

I take this opportunity of informing all whom it may concern (1) that Mr Bell is not a member of our society; (2) that I do not believe either the end of the world or any signal calamity will be on the 28<sup>th</sup> instant; and (3) that not one in fifty, perhaps not one in five hundred, of the people called Methodists believe any more than I do either this or any other of his prophecies<sup>133</sup>



In minimising Bell's influence, Wesley, for the sake of damage limitation, was economical with the truth. On 19 January 1763,<sup>134</sup> the London Methodist John Butcher wrote that 'I think there is but 3 men that seems to stand close, firm & stedfast but what in some degree withdraws or else renounces the common preaching for to hear Mr Bell, who is so highly in their esteem, that he is to much the subject of conversation in the room of Jesus Christ.' This was written after the apocalyptic prophecy became public knowledge and contradicts Wesley's denial that his followers had been taken in by the enthusiasts. Wesley repeated his claim three years later in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* where he states that Bell 'made exceeding few converts: I believe scarce thirty in our whole society.'<sup>135</sup> In this work and in his *A Short History of Methodism*, Wesley is at pains to stress the small number of people that had been adversely affected. When referring to the extremists, he uses such suggestive terms and phrases as 'a few,' or 'two or three.'<sup>136</sup> One must question Wesley's strict veracity or at the very least the quality of his powers of recall. In the aftermath of the perfectionist controversy, the London membership by Wesley's own admission declined by nearly a quarter from a peak of approximately 2800 in 1762.<sup>137</sup> It took 27 years to make up this loss.<sup>138</sup> During the same period, the national membership virtually trebled.<sup>139</sup> Other factors no doubt played a part in this local stagnation, but its beginnings can be traced back to events of the early 1760s. It is true that not all the people who left Methodism did so because of conversion to Bell's teachings; indeed many would have left in disgust, but for such damage to be inflicted, Bell must have made an immense impression.

Despite Wesley's subtle attempts to prove otherwise, there is overwhelming evidence to indicate that perfectionist influence had been pervasive. The enthusiasts were active at the Foundery and at West Street and Snowsfields Chapels and it is highly likely that other places of worship were similarly affected. There were also the private meetings that sprang up during the closing months of 1762. It could in fact be argued that not only was the society riddled with enthusiasm but that Bell came close to supplanting Wesley in the hearts and minds of many of his followers. Support for this statement comes from the grassroots of the movement; John Butcher in his letter of January 1763<sup>140</sup> told Charles that while John had barred Bell from teaching at the Foundery or Snowsfields Chapel, it had nevertheless been announced that he would speak publicly there that night.<sup>141</sup> Butcher was also told by the Anglican evangelical and Bell supporter Benjamin Colley that in standing against Bell, Butcher 'opposed the preachers & sett up my wisdom against the experiences of 500 people...Dear Sr if you knowd how the People seems to *make light of your br.*' The factor that saved the society from a division worse than the one that actually took place, was Bell's overstepping the mark with a precise millennial timetable. Such a division, given the intrinsic importance of the London work, would have had disastrous consequences.

One of the certain by-products of the controversy was a widening of the gulf between Methodism and the Anglican Church. Ordained evangelicals were disturbed by events in London; William Grimshaw was sceptical as early as May 1761<sup>142</sup> and John Berridge not much later.<sup>143</sup> To their opposition was added that of George Whitefield, Thomas Haweis and Martin Madan, all of who were criticised by John, not only for their failure to help him, but also for their pointed attacks.<sup>144</sup> The hymn writer John Newton had engaged in

friendly correspondence with Wesley during the late 1750s, but the letters between them ceased in 1762. In his recent biography of Newton, Hindmarsh argues convincingly that this estrangement was a direct result of the perfectionist controversy.<sup>145</sup>

If men, who supported Wesley and sympathised with his broad aims, were aghast at Methodist extremism, the reaction of the movement's critics can well be imagined. On 2 March 1763 a letter from "Philodemus" was printed in *Lloyd's Evening Post*; after commenting on the Bell incident, it denounced Methodism as 'the most destructive and dangerous system to government and society that ever was established.'<sup>146</sup> In the aftermath of the controversy there was a spate of publications aimed at countering fanaticism. These included Bishop Warburton's *The doctrine of grace; or, The Office and operations of the Holy Spirit vindicated from the insults of infidelity and the abuses of fanaticism*,<sup>147</sup> which work went through three editions in its first year. It is clear that despite Wesley's own denunciation of Bell, Anglican critic and evangelical colleague alike were pointing the finger at both men. It would have been a source of particular concern to the bishops that the secular authorities had intervened to suppress a threat to public order in the British capital posed by a group that had links with the Church of England.

The perfectionist controversy of the early 1760s represents one of the most interesting episodes in the movement's early history. It places the Wesleys and some of their followers within a strand of Christianity that was at best potentially unhealthy, and at worst overlapping in such of their practices with such apocalyptic groups as the French Prophets. It vividly illustrates why the brothers' Anglican contemporaries were so keen to keep them at arms length and when one examines eye-witness testimony, it is not difficult to see why. The activities of George Bell, encouraged by John Wesley, came very close to destroying Methodism within the capital and certainly drove a nail into the coffin of Anglican-Methodist relations. Yet it is an episode, the importance of which has been neglected; even Baker in his key work *John Wesley and the Church of England* mentions the London affair just once and then only in passing<sup>148</sup> while George Bell does not rate any mention at all. This serves to illustrate the point that Methodist historians even in our own time have consistently failed to address dispassionately the question why many Anglicans were so reluctant to welcome the Methodists. This has its roots in the Victorian Wesleyan Church led by Jabez Bunting and applauded by historians like Luke Tyerman. It is ironic that their denomination bore surprisingly little similarity in important aspects to the charismatic revival movement led by their idol. In seeking to stress the unbroken line that connected the Methodism of 1750 with their own day, historians dismissed and distorted episodes like the London affair, as well as the lives and viewpoints of John Wesley and his contemporaries.

#### NOTES

1. Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 48.
2. Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 395.
3. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:398-414
4. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press,

1986), 3:70

5. *Minutes of the First Methodist Conferences from the first, held in London, by the late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. in the year 1744* (London: [Wesleyan Methodist] Conference Office, 1812), 1:7.

6. See the testimonies of lay Methodists in folio MS volume entitled "Early Methodist Volume" (hereafter EMV), Methodist Church Archive (hereafter MCA), Special Collections, John Rylands University Library of Manchester (hereafter JRULM), Manchester.

7. 'my heart flows with love & pants & reaches after God...O my blessed Jesus make me holy then I shall be happy in thee. Fulfill these longing desires of my soul & let me know ye depths of thy sanctifying love.' Susanna Designe to Charles Wesley (hereafter CW), ALS, 18 March 1742, Reference EMV, 51, MCA.

Also: 'may we walk in the light as God is in the light and feel the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse us from all sin.' Eliza Mann to CW, ALS, January 1742, Reference EMV, 107, MCA.

8. "The design of our meeting is to obey that command of God, confess your faults one to another...that ye may be healed." John Wesley's manuscript annotation on a copy of his *Nature, design, and general rules, of the United Societies* (Newcastle upon Tyne: John Gooding, 1743), Reference MAW G43B, MCA.

9. In 1741, the Bishop of London listened to John Wesley's views on perfection and gave his approval for Wesley "to publish it to all the world," which he promptly did in the form of his sermon "On Christian Perfection." Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 72.

10. Rack, 407.

11. John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Francis and Taylor Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 163-179.

12. John and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborn (London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference Office, 1871), 10:114.

13. Tyson, 247.

14. *Ibid.*, 248-252.

15. "The Prophet Wise askd "Can a man attain Perfection here?" lie in this lifel. I answered No." Entry in Charles Wesley's journal for 7 June 1739. Charles Wesley (hereafter CW), Journal, AMs, 1736-1756, Reference DDCW 10/2, MCA.

16. Tyson, 246-248

17. For example: 'preached...to betwn 1 & 2000 tinnrs...several hid their faces, & mourned inwardly, being too deeply affected to cry out...' Entry in CW's journal for 19 July 1744. DDCW 10/2, MCA.

18. 'I was thinking on my miserable state and wishing I had never been born and despairing of mercy...I was strongly moved to pray. I immediately retired and cast myself on the ground and cried for mercy. My dear savior heard my prayer and comforted my heart. My terrors ceased...I thought my sins were forgiven.' Martha Jones to CW, ALS 1 June.1740, Reference EMV, 3, MCA.

19. 'Your zealous looks and forsable words caused me to think you spoke as never man spoke...as well as I was able I kept myself from making a disturbance till ye sermon was over...my soul it being filled with joy unspeakable' Samuel Webb to CW, ALS, 20 November 1741, Reference EMV, 18, MCA.

20. 'at his [John Wesley's] preaching at Clifton Church, the word came very sweet and with power; and I shed tears, but know not well for what reason.' Elizabeth Sayce to CW, ALS, May 1742, Reference EMV, 126, MCA.

21. 'the word came with such power into my soul yt I...was afraid I should expose myself before all the people...for my bones seemed to me as if they were out of joint.' Naomi Thomas to CW, ALS, June 1742, EMV, 129, MCA.

22. 'At other times, I fell on the ground and roared for the very disquietness of my heart.'



Testimony of John Murlin, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1871; reprint, Stoke on Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 1998), 2:242.

23. 'The sinners' friend manifested himself to me...The manner of this visitation was different to what I had prescribed. I expected to feel some excessive rapture, that should deprive me of sense, strike me to the ground, or else to see a vision, or hear some audible voice.' Katherine Keysall to John Fletcher, ALS, 11 July 1776, Reference MAM FI 4/8/2, MCA.

24. Anon., *The mock-preacher: A satyrico-comical-allegorical farce, as it was acted to a crowded audience at Kennington Common and many other theatres with the humours of the mob* (London: printed and sold by C. Corbett, 1739).

25. Anon. to the 'Ministers called Methodists,' ALS, 31 May 1740, Reference EMV, 144, MCA.

26. [Richard Smalbroke], *A Charge deliver'd to the reverend the clergy in several parts of the Diocese of Lichfield and Coventry in a triennial visitation of the same in 1741* (London: printed for J. and P. Knapton, 1744), 1-2.

27. Edmund Gibson, *Observations upon the Conduct and behaviour of a certain sect, usually distinguished by the name of Methodists*, 3d ed., (London: E. Owen, 1744), 10.

28. See for example, Tyerman's reference to the Church of England as a 'corrupted church.' Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of John Wesley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872), 2:382.

29. Tyson, 255.

30. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as believed and taught by the Rev. Mr John Wesley from the year 1725*, 2d ed. (Bristol: William Pine, 1766), 12.

31. *Ibid.*, 8.

32. Quoted by Tyson, 164.

33. "sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I seem to contradict myself." Quoted by Tyson, 259.

34. Kenneth Newport, "George Bell: Prophet and Enthusiast," *Methodist History* 35:2 (January 1997): 95.

35. George Bell to John Wesley (hereafter JW), 6 April 1761. *Arminian Magazine* 3 (1780): 674-676.

36. *Ibid.*, 675.

37. *Ibid.*, 676.

38. For example; Mrs E. Jackson to JW, 14 March 1761. *Ibid.*, 673-674.

39. Heitzenrater, 209.

40. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.

41. John Wesley, *The Letters of John Wesley* (hereafter JW), ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931; reprint, 1960), 4:129.

42. John Downes to CW, ALS, 30 July 1761, Reference DDPr 2/19, MCA.

43. Entry in John Wesley's journal for 18 March 1761. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 21:311-312.

44. Entry in John Wesley's journal for 23 March 1761. *Ibid.*, 312.

45. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.

46. For example; 'the same flame was applied at Gateshead Fell, while I was opening and applying those words, "Every one that hath this hope in him, purifeth himself, even as he is pure."' Entry in JW's journal for 19 May 1761. JW], 4:457.

47. The men bands at West Street [Chapell...disputed much about perfection...they who pleaded for it were many, & shewed much warmth; their opponents were few & cool: only Mr Bell spoke with much vehemence against it.' John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.



48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. *Arminian Magazine* 3 (1780): 674.
52. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.
53. Tyerman, 2:431.
54. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.
55. 'I went this evening to Mr Bell's assembly...& felt a strange overcoming power...while he prayed that God would make me perfect.' Ibid.
56. W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of Love Divine: John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 217.
57. Entry in JW's journal for 14 November 1761. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:343.
58. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.
59. 'July 5 [1761]. Mr Neal preached at West Street, I thot several justified; especially one who sat next me: but he said, he was justified before & now made perfect; because he had wept with extreme joy, as I have done 1,000 times; tho without presuming to call myself perfect, or any thing better than a dog or a swine.'
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. 'I have often heard you do not take those persons to be real friends who reprove you or tell you what they think wrong: but cleave to those who give you praise and respect.' Sarah Ryan to JW, March 1764. Quoted by Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 397.
64. 'If Wesley examined people carefully he often saw what he wished to see.' Rack, 541.
65. JW to CW, 26 December 1761. JWJ, 4:166.
66. Entry in JW's journal for 29 December 1761. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:346.
67. John Downes to CW, ALS, 14 December 1761, Reference DDPr 2/20, MCA.
68. Charles Wesley's letter to which Downes responded, does not seem to have survived, but Downes's wording indicates that he was quoting Charles when he referred to the perfectionists as a 'cloud of perfect witnesses.' John Downes to CW, ALS, 30 July 1761, Reference DDPr 2/19, MCA.
69. Entry in CW's manuscript journal for 7 June 1739. DDCW 10/2, MCA.
70. Charles Wesley, "Lavington's case," AMs, 11739], Reference DDCW 8/12, MCA.
71. Ibid., 7.
72. Ibid., 5.
73. Gunter, 152.
74. "[John] Wesley's emotional temperament, as observed by those who knew him as an old man, seemed to be a miracle of calm, controlled serenity." Rack, 540.
75. Ibid., 539-540.
76. 'One among ye classes told my bror [brother] she had a constant sense of forgivens [forgiveness] and he let her pass. I could not help proving her farther; & then the justified sinner appeared full of the gall of bitterness.' Entry in Charles Wesley's journal for 5 February 1743. Reference DDCW 10/2, MCA
77. CW to Joseph Cownley, ALS, 1 February 1763, Reference DDCW 1/57, MCA.
78. Regarded by John Wesley as commencing at Otley in Yorkshire in 1760. Quoted by Tyerman, 2:416-417.
79. William Grimshaw to CW, ALS, 23 May 1761, Reference DDWes 6/7, MCA.

80. Charles Wesley, *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Bristol: printed by E. Farley, 1762).
81. *Ibid.*, unpaginated preface to volume 1.
82. JW to Dorothy Furry, 25 September 1762. JWL, 4:189.
83. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.
84. Later in the letter, Walsh refers to the meetings of the Select Society. This was an alternative term for band meeting.
85. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.
86. Entry in JW's journal for 5 February 1762. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:350.
87. Entry in JW's journal for 14 February 1762. *Ibid.*, 351.
88. Entry in JW's journal for 15 March 1762. *Ibid.*, 352.
89. For example, Abel Stevens, *History of Methodism* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1878), 1:320-322; Tyerman, 2:432-440; Rack 338-339. See also the following by John Wesley himself: 'In 1762, George Bell, and a few other persons, began to speak great words.' John Wesley, *A Short History of Methodism* (London: printed at the Foundery, 1765), 9.
90. For example, Stevens, 1:321 and Charles Atmore, *The Methodist Memorial; being an impartial sketch of the lives and characters of the preachers, who have departed this life since the commencement of the work of God, among the people called Methodists...*(Bristol: Richard Edwards, 1801), 268.
91. For example; Atmore, 267-268.
92. Grimshaw to CW, ALS, 23 May 1761, Reference DDWes 6/7, MCA.
93. John Walsh to CW, ALS, 11 August 1762, Reference EMV, 134, MCA.
94. Entry in JW's journal for 21 August 1762. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:386.
95. Thomas Maxfield to JW, 23 September 1762. Quoted by John Wesley in his journal entry for 4 February 1763. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:404.
96. William Briggs to CW, ALS, 28 October 1762, Reference DDP 1/10, MCA. Transcribed by Kenneth Newport and Garth Lloyd, "George Bell and Early Methodist Enthusiasm: A New Manuscript Source from the Manchester Archives," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University of Manchester* 80, no.1 (Spring 1998): 89-101.
97. *Ibid.*, 94.
98. *Ibid.*, 95.
99. *Ibid.*, 96
100. *Ibid.*
101. *Ibid.*, 98.
102. JW to CW, [September 1762]. JWL, 4:187-188.
103. JW to Samuel Furry, 30 July 1762. JWL, 4:185-186.
104. JW to Dorothy Furry, 15 September 1762. JWL, 4:188-189.
105. JW to Thomas Maxfield, 2 November 1762. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:394-397.
106. Tyerman, 2:418.
107. Tyson, 276.
108. 'I said little, being afraid of taking any step which I might afterwards repent of.' Entry in JW's journal for 8 November 1762. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:398.
109. Entry in JW's journal for 24 November 1762. *Ibid.*, 398-399.
110. Entry in JW's journal for 8 December 1762. *Ibid.*, 400.
111. Entry in JW's journal for 22 December 1762. *Ibid.*
112. JW to CW, 5 January 1763. JWL, 4:200.
113. William Ellis to CW, ALS, 23 December 1762, Reference EMV, 56, MCA.

114. Newport and Lloyd, 95.
115. Newport and Lloyd, 98.
116. Thomas Maxfield, *A Vindication of the Rev. Mr Maxfield's Conduct* (London: printed and sold by G. Keith, 1767).
117. Wesley, *A Short History*, 9. Cf. Maxfield, 14.
118. Wesley, *A Short History*, 9 and Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as believed and taught by the Rev. Mr John Wesley from the year 1725*, 2d ed. (Bristol: William Pine, 1766), 49.
119. Maxfield, 14.
120. John Downes to CW, ALS, 10 March 1763, Reference DDWes 2/62, MCA.
121. William Ellis to CW, ALS, 23 December 1762, Reference EMV, 56, MCA.
122. Maxfield dates this event to his first hearing Bell prophesying the end of the world. Maxfield 16n.
123. Maxfield, 14-15.
124. Rack 540.
125. Gunter, 218.
126. It has been said of Jabez Bunting, the leader of the Wesleyan Church in the first half of the 19th century, that he 'was dissatisfied with the rapid growth of Methodism, distrusting revivalism and evangelistic activities, and preferring "smaller numbers with more knowledge and depth of piety." Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 32.
127. For a discussion of the 19th-century reforms, sponsored by Bunting and his supporters, that led to greater Methodist institutionalization and the development of 'high' Wesleyanism, see *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858*, ed. W. R. Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), xiii-xvi.
128. Entry in JW's journal for 7 January 1763. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:402.
129. JW to the Editor of the London Chronicle, 7 January 1763. JWL, 4:200-201.
130. Stevens, 1:321.
131. Entry in JW's journal for 4 February 1763. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:403.
132. Tyerman, 2:438.
133. JW to the Editor of the London Chronicle, 9 February 1763. JWL 4, 202-203.
134. John and Elizabeth Butcher to CW, ALS, 19 January 1763, Reference EMV, 29, MCA.
135. Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 49-50.
136. *Ibid.*, 48 and Wesley, *A Short History*, 9.
137. 'I wrote a catalogue of the society, now reduced from eight and twenty hundred to about two and twenty. Such is the fruit of George Bell's enthusiasm and Thomas Maxfield's gratitude.' Entry in JW's journal for 10 February 1766. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 22:30. See also the entry in JW's journal for 14 March 1762. *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:351.
138. *Minutes*, 1:228.
139. From 25,911 in 1767 to 71,568 in 1790. *Ibid.*, 71 and 230.
140. John and Elizabeth Butcher to CW, ALS, 19 January 1763, Reference EMV, 29, MCA.
141. It is not clear if Butcher was referring to one or both places of worship.
142. William Grimshaw to CW, ALS, 23 May 1761, Reference DDWes 6/7, MCA.
143. John Walsh to CW, 1762 11 August: EM, 134.
144. 'Their voice seemed to be rather, "Down with him, down with him even to the ground."' JW to the Countess of Huntingdon, 20 March 1763. JWL, 4:206.
145. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition between the Conversions*

*of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 126-135.

146. Quoted by Newport and Lloyd, 91n.

147. Bishop Warburton, *The doctrine of grace; or, The Office and operations of the Holy Spirit vindicated from the insults of infidelity and the abuses of fanaticism* (London: printed by Millar and Tonson, 1763).

148. Baker, 189.