

**METHODIST WORSHIP**  
**With Reference to Historic Practice,**  
***The Methodist Worship Book,***  
**and Current Patterns in the Newcastle Methodist District**  
by  
**RICHARD FIRTH**

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# **METHODIST WORSHIP**

**With Reference to Historic Practice, *The Methodist Worship Book* and Current  
Patterns in the Newcastle Methodist District**

**RICHARD FIRTH**

## **ABSTRACT**

Methodism, as a hybrid denomination, being neither Anglican nor Free Church, was endowed by the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, with worship characterised by a twofold practice, the liturgy of *The Book of Common Prayer* on the one hand and the free form preaching service on the other. The thesis traces the history and the development of this pattern on through the use of the different service books, the latest of which is *The Methodist Worship Book* published in 1999. How this book came about is explored and the response to its publication by Methodist ministers, churches and members is researched by the use of questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Developments in the shape of the preaching service are also considered.

Greater variety in Methodist worship in general is then reviewed. Some pointers for the future are explored, as indeed whether or not today's alternative patterns of worship may be regarded as essentially Methodist.

## **DEDICATION**

To my wife Joyce, who with me, shares a concern for the quality of Methodist worship.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

With grateful acknowledgement of the guidance and inestimable help received from my tutors and supervisors at the Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield, Revd Dr John J Vincent and Revd Dr Eric Wright, and to the Director of Studies Revd Dr Ian Duffield for his support and encouragement.

Also for advice received from Revd Lionel E Osborn, (President of the Methodist Conference 2011-12, Chair of the Newcastle District) a friend and colleague in ministry who was a member of *The Methodist Worship Book* Revision Committee and whose counsel has been invaluable.

# METHODIST WORSHIP

(WITH REFERENCE TO HISTORIC PRACTICE, THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK, AND  
CURRENT PATTERNS IN THE NEWCASTLE METHODIST DISTRICT)

| CONTENTS  | Page |
|---|------|
| <b>PART 1</b>   |      |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>   | 1    |
| <b>TERMINOLOGY</b>  | 4    |
| <b>SYNOPSIS</b>   | 5    |
| <b>CHAPTER 1: A PRAGMATIC TRADITION</b>                                   |      |
| 1.1 John and Charles Wesley: A Twofold Approach                           | 8    |
| 1.2 Methodist Lay Preachers: Itinerant and Local                          | 14   |
| 1.3 Wesleyan Methodism after 1791   | 19   |
| 1.4 Primitive Methodism and the Other Connexions                          | 21   |
| 1.5 Methodism post 1932   | 24   |
| 1.6 Methodist Fellowships   | 26   |
| 1.7 <i>Divine Worship</i> 1935  | 28   |
| 1.8 <i>The Book of Offices</i> 1936                                       | 30   |
| 1.9 <i>The Methodist Service Book</i> 1975                                | 32   |
| 1.10 Developments between 1975 and 1998                                   | 34   |
| <b>CHAPTER 2: THE PREACHING SERVICE</b>                                   |      |
| 2.1 Introduction  | 36   |
| 2.2 The Preaching Service in Early Methodism                              | 36   |
| 2.3 The Nineteenth Century  | 40   |
| 2.4 The Twentieth Century to 1960 Union and Consolidation                 | 44   |
| 2.5 Settled Routine   | 45   |
| <b>CHAPTER 3: THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK: GESTATION</b>                   |      |
| 3.1 The Results of the Use of <i>The Methodist Service Book</i><br>(1975) | 50   |
| 3.2 Origins of a New Worship Book   | 52   |
| 3.3 The Limitations of <i>The Methodist Service Book</i> (1975)           | 53   |
| 3.4 A Step Backward?  | 55   |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 3.5 Slow but Sure Progress                 | 57 |
| 3.6 Getting There                          | 59 |
| 3.7 The Deadline Approaches                | 60 |
| 3.8 Fine Tuning                            | 61 |
| 3.9 Decision Time                          | 63 |
| 3.10 From the Old to the New: A Comparison | 65 |

#### **CHAPTER 4: THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK: COMPILATION**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 4.1 Research Method   | 72 |
| 4.2 The Constitution of the Compiling Group                                 | 73 |
| 4.3 An Analysis of the Compiling Group and Revision<br>Committee Membership | 74 |
| 4.4 The Work of the Revision Committee                                      | 76 |
| 4.5 The Questionnaire to the Compilers                                      | 77 |
| 4.6 Responses: Nine Questions   | 78 |

#### **CHAPTER 5: THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK: RECEPTION**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 5.1 Ministers Survey: Seven Questions   | 121 |
| 5.2 A Matter of Choice: How Ministers use <i>The Methodist<br/>Worship Book</i> | 145 |
| 5.3 Discovering Alternatives: What Some Ministers Use Instead                   | 152 |
| 5.4 What People in the Pews Say   | 158 |
| 5.5 More Clues from the Pews  | 180 |
| 5.6 Comparing and Contrasting   | 192 |

### **PART 2**

#### **CHAPTER 6: FIFTY YEARS OF CHANGE: 1960 - 2010**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 6.1 Sixties Stirrings                        | 197 |
| 6.2 A Move for the Sermon                    | 202 |
| 6.3 Worship Leaders                          | 204 |
| 6.4 Local Arrangements                       | 206 |
| 6.5 Hymnody: Singing New Songs               | 210 |
| 6.6 The Covenant Service                     | 217 |
| 6.7 The Love Feast (The Agape)               | 225 |
| 6.8 Ecumenical Influences                    | 239 |
| 6.9 Extempore Practice: Prayer and Preaching | 249 |
| 6.10 Some Services Observed                  | 257 |

## **CHAPTER 7: PRESENT PRACTICE**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 7.1 Introduction                       | 275 |
| 7.2 Book Based Services                | 276 |
| 7.3 Multiform Preaching Services       | 277 |
| 7.4 Expecting the Unexpected           | 278 |
| 7.5 The Alternative Practice           | 279 |
| 7.6 Liquidity and Fluidity             | 281 |
| 7.7 Alternative Worship Patterns       | 283 |
| 7.8 Corroboration from Other Districts | 293 |
| 7.9 Conclusion                         | 297 |

## **CHAPTER 8: METHODIST WORSHIP: A WORK IN PROGRESS**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 8.1 Connexional Encouragement                    | 298 |
| 8.2 Abundant Resources                           | 301 |
| 8.3 But is it all Really Methodist?              | 302 |
| 8.4 Is it Liturgically Acceptable?               | 305 |
| 8.5 Some Hesitations                             | 309 |
| 8.6 Releasing Potential: Training and Resourcing | 312 |
| 8.7 Worship, Discipleship and Mission            | 315 |
| 8.8 Changing Times                               | 318 |
| 8.9 A Current Debate                             | 321 |
| 8.10 Contextual Worship                          | 326 |
| 8.11 Times and Places                            | 328 |
| 8.12 Finally                                     | 330 |

## **APPENDICES**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Letter to Compilers                      | 335 |
| 2. The Sacraments of the Methodist Church   | 336 |
| 3. An Alternative Service of Infant Baptism | 339 |
| 4. An Alternative Service of Holy Communion | 344 |
| 5. Encouraging Participation                | 350 |
| 6. A Personal Journey                       | 356 |

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> | 365 |
|---------------------|-----|



## INTRODUCTION

It has been my privilege to experience, throughout my life's journey, the multi-faceted nature of Methodist worship and to be part of a significant stage in its evolution, from the fairly static situation of the 1950's to the fluidity which now prevails in the early part of the twenty first century.

My appointed stations in the Circuits of Methodism have encompassed a broad spectrum of situations; central mission, overseas, inner city, commuter town, urban, rural, and now, finally, in active retirement, a seaside residential area. These different circumstances have meant an experience of the breadth of Methodist worship, from the classical liturgy of Holy Communion to be found in *The Book of Offices* 1936, through to the more contemporary services of *The Methodist Service Book* 1975 and its successor *The Methodist Worship Book* 1999. Parallel to the ethos represented by these books there is another tradition, the preaching service, the shape of which also has changed considerably.

The worship of the early Methodists followed a distinct pattern:

1. Worship in their local parish churches according to *The Book of Common Prayer 1662*, especially for the sacrament of Holy Communion.

2. Attendance at their own preaching service in order to experience Biblical exposition, depth of fellowship and vibrant hymn singing.

This pattern became an established characteristic of Methodism. It was later described as the 'dual tradition', a phrase first used, as far as may be ascertained, by Neil Dixon in his book *At Your Service*<sup>1</sup>, although he suspects that Raymond George may have used it previously, but not in any publication<sup>2</sup>.

This twofold practice became distinctive of Methodism because worship in the Church of England was based, by law, solely on *The Book of Common Prayer* and worship in the Non-Conformist Churches was almost exclusively that of services of the word, i.e. preaching services, with Holy Communion being observed infrequently. Wesley's genius meant that, in Methodism, the two practices were combined, a situation which remained characteristic of the movement during his lifetime.

However, it is plainly evident that Methodist worship today does not follow this pattern to the same extent. A process of evolution has occurred between the eighteenth and the twenty-first centuries.

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1 Dixon N. *At Your Service*, London, Epworth, 1976, p.11

2 Revd N Dixon email to the researcher 25.8.11

The aim of the research is to investigate how Methodist worship has evolved since the time of the Wesley brothers to the present day.

Historic practice from the time of the Wesley's will be critically examined.

The researcher's varied experience of Methodist worship throughout a lifetime will be recalled.

The process leading up to and including the publication of *The Methodist Worship Book* (1999), the effect which this has had on patterns of Methodist worship and the way the book was received by both ministers and lay people will be investigated.

Parallel with such developments in the officially authorised patterns of worship there have been changes in the style of the preaching service and these will be examined, together with more recent advances in the nature of worship, notably as a result of the Fresh Expressions initiative, which is still in its infancy.

The research will be carried out by reading widely in the great deal of historical and archival material available, through the circulation of questionnaires amongst the appropriate constituencies, by face to face interviews with relevant people and by personal observation and experience of acts of worship in the Newcastle Methodist District, which is regarded as fairly typical of Methodism as a whole and as an accessible area. It is hoped

that the findings may lead to conclusions which will be of value for the worship life of Methodism as a whole.

## **TERMINOLOGY**

For the sake of clarity it will be helpful to define here the terms used throughout the thesis, although, of course, there will be occasion to exercise flexibility of usage.

1. 'Prayer Book Service or Services': Acts of worship based on the services to be found in *The Book of Common Prayer* or similar services adapted from them.

2. 'Preaching Service or Services': Acts of worship having their origins in the patterns of early Methodism consisting of hymns, prayers, Bible readings and a sermon. The prayers and sermon may have varying degrees of extemporaneousness, varying from the completely printed to the wholly spontaneous. Such services are non-Eucharistic in character.

3. 'Liturgy' or 'Liturgical': Usually, printed services such as those found in the various worship books, but in its truest sense it refers, of course, to any order of service used by a congregation, ideally created by them, which accords with the original meaning of the word as 'the work of the people'.

4. 'Extempore': Worship which is 'of the Holy Spirit' and which springs from the inspiration of the moment. Such spontaneity, if it is to have quality, needs

to arise out of a mind and a heart which has been pre-prepared by wide reading and deep reflection.

5. 'Free Form Worship': refers to services which are not based upon officially authorised worship books. It may contain spontaneous elements, but, more often, material of the preacher's own composition or culled from the many published resources available these days or from the internet.

6. 'Dual Tradition': refers to the twofold practice of worship established by the Wesley brothers for the Methodist people, firstly the observance of Holy Communion according to *The Book of Common Prayer* of 1662, and secondly, the non-Eucharistic Preaching Service of the Word.

Wherever the above phrases are used in the thesis it is hoped that their meaning will be clear from the context, especially when there is a need for flexibility.

## **SYNOPSIS**

The research began in 2004 as an investigation into the origins and compilation of *The Methodist Worship Book* leading to its authorisation and publication by the Methodist Conference for use in the churches at Easter 1999. It soon became evident that this could not be done in isolation, rather in the context of Methodist Worship as a whole, both historically and contemporarily. The content of the thesis, therefore, developed as follows:

Chapter 1. *A Pragmatic Tradition*, describes the establishment of the 'dual tradition' by the Wesley brothers and how this was observed, or otherwise, from their demise through to the 1950's, highlighting the various authorised books which have encapsulated the liturgical tradition.

Chapter 2. *The Preaching Service* tells of the development of the extempore tradition in the form of the preaching service, its importance to Methodist worship and its settling into a relatively fixed form by the mid-twentieth century.

Chapter 3. *The Methodist Worship Book: Gestation* explores the origins of the book, how it was compiled and introduced to Methodism, being authorised by Conference for use in the churches.

Chapter 4. *The Methodist Worship Book: Compilation* examines in detail the work of the Compiling Group (The Liturgical Sub-committee of the Connexional Faith and Order Committee). A questionnaire to its members attempted to discover their rationale for doing things the way they did and reaching the decisions they made.

Chapter 5. *The Methodist Worship Book: Reception* then researches the reception of the book by ministers and congregations showing the range of responses to it and evaluating them.

Chapter 6. *Fifty Years of Change: 1960-2010* considers and evaluates the changes which have occurred in the nature of Methodist worship since the 1960's and observes some contemporary services.

Chapter 7. Present Practice describes the many and varied practices now occurring in Methodist worship patterns and the emergence of an alternative tradition possibly encouraged but not necessarily initiated by the introduction of *The Methodist Worship Book*.

Chapter 8. Methodist Worship: A Work in Progress highlights current issues and pointers to the future in light of the transition from two traditions to three.

Appendices: These are intended to provide examples of contemporary liturgy and to contribute to the debate about the nature of sacramental services and give help with a participatory approach.

## CHAPTER 1

### A PRAGMATIC TRADITION

#### 1.1 JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY: A TWOFOLD APPROACH

John Wesley, a Church of England priest and founder of Methodism was a convinced Anglican and user of *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662). He stated:

I believe there is no liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational piety than the Common Prayer of the Church of England. <sup>3</sup>

He was also keen to encourage the use of other liturgies, especially the Covenant Service, which he gleaned from the Puritan and Moravian traditions. He edited *The Book of Common Prayer* for the use of Methodists in North America, publishing his version in 1784 under the title *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America with Other Occasional Services*.

He wrote in his letter to 'our brethren in America':

I have prepared a liturgy little differing from that of the Church of England, (I think, the best constituted National Church in the world), which I advise all the travelling preachers to use on the Lord's Day in all the congregations, reading the litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's Day. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Methodist Service Book*, London, MPH, 1975, p.vii.

<sup>4</sup> Telford J. (Ed), *The Letters of John Wesley*, Vol. 7, London, Epworth, 1931, p. 239. A later verification is given in George A.R. *The People Called Methodists – The Means of Grace* in Davies R. & Rupp G. (eds) 'A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain', London, Epworth, 1965, p260.



Besides Holy Communion (Wesley's revision of the 1662 Prayer Book Service), the "Other Occasional Services" in Wesley's 1784 collection included an Ordinal to be used in North America, Morning and Evening Prayer, and the Public Offices.

There then followed further edited editions for the Methodists of Great Britain, which continued to be used after his death, and which have influenced Methodist liturgical practice ever since.

Wesley's 1784 revision of *The Book of Common Prayer* was intended to encourage what he regarded (and indeed Methodists ever since) as the observance of the 'means of grace', events whereby Christians experienced the transforming presence of God. He wrote:

By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to men, preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace.<sup>5</sup>

Such 'means of grace' were then specified in various places in his sermons and writings: receiving the Lord's Supper; searching the scriptures (through reading, meditating, and hearing, especially via the preaching service); prayer in its different forms; fasting; fellowship meetings of various kinds (class and band meetings, the love feast and the covenant service).

The 1784 revision also underlined the importance Wesley gave to sound liturgy alongside the less formal preaching services and fellowship meetings.

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Sugden E.H., *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley*, No.12, London, 1921, in George A.R., "The People Called Methodists – 4. The Means of Grace", *The History of The Methodist Church in Great Britain Volume 1*, Davies R. and Rupp G., (eds.) London, Epworth, 1965, p.259.

There then followed further edited editions for the Methodists of Great Britain, which continued to be used after his death, and which have influenced Methodist liturgical practice ever since.

John Wesley was nothing if not pragmatic. The expectation was that members of the growing Methodist movement would avail themselves of regular Holy Communion in their own Parish Churches each Sunday as well as attending their Methodist preaching services.

The preaching services were held outside the times of services in the Parish Churches, often early on a Sunday morning, so that Methodists could attend them before going on to their Parish Communion. The intention of the preaching service was clearly evangelistic, the winning of converts and the encouragement of those already practising Methodists. As Adrian Burden observes:

The sermon was the grand climax, the be all and end all of worship. <sup>6</sup>

It had a connection with the real lives of the people.

Often the preacher would be one with whom his hearers were acquainted. His message was delivered through the medium of his daily life, as a member of the local community, putting into words what his life had proclaimed, that through faith he had received the gift of God. <sup>7</sup>

Methodism was a movement

... made up of societies whose staple diet of worship was the preaching service.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Burden A. *The Preaching Service*, Nottingham, Grove, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Burden, *The Preaching Service*, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Burden, *The Preaching Service*, p. 28.

The service consisted in the singing of hymns, often those written by John's brother Charles, the reading of scripture, the saying of extempore prayers, and a sermon. John Wesley therefore combined the firm adherence to official liturgy on the one hand, and worship of a freer and more spontaneous nature on the other.

John Wesley, firm Anglican traditionalist as he was, certainly espoused spontaneity. John Kent observes:

The Journals make quite clear that in the early years his role in the more exciting meetings of the Societies was not that of a bystander taking notes, but of a commanding figure who guided the group towards a climax. When he stood at the centre of such waves of communal passion, stimulating and controlling them, as he certainly did, the Wesley of the Journals does not give the impression of even being slightly alienated. When he described these events, he defined and approved what took place as divinely prompted.<sup>9</sup>

Kent also comments:

There is a sharp contrast between the immaculate style of Wesley's formal defences of Wesleyan piety and theology, and the chaotic underside of the movement, in which a simpler version of religion prevailed.<sup>10</sup>

John's brother Charles had similar views and took the same approach. Gary Best, in his biography published to mark the tri-centenary of Charles Wesley's birth, states:

As far as he was concerned, the early Church had regarded Communion as central to their daily worship.<sup>11</sup>

This meant the obligation of frequent communion for Methodists too. Charles published his *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* in 1745, all 166 of them at the time,

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9 Kent J. *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, Cambridge, CUP, 2002, p. 191.

10 Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, p.199.

11 Best G. *Charles Wesley, a Biography*, Peterborough, Epworth, 2006, p. 237

as if to emphasise the point. But, then again, his hundreds of other hymns were regularly sung at the Methodist preaching services, and he gained his own reputation for extempore prayer.

He always used the form contained in *The Book of Common Prayer*, but he did not confine himself to it. He was often drawn out largely in extemporary prayer.<sup>12</sup>

His journals contain frequent references to occasions when, on his travels, he prays extempore with the needy, the sick and the dying. Insofar as times of worship and fellowship are concerned he appears to distinguish between the times when he 'read prayers' and those when he 'said prayers' or simply 'prayed', the latter phrases referring to extempore practice.<sup>13</sup>

So the Wesley brothers began and fostered the dual tradition in Methodism.

Neil Dixon observes:

John Wesley, Anglican Priest and founder of Methodism, effusively praised *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662) and commended it to his followers; but he did not hesitate to conduct free services or to pray extempore. The dual tradition has survived to this day.<sup>14</sup>

However J. Munsey Turner believes that the situation was more complex than this and that there was a whole spectrum of worship practice ranging

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12 Best, *Charles Wesley, a Biography*, p. 237

13 In Tyson J.R. *Charles Wesley, A Reader*, Oxford, OUP, 2000, (selections from the Journals) for instance, Charles Wesley 'read prayers', presumably from *The Book of Common Prayer*, on Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> 1738 (p.133), on July 17<sup>th</sup> and Aug.25<sup>th</sup> 1741 (p.200). On Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> 1739 he 'preached and prayed' (p.169); on July 16<sup>th</sup> 1740 he was 'enlarged in prayer' (p.188); and on Dec. 2<sup>nd</sup> 1753 he 'prayed with strong desire' (p.326), all descriptions which strongly imply extempore prayer. These are but a few examples giving evidence that he practised both forms of prayer, one as readily as the other. In other works (e.g. Wiseman F. Luke, *Charles Wesley, Evangelist and Poet*, London, Epworth, 1933, p.138) Charles practice of extempore prayer is given passing mention, and other references, both in books and on websites, may be found rarely, perhaps because it is assumed, and even taken for granted, that it was a common practice of his, as Best demonstrates.

14 Dixon N. *At Your Service*, London, Epworth, 1976, p. 11

... between the poles of revivalism and sacramentalism ...<sup>15</sup>

with an essential dualistic tension.

There was much plurality in Methodism from the beginning, ranging from the charismatic to stately liturgy in some of the principal urban chapels ... Methodism inherited a dual tradition of worship and was always comparatively highly organised ... The whole matter is the perennial tension between order and ardour. <sup>16</sup>

It was a tradition that related

... freedom of worship with stability of structure. <sup>17</sup>

John Walsh is quoted as calling John Wesley a “both ... and” man.

In the realm of worship and spirituality he stressed the means of grace in two ways. There were the “*instituted* means of grace” – established styles of worship, prayer, Bible study, fellowship and fasting ... But he stressed too what he called the “*prudential* means of grace”. He stressed the ‘preaching service’, with his brother Charles hymns ‘lined out’ so that the illiterate could sing them ... He believed in both liturgical and spontaneous prayer.<sup>18</sup>

Raymond George comments on Wesley’s genius.

With a sure touch, in order to serve the needs of the growing Methodist societies, he adapted, enriched and supplemented the modes of worship which he inherited, and so laid the foundations of the Methodist worship of the ensuing centuries.<sup>19</sup>

And also on Wesley’s legacy.

The Methodist heritage is a blend of Anglican and non-Anglican elements. They have not always been well-blended, but when Methodism is at its best, these two elements, fused together in

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15 Turner J.M. *Conflict and Reconciliation*, London, Epworth, 1985, p. 61

16 Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation* p61

17 Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, p. 230

18 Quoted by Turner J.M. “John Wesley’s Primitive Christianity” original source not given, in Vincent J.J. (ed) *Primitive Christianity*, Stoke on Trent, Tentmaker Publications, 2007, p.26

19 George A.R. “The People Called Methodists – 4. The Means of Grace” in *The History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain Volume 1*. Davies R. and Rupp G. (eds.). London. Epworth. 1965. p273.

the crucible of the Methodist experience, have produced a rich and fruitful synthesis.<sup>20</sup>

Such was the twofold approach inherent in the dual tradition.

## **1.2 METHODIST LAY PREACHERS: ITINERENT AND LOCAL**

John Wesley was not unfamiliar with the idea of lay people speaking and interpreting the Bible. As he was growing up he would be aware, for instance, that his mother Susanna led house meetings in the rectory at Epworth whenever her husband was absent from the parish. These included prayers, sermon readings and religious conversation.

However it was evidently John Wesley's hitherto unexamined view that preaching should be confined to the ordained clergy and that in a church. These views were to change, first, when George Whitefield persuaded him, in 1739, to preach in the open air to miners in Bristol; and, secondly, when lay men took it upon themselves, ostensibly at the call of God, to preach to Methodist congregations. This occurred because the growth of Methodism demanded numerically more ministers than could be provided by John and Charles Wesley and the other ordained clergy who were supporting them. The matter came to a head when Thomas Maxfield first preached to the Foundery congregation in London. Leslie Church describes the event as follows.

The authorisation of Thomas Maxfield came about, strangely enough, through Susanna Wesley, herself a sound Churchwoman. Up to this point he and a few others had been allowed to 'exhort', but there had been no question of his 'preaching'. The distinction, which

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p260.

seems slight, was a very real one to John Wesley. Hearing, when he was in Bristol, that Thomas Maxfield was actually 'preaching' in London, he came to town evidently determined to forbid it. His mother made him pause before taking action. 'John' she said, 'take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear him for yourself' ... The battle was soon over and John Wesley authorised Thomas Maxfield to preach.<sup>21</sup>

Other preachers in other places followed suit. Thomas Westall, a carpenter, began to preach around Bristol, and then so did John Nelson, a stonemason in Birstall. Thus from these small beginnings grew the Order of Methodist Local Preachers, men and eventually women, and not ordained. They were drawn from many different walks of life; coal miners, tin miners, fishermen, farm labourers, shepherds, pottery and foundry workers and many other working class occupations, besides some professionals, teachers, doctors, businessmen and so on. Each one brought his or her particular insights from daily life and work into the task of preaching the gospel, something which the academically trained professional clergy, for the most part, were not qualified to do, and which evoked considerable criticism from the Church of England at the time.

At first the term 'exhorters' was used to describe such speakers or readers, but when they began to expound the scriptures from specific texts, the term 'local preacher' became more commonly used, 'local' as opposed to the 'itinerant' preachers who, on Wesley's instruction, travelled in 'rounds' or

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21 Church L. F. *More about the Early Methodist People*, London, Epworth, 1949, p. 100-101

'circuits', that is the geographical areas into which Wesley had conveniently divided the country.

In the most comprehensive work to date John Lenton researches the story of John Wesley's itinerant lay preachers. Like him they travelled on horseback in 'rounds' or 'circuits' (i.e. the geographical areas into which Wesley had conveniently divided the country) establishing and consolidating Methodist societies. He affectionately described them as his 'sons in the gospel'<sup>22</sup>, and relied upon them entirely for the growing work of the movement, as indeed upon the much larger body of local preachers. The itinerants, according to Lenton, numbered over 800 by the time of Wesley's death in 1791.<sup>23</sup>

The success of Methodism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should be put down to many factors. Among these was not the preaching of [John] Wesley, nor even his organisation and expertise, but his building up of a successful cadre of preachers.<sup>24</sup>

Both local and itinerant were preachers of the gospel, expected to win converts and integrate them into the Methodist Societies in their respective towns and villages, thus building them up in the faith. Such preachers were expected to have a certain 'charisma'; and it was believed that their services were more 'effective' when the use of printed or written material was kept to the minimum.

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22 Lenton J., *John Wesley's Preachers, A Social and Statistical Analysis of the British and Irish Preachers who Entered the Methodist Itineracy before 1791*, Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2009.

23 *ibid.* p.423

24 *ibid.* p. 7



This brief description of what happened serves to underline the fact that “Mr. Wesley’s Preachers”, of either kind, in conducting their acts of worship, were taking part in the process of establishing and then sustaining the preaching service tradition of Methodism, because, as yet, the itinerants were not ordained and therefore unable to preside at the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Also, not being local clergy, they could not be appointed to conduct the normal liturgical offices of the parish church.

In order to maintain discipline, local preachers were authorised annually by a ‘note’ from John Wesley or one of his itinerants. They performed an invaluable role in spreading the work of Methodism, not least by conducting services of a non liturgical nature, that is, services not taken from *The Book of Common Prayer*.

All over the connexion ordinary local preachers continued faithful. They pioneered new work, prepared the way for his [Wesley’s] itinerants, and built chapels.<sup>25</sup>

Before his death in 1791, John Wesley had established a Conference which would exercise the governance of Methodism, including the supervision of the preachers, both itinerant and local. Two issues were of particular concern, whether or not the itinerants should be allowed to administer the sacraments and whether or not Methodist Societies should be allowed to hold their services at the same time as those in the parish churches. In 1795 the Conference devised a ‘Plan of Pacification’ designed to allow these developments, subject to majority decisions by trustees, society stewards

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25 Milburn G. and Batty M. (eds.), *Workaday Preachers, The Story of Methodist Local Preaching*, London, MPH, 1995, p.30

and class leaders at local level. Thus the dual tradition proceeded to another stage in its evolution, the itinerants being permitted to conduct Holy Communion based on Wesley's revision of services from *The Book of Common Prayer*, whilst both itinerant but mainly the local preachers conducted the free form preaching services.

Local Preachers' meetings began to be established in order to regulate the admission, training and discipline of preachers and also to ensure that standards were maintained.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw a period in which there occurred the formation of several different Methodist bodies which separated from or were ejected by Wesleyan Methodism, the main groups being the Methodist New Connexion, the Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians, the Independent Methodists and the United Methodist Free Church (itself a union of smaller Churches). These denominations were formed for various reasons. Barrie Tabraham observes:

These divisions were not so much about fundamental differences in theology or doctrine. Rather, they were often caused by personal differences, misunderstandings or tactlessness on the part of individuals and groups.<sup>26</sup>

In so far as the dual tradition was concerned each group pursued its own agenda to a varying degree. But in addition to their attitudes to the dual practice, especially Holy Communion, other factors contributing to division

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22 Tabraham B. *The Making of Methodism*, London, Epworth, 1995, p.65

were those of social class, the place of laity and matters of Church organisation, mostly in reaction to an authoritarian Wesleyan Methodism.

### **1.3 WESLEYAN METHODISM AFTER 1791**

To begin with, Wesleyan Methodism, during the nineteenth century, continued its pattern of worship in the manner laid down by John Wesley himself.

The heart of the Methodist Movement remained as at first in the Sacrament, the Class Meeting and the Preaching Service.<sup>27</sup>

His revised service from *The Book of Common Prayer* was used for Holy Communion and in many churches, Morning, if not Evening Prayer, was a fairly common practice. Alongside the other Methodist Connexions, Wesleyan churches experienced growth, and it became the case that communities would contain two or three Methodist chapels of different hues, each worshipping similarly so far as the preaching service was concerned, but affording varying degrees of importance to Holy Communion.

Thus the stormy controversies which engendered division were weathered and the Connexions went their separate ways. Wesleyan worship, laying greater emphasis on Holy Communion tended to be dominated more by ministerial presence, whereas the other Connexions relied more on the ministry of lay preachers and thus gave the preaching service greater pre-eminence.

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<sup>27</sup> Davies R. *Methodism*, London, Epworth, 1985 edn. p. 134

The most significant change in Wesleyan worship was the introduction of instruments, notably organs, to accompany the hymn singing. Hitherto it was believed

... that God wished the human voice in worship to be unassisted by any mechanical contrivance.<sup>28</sup>

However, in 1827, the trustees of Brunswick Chapel, Leeds, decided to install an organ, contrary to the feelings of the ordinary members and the preachers of the Leeds District. On appeal to the Methodist Conference by the trustees, the organ was sanctioned, thus causing a minor secession. Many other chapels followed suit and organ music henceforth accompanied the singing of Methodist hymns and encouraged the formation of choirs. Where this was the case it became customary for the choir to sing an anthem during worship.

But gradually, possibly because of antipathy to the Oxford Movement<sup>29</sup> and assimilation by the nonconformist ethos, the preaching service achieved pre-eminence and Holy Communion diminished in importance during the later years of the Victorian era. That this was the case was evidenced by the design of the Methodist chapels of the period which focussed on the pulpit, whilst the Communion area became smaller both in size and significance.

This situation prevailed on into the twentieth century when there was a

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28 Davies. *Methodism*. p122

29 See Turner J.M. *Conflict and Reconciliation*, London, Epworth, 1985, p.171 &173 where the author asserts that the Oxford Movement pushed Methodism into the Free Church camp and that it was 'a major factor in keeping the two traditions of Anglicanism and Methodism institutionally apart'. It 'had the effect of raising barriers between Anglicanism and Dissent, including Methodism'.

reassertion of the sacramental tradition by the Wesleyans as negotiations for the union of the various Methodist Connexions proceeded. At union, as we shall see, when *The Book of Offices* was published in 1936, the dual tradition was reaffirmed.

#### **1.4 PRIMITIVE METHODISM AND THE OTHER CONNEXIONS**

After John Wesley's death, the nineteenth century saw division in the movement that he left behind, not least the rise of Primitive Methodism. Initially, this was a manifestation of a type of Methodism which, amongst other factors, reacted against the formal liturgical style of Wesleyan Methodist worship, centred in impressive chapels and churches.

Primitive Methodism began in the spring of 1807 as a result of revivalist influences from America upon Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, two Wesleyan Methodist preachers. Camp Meetings were held outdoors at Mow Cop in the Potteries. These were characterised by

... preaching, praying and singing with equal fervour, offering a gospel of forgiveness which could reach men and women whom their more sober Anglican and Wesleyan contemporaries could not reach.<sup>30</sup>

John Kent also observes:

The Camp Meetings of 1807 reflected the desire of many of the poorer people in the country areas to set up a religious society of their own, as outside the normal religious structure as they themselves were outside the recognised social system.<sup>31</sup>

The new movement quickly spread through the work of zealous preachers amongst workers in the Potteries, agricultural labourers east and west of the

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<sup>30</sup> Turner *Conflict and Reconciliation*, p84

<sup>31</sup> J Kent. *Holding the Fort*. (London, Epworth, 1978) p. 39

Pennines, fishermen in East Anglia and miners in South Yorkshire and County Durham. The expansion of Primitive Methodism is expressed in the inscription on the plate produced in the Potteries by way of a souvenir to celebrate the centenary of the movement;

The little cloud increaseth still,  
Which first arose upon Mow Hill.

It must be stressed, however, that the Primitive Methodist movement saw itself as being a strictly orthodox form of Christianity, indeed as a return to its origins.

Orthodox Christianity was the hallmark of these emerging Primitive Methodists. They believed themselves to be in the same tradition as Mr. Wesley, the teaching of the Church of England (rightly understood), and the early church of the New Testament period itself.<sup>32</sup>

One feature of Primitive Methodist Worship was the 'agape' or 'love feast', characterised by lively singing, extempore prayer, Bible readings, preaching and testimony. All present at such a meeting would drink from a common loving cup and share bread or cake.

When the Primitive Methodists shared their love feast they drank water from the cup and ate cake from the plate. For those who didn't have bread enough, the cake certainly made it a feast. It was, in fact, an anticipation of the heavenly feast prepared for all people, but experienced within the Primitive Methodist community.<sup>33</sup>

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32 S G Hatcher. "Primitive Methodism as Primitive Christianity" in J J Vincent (ed) *Primitive Christianity* (Stoke on Trent, Tentmaker Publications, 2007) p. 30

33 Hatcher *Primitive Methodism as Primitive Christianity* p36

Following Methodist Union in 1932 the practice fell into disuse somewhat, but is now being revived in some places, despite no mention of it being made in authorised service books, although being free in ethos perhaps we should not expect it to be.

With passage of time, this revival movement, inevitably, grew into a connexion and then became a denomination in its own right, and in so doing began to embrace also a more formal kind of liturgy. As Munsey Turner observes;

Worship became less spontaneous and charismatic, service books were produced and used, especially for the rites of passage.<sup>34</sup>

Thus the initial simple enthusiasm had reached a point where growing educational standards perhaps demanded something more substantial than revivalist services. There was a desire for structure and organisation and what appeared to be a more mature approach to worship. The first official *Primitive Methodist Service Book* was sanctioned by its Conference held in Tunstall in June 1860 containing

Forms for the Administration of Baptism (including Infants and Those of 'Riper Years'), the Solemnization of Matrimony, Maternal Thanksgiving after Childbirth, Administration of the Lord's Supper; Renewing our Covenant with God and for the Burial of the Dead, with an appendix confirming legal directions.

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The twofold practice was now somewhat restored to Primitive Methodism. There were other branches of Methodism resulting from nineteenth century divisions, but the Primitives were the largest and most significant.

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34 Turner *Conflict and Reconciliation* p87

35 S G Hatcher, email to researcher 1.3.07

With regard to these other smaller Methodist bodies, the New Connexion, the United Methodist Free churches, the Bible Christians, the Independent Methodists, the Wesley Reform Union, the Armenian Methodists and even lesser groups, the main element of worship life was the preaching service of an extempore or free form nature with Holy Communion, when observed, often administered by Local Preachers using shorter orders of service. The emphasis on the 'priesthood of all believers' meant a 'low' view of both ordained ministry and sacramental life. Printed liturgies and service books were not necessarily seen as in any way essential for effective worship, whereas the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the moment was. The smaller connexions therefore, were very much of the preaching service strand of the dual tradition.

In 1907 most of these groups came together to form the United Methodist Church, which then itself became part of a greater union in 1932, the formation of the Methodist Church itself, a merger of the United, Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists.

### **1.5 METHODISM POST 1932**

Each of the three strands of Methodism, on coming together, brought to the one Church their own distinctive brands of churchmanship and diverse liturgical practice, ranging from the regard for Prayer Book services of some Wesleyans to the extreme 'low church' of 'the Primitives' and 'the Uniteds', with, in some cases, almost a contempt for the printed page, insofar as liturgy was concerned.



The supreme authority of the newly established single Methodist Church was, and remains, the annual Methodist Conference, duly constituted and established by Act of Parliament. It consists of representatives of both ministers and lay people, and its authority and responsibilities are regulated by its *Constitutional Practice and Discipline*, with Conference itself having the right to interpret its own standing orders.

Constitutionally, amongst the various responsibilities of the Methodist Conference, was, and still remains, the oversight of the worship services that occurred in the Methodist churches and chapels Sunday by Sunday. Following union in 1932, a regulated system of training was introduced to encourage improved standards amongst local preachers. Ministers imbibed liturgical practice in their theological colleges. Liturgical standards themselves were enshrined in *The Book of Offices* published in 1936 (see ch.1.8).

From the time of the union in 1932 there was what was called the World Conference on Faith and Order Committee which incorporated, after 1936, the work of The Book of Offices Committee and the Committee on Children and Public Worship. The World Conference on Faith and Order Committee

... reported annually to the Conference in both Representative and Ministerial Sessions from 1933 to 1957. It was then superseded by the [British] Faith and Order Committee which reported from 1958 to date (but the annual report to the Ministerial Session ceased after 1985).<sup>36</sup>

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36 K G Howcroft, Assistant Secretary of the Methodist Conference. Information provided in an email to the researcher 21.2.07

Worship matters were thus delegated to this Faith and Order Committee appointed annually by Conference with responsibilities defined by a Standing Order still contained in present day editions of *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*.

The Committee is authorised to make proposals to the Conference for the revision from time to time of the forms of service authorised by the Conference for use in the Methodist Church, and forms of worship intended for regular and general use in Methodist public worship shall be submitted to the Conference for approval after a period of experimentation on the recommendation of the Committee. (S.O. 330/9)<sup>37</sup>

## **1.6 METHODIST FELLOWSHIPS**

The Methodist denomination contains under its umbrella a great variety of interest groups amongst which are the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship and Methodist Evangelicals Together. It could be said, amongst other things, that these two organisations represent the dual tradition of Methodist worship, albeit in polarised form.

The Methodist Sacramental Fellowship (MSF) began in 1935, only three years after Methodist union, apparently in response to what was perceived as a threat to the Wesleyan Methodist tradition by the influx of the Primitive and United Methodist ethos. These days the membership of the MSF is open to clergy and laity of any Communion. Its aims are printed in the inside cover of each issue of its regular bulletin. Among them is the declared intention:

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<sup>37</sup> *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* (London, MPH, 2002 edn.) p. 433

To encourage standards of excellence in worship and, in particular, to emphasise the centrality of the Eucharist, as set forth in the lifelong practice and teaching of the Wesleys.<sup>38</sup>

This aim therefore seems to promote one side of Methodism's twofold practice, as there is no mention of the Wesleys' other important emphasis, that of the preaching service.

Methodist Evangelicals Together (MET) is the present name of an interest group formed from a union of the Methodist Revival Fellowship (MRF) and Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism (CEIM).

MRF began informally in 1948 but didn't gain official recognition and Conference permission to use the term 'Methodist' in its title until 1952. CEIM was formed in November 1970 ... its aim being to complement MRF's emphasis on prayer for revival with study and action on matters of ecclesiological, doctrinal and strategic concern to evangelical Methodists.<sup>39</sup>

Because of an overlap of interests these two groups were then merged in 1987 to form Headway, also incorporating Dunamis, a charismatic renewal fellowship. Headway was then renamed yet again as Methodist Evangelicals Together (MET) in 2007. There is no defined attitude or policy towards Methodist liturgy but Martin Wellings, who has done research into their history, comments on their probable attitude to worship.

My impression would be that they would value a traditional Methodist Preaching Service, with hymns and a 'teaching' sermon, and probably be less enthusiastic about read prayers and *The Book of Offices*.<sup>40</sup>

Presumably, this also means *The Methodist Worship Book*! This group also values times of free praise using worship songs as well as hymns.

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38 MSF Bulletin No. 132, Epiphany, 2005 p. 2

39 Revd. B. Hoare of MET in an email to the researcher 13.2.07

40 M. Wellings email to the researcher 13.2.07

The dual tradition of Methodism, therefore, is polarised in these two particular interest groups (The Methodist Sacramental Fellowship and Methodist Evangelicals Together), although it is not unknown for some people to be enrolled members of both of them! It is known that one or two leading members from each movement were on the Liturgical Sub-Committee which compiled the Methodist Worship Book.

### **1.7 DIVINE WORSHIP 1935**

As a forerunner to *The Book of Offices* 1936 there was published, in 1935, an alternative book of services and prayers entitled *Divine Worship*, which, although officially approved, never enjoyed as wide a use, but did extend to a sixth impression in 1948. The book consisted of a comprehensive collection of prayers for all the seasons of the Christian year and for a wide variety of occasions. There were a few full orders of non-eucharistic services for the main festivals. All the elements of prayer were included. The book was the initiative of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in 1930 that had duly set up a Committee

... to consider the best methods of giving to corporate prayer its due place in the life of the Church.<sup>41</sup>

The Committee reported to the first Conference of the newly united Methodist Church meeting in 1932, a report that was received and sent for

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41 *Divine Worship* (London, Epworth, 1935) p. 9

consideration by District Synods. The report further expressed the conviction of the Committee:

There are signs amongst our Methodist people that the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who teaches us how to pray as surely as what to pray for, points towards the wisdom of blending extempore with directed and responsive prayer in our orders of service.<sup>42</sup>

As a result the Conference of the newly united Church appointed a Committee to produce *Divine Worship* for optional use in the Churches of Methodism. It was obviously a book that both preserved and fostered the original Methodist practice. The introduction to the book actually affirms:

Methodism has inherited two traditions of worship, liturgical and free. In the early days of the Evangelical Revival, Methodists worshipped in their Parish Churches. During the greater part of (John) Wesley's lifetime the distinctive Methodist services were not held on Sundays during church hours. When held these followed a simple sequence comprising the use of (Charles) Wesley's hymns, extempore prayer, the reading of the scriptures and the preaching of the word, it being generally assumed that members of the 'Societies' had already taken part in public worship according to the order of *The Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>43</sup>

The trend, following John Wesley's death, was for the freer form of worship increasingly to predominate, and the intention behind the publication of *Divine Worship* was to redress the balance.

In preparing and presenting this book of *Divine Worship* we have been guided by the conviction that both traditions have elements of value which should be carefully conserved and blended.<sup>44</sup>

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42 *Divine Worship* p. 9

43 *Divine Worship* p. 17

44 *Divine Worship* p. 18

## 1.8 THE BOOK OF OFFICES 1936.

*The Book of Offices*, containing various forms of service, was authorised for use in the Methodist Church by the Conference meeting in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1936.

These forms of service have been prepared by the direction of the Conference for the use of the Methodist people, now happily united into one great Church.<sup>45</sup>

In compiling *The Book of Offices*, it was claimed, due attention had been paid to the wealth of liturgical devotion from all the main sections of the universal Church in both east and west, and from ancient to modern times.

The wealth of liturgical devotion which is the noble heritage of the universal Church has been largely used, and forms of worship belonging to the East and the West, to ancient times and to more modern days, have all been explored to enrich these pages.<sup>46</sup>

The Book, however, was in fact, in several of its liturgies, following the precedent set by John Wesley, based on services in *The Book of Common Prayer*, including Morning Prayer, as used in many former Wesleyan Churches. Distinctly Methodist services were also included, such as the Covenant Service, Ordination of Ministers and Recognition of Local Preachers.

Whilst including the Wesleyan tradition, that of the Primitives and Uniteds was not forgotten.

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<sup>45</sup> *The Book of Offices* (London, MPH, 1936) p. 7

<sup>46</sup> *The Book of Offices* p. 7

It must not be thought that here is any attempt to disparage the practice of free prayer which has always been one of the glories of Methodism.<sup>47</sup>

Thus in many of the services, apart from the Morning Prayer and the Communion Service, a place was given for extempore prayer. Moreover, the varied sacramental tradition of the Church was recognised by the inclusion of a full order of Holy Communion (based on the service in *The Book of Common Prayer*), but also a shorter alternative form which could be used to follow on from a normal preaching service, which specifically includes provision for an extempore prayer of thanksgiving in place of the set form of the great prayer of thanksgiving.

It is worth noting that *The Shorter Book of Offices* was also published in 1936 omitting the Order of Morning Prayer, which was falling into disuse in all but a few high ex-Wesleyan Churches. Also omitted were services not considered essential for the life of the local Methodist chapel, such as the Ordination of Ministers and Deaconesses and other services of Recognition and Dedication.

Perhaps for reasons of convenience and possibly of economy, separate services were also published as individual booklets, e.g. for Holy Communion, the Covenant Service, Baptism and Reception into Membership.

There was also published, in 1945, an edition of *The Methodist Hymn Book* bound together in one volume with *The Shorter Book of Offices* for the use

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<sup>47</sup> *The Book of Offices* p. 7

of the armed forces through the auspices of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force United Board. This was then reprinted for general use throughout Methodism as a whole in 1954. So worshippers would, conveniently, need have only one book.

### **1.9 THE METHODIST SERVICE BOOK 1975**

During the 1960's there was a growing feeling that *The Book of Offices* no longer served the needs of the times, because of dated language and sentence structure, and inadequacies exposed by the new insights gained from forty years of the growing ecumenical liturgical movement. The result was the publication in 1975 of *The Methodist Service Book*. Basically the contents were an updating of the 1936 book. For instance, it included the 1936 Communion Service from *The Book of Offices* as well as 'The Sunday Service', which, at the time, was a distinctively new liturgy for communion. This included texts from earlier historic liturgies and also fresh material arising out of the insights of the liturgical movement.

The Order of Morning Prayer was omitted, but a Sunday Service without communion was included, as was a dedication service for class leaders/pastoral visitors. A service for the Blessing of a Marriage was new, reflecting the fact that the number of marriages in Methodist Churches was falling and more couples were using the Registry Offices. More people too were divorced and, after remarriage in the Registry Office, could have the



option of a Service for the Blessing of a Marriage previously solemnised which could take place in a Methodist Church.

There was no service of Thanksgiving Following Childbirth, possibly because superstitious notions attached to the Churching of Mothers no longer held sway. Ordination of Ministers was included but not the Ordination of Deaconesses, because for some years recruitment to the Order was suspended.

The contents of the book, with regard to types of services, were thus substantially similar to those of *The Book of Offices*. Many of the services had also been published in experimental form so as to enable trial runs in the Circuits and churches. Again there was the assertion:

These forms are not intended, any more than those in earlier books, to curb creative freedom, but rather to provide norms for its guidance.<sup>48</sup>

*The Methodist Service Book's* links with other Churches is also emphasised, other Methodist Conferences and other Communion having been consulted.

Though this book resembles *The Book of Common Prayer* less than any of its predecessors it will serve as a link, not only with the Church of England, but with other communions also, for the investigation of liturgical scholars into the origins and basic structures of liturgical rites have caused a marked convergence in the forms of worship used in various Churches. The services retain, however, a distinctively Methodist flavour.<sup>49</sup>

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48 *The Methodist Service Book* (London, MPH, 1975) p. vii

49 *The Methodist Service Book* p. vii-viii

*The Methodist Service Book* came to be widely used. It stood firmly within the dual tradition of Methodist worship, seeking to be inclusive of the whole spectrum of points of view that may be found amongst Methodist congregations and their ministers, as for instance seen in the opportunities given for extempore prayer.

It is noted, again, that as with *The Book of Offices* 1936, the services in *The Methodist Service Book* 1975 were also printed as separate booklets, which enabled churches to choose which services they wished to purchase and use.

#### **1.10 DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN 1975 AND 1998**

Between 1975 and 1998 when the final form of *The Methodist Worship Book* was decided, several reports were made to the Methodist Conference by the Faith and Order Committee relating to worship and liturgy. Indeed it could be said that they came thick and fast! The subjects relevant to the production of *The Methodist Worship Book* included children at Holy Communion, recognition and commissioning services, extended Communion, presidency at Communion, Christian initiation, inclusive language and imagery about God.

The reports covered a wide range of subjects and, without a doubt, much of their findings and recommendations were, either consciously or

subconsciously, incorporated into the production of *The Methodist Worship Book* in 1999.

This contains, for instance, a Service of Thanksgiving on the Birth of a Child, a wide range of extra services for many different occasions, the provision of an All-age Communion Service, an Extended Communion Service, various Commissioning Services and the use of inclusive language throughout.

Thus the insights of both liturgical scholars and of the experience of the Church in general became part of the content of *The Methodist Worship Book*. We shall, in Chapter 3, turn to a more detailed consideration of how this book itself was compiled.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE PREACHING SERVICE**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

We have described the development of the Prayer Book tradition from the time of the Wesley brothers to that period preceding the introduction of the Methodist Worship Book.

The preaching service, the second tradition, largely because of its mainly extempore nature, is more difficult to relate than printed liturgical services because of the lack of written material.

The purported reliance upon the momentary inspiration of the Holy Spirit also means that such worship is ephemeral and unable to be captured in any permanent form except where published material is inserted into the service.

However, despite the difficulties involved, we shall attempt to trace the development of the Preaching Service in the worship life of Methodism, from the time of the Wesleys' to the present day.

#### **2.2 THE PREACHING SERVICE IN EARLY METHODISM**

As we have seen in chapter 1.1, John Wesley, in partnership with his brother Charles, encouraged the Methodist Societies, then being established up and down the land, to attend Holy Communion each Sunday in their local parish

churches, as well as being present at their own preaching services which were usually held earlier or sometimes later in the day than the parish communions themselves, but never at the same time in order to avoid any accusations from, or appearance of, a threat to the established Church. Consequently 5.0 am and 5.0 pm were Wesley's recommended times for these services each Sunday. However the preaching services often took place at various times, whenever one of the Wesleys or another preacher was available.

The preaching service was not intended to be an alternative to the normal offices of the established church.<sup>50</sup>

However, provision in this regard was patchy, because the Church of England itself did not uniformly give to Holy Communion the high priority which the Wesleys gave to it.

It was not seen as the norm and centre of weekly devotion but as an occasional, special and (one might say) festival occasion or one which was taken as a sign and instrument of special concern and devotion.<sup>51</sup>

So it was inevitable that in many places the Methodist preaching service became the principal act of worship for Wesley's converts, and this tradition began to predominate.

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50 Burdon A. *The Preaching Service, The Glory of the Methodists*, Nottingham, Grove, 1991, p.25.

51 Rack H D. *Reasonable Enthusiast, John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, London, Epworth, 2002 (3rd edn.), p.21

Arising out of his wide reading into the nature of Methodist worship as established and encouraged by the Wesley brothers, Adrian Burdon offers an account of a typical preaching service.<sup>52</sup>

It was an intense, atmospheric, enthusiastic and focussed event, especially if, as he describes on this occasion, John Wesley is the preacher, a figure small in stature, impeccably dressed in cassock, bands and gown, and with a commanding presence. Evangelistic hymns by his brother Charles are sung fervently, deeply felt prayers are offered and the Bible passages solemnly read.

All of these preliminaries lead up to the preaching of the word. The congregation is enthralled. Even sceptics present find themselves moved. Some, at the behest of the preacher, experience conversion, which is the cause of much rejoicing among the congregation.

The people depart having felt themselves to be in the presence of the living God. They are duly inspired to face their daily lives in a positive way, despite the fact that for many of them hard physical work fills most of their waking hours.

The description 'preaching service' is significant because that is precisely what it was: a hymn, a prayer, a scripture reading, the sermon, a hymn, and a final prayer. The sermon, being the climax of the occasion, was regarded as a time of high drama, even sacramental in nature, when God Himself was

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<sup>52</sup> Burdon, *The Preaching Service*, p25-27.

believed to be speaking to the assembled congregation through the medium of the preacher. The message was intense and challenging.

Every Methodist preacher aimed at enabling all who would listen to commit themselves to Christ. The sermon was the grand climax; a preaching service without a sermon was not a preaching service. The prayers, whether of liturgical form or extempore; the hymns sung with rapture; were of no avail if the proclamation of the word of God through the sermon was missing. The eloquence of the prayer; the fervour of the hymn; took second place to even the least competent sermon.<sup>53</sup>

The sermon was thus designed to evoke a personal response from the hearers, whether of a deep awareness of sin leading to an initial conversion, of an affirming of the sense of assurance of sins forgiven, or of progress towards Christian perfection. There was also the incentive of the after-life.

The message beginning with Wesley was transmitted through his preachers to the common people. It did not remain a message with them, any more than with the messengers. It became a living and joyous experience.<sup>54</sup>

The preaching was purposefully intense, personal, experiential, and individualistic, but nevertheless had its impact in the world at large, through social transformation and missionary activity. The good news of salvation was to be shared and practically applied.

The danger of individualism and self-analysis was corrected by... the wider view of the divine purpose for the salvation of the world.

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53 Burdon. *The Preaching Service*. p23

54 Church L. F. *The Early Methodist People*, London, Epworth, 1948, p.96

This became more obvious as social service and missionary enterprise developed.<sup>55</sup>

This emphasis on the proclamation of the word was encouraged by John Wesley through the remainder of his life in the second part of the eighteenth century, reinforced, as we have seen (chapter 1.2) by the ministry of his preachers, both local and itinerant. With the inclusion of fervent extempore prayer and heartfelt hymn singing in the preaching service, Methodist acts of worship were a meaningful experience for those who attended them and provided a spiritual diet which sustained their Christian witness and service week by week in the world. This situation prevailed until John Wesley's death and beyond. Already the process of separation from the Church of England, most historians believe, had become inevitable.

### **2.3 THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

As we have seen, the nineteenth century was a period in Methodist history characterised by the growth of a variety of movements which broke away from or were expelled from Wesleyan Methodism. However, this had the effect of bringing many more people within the ever-widening circle of Methodism as a whole. The separations were mainly over the issue of authority; Connexional versus local; clerical versus lay; but not relating to the style of worship, except for presidency at Holy Communion and perhaps the use of revivalist hymns.

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<sup>55</sup> Church, *The Early Methodist People*, p.10



Though there were many disputes during the nineteenth century, none of them centred upon the pattern of worship or the practice of the preaching service. The turmoil of the century largely centred upon the disciplinary and political structure of the Wesleyan Connexion.<sup>56</sup>

However, despite the fragmentation of the movement (into New Connexion, Bible Christians, Primitives, Independents, Wesleyan Reformers, etc.) it was possible to say that:

the separated and rival Methodists preached the same gospel, sang the same hymns and prayed with the same fervour.<sup>57</sup>

And the common denominator of them all was the preaching service which flourished among Methodists of all persuasions. Apart from a few tweaks in the number of hymns and prayers this had remained virtually unchanged since its inception by John Wesley.

An account of such a service in the mid-nineteenth century is given in the novel *Adam Bede* by George Eliot, which, whilst being fictitious, is nevertheless an accurate description of worship as recalled in the author's own experience. The novel, written in 1859, begins the sermon with the same text, co-incidentally, that John Wesley used in his first open air preaching in Bristol.

Dinah Morris is a Methodist lay preacher who conducts an open air service in the village of Hayslope

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<sup>56</sup> Burdon, *The Preaching Service*, p.29

<sup>57</sup> Wakefield G. S. *Methodist Spirituality*, Peterborough, 1999, pp. 51 & 53

with a clear but not loud voice on the text 'the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor' ... She was not preaching as she heard others preach, but speaking directly from her own emotions, and under the inspiration of her own simple faith. <sup>58</sup>

She concludes with a direct personal appeal to those who had gathered to listen, inviting them to repent and to receive the 'joyous salvation which God offers through the cross of Christ'. The service closed with a hymn, there being at least one 'conversion'.

Dinah had been speaking at least an hour, and the reddening light of the parting day seemed to give a solemn emphasis to her closing words. The stranger, who had been interested in the course of her sermon, as if it had been the development of a drama – for there is this source of fascination in all sincere unpremeditated eloquence, which opens to one the inward drama of the speaker's emotions – now turned his horse aside and pursued his way.<sup>59</sup>

Reading the full sermon through, the content represents what might have been expected of the biblical and theological standards of the time in an intelligent lay person. Dinah could not have preached it without being literate and knowledgeable about the Bible and perceptive about real life. She is presented as a typical local preacher of that period.

The second half of the century saw Methodism as a whole grow to its maximum size numerically with the appearance of 'princes of the pulpit', further emphasising the importance with which the preaching service was regarded. This was especially so in the great Methodist Central Halls built in

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58 Eliot G. *Adam Bede*, London, Zodiac Press, 1962 edn., p.26f

59 Eliot G. *Adam Bede*, p.27

the period 1890 – 1910, in the centres of large towns and cities to accommodate 1,000 to 2,000 people or more. They were regarded as ‘open air meetings with the roof on’ and the preachers appointed to them proclaimed their message in flamboyant and dramatic style. The content of the service (music, hymns, prayers and readings) was designed to build up to its climax, the sermon, with a popular and entertaining character, but nevertheless containing the challenge of the gospel, often with an emphasis relating to the social problems of cities at the time. Gordon Wakefield comments:

The last fifty years of the nineteenth century was the era of great preachers, and Methodist spirituality was undoubtedly influenced by the cult of the pulpit. ... [However] The pre-eminence of the sermon could make the rest of the service but ‘preliminaries’ and it led to a failure to understand liturgy as well as a tyranny of words.<sup>60</sup>

The ‘cult of the pulpit’ was therefore to the detriment of liturgical quality. Adrian Burdon, in his researches into the Methodist preaching service, demonstrates that over the period of the nineteenth century its content had developed from a basic simplicity to an order with considerably more content. For instance, a typical service in the early 1800’s would have been: hymn; prayer; reading and sermon; hymn; prayer and blessing. The hymns were ‘lined out’ for the congregation to sing them and so would take longer than if they were sung straight.

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<sup>60</sup> Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, p.51 & 53

With advances in literacy, printing, music and the use of instruments (organs), the introduction of choirs, and services being held at more convenient times, the preaching service, by the end of the century (c1890), had become a more elaborate occasion, typically: hymn; prayer and Lord's Prayer; hymn (or chant), Old Testament lesson; hymn; New Testament lesson; hymn; sermon; hymn; prayer and blessing.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, in many of the larger churches, the choir would sing one or two anthems.

On into the twentieth century the role of the preacher, whether ministerial or lay, had become predominant and congregations regarded their 'performance' in the pulpit as being crucial to the quality of a service.

#### **2.4 THE TWENTIETH CENTURY TO 1960: UNION AND CONSOLIDATION**

Negotiations prior to Methodist Union gave no attention to the nature of worship of whichever tradition but had mostly to do with Church polity.

Upon coming together in 1932, the Connexions found that, as far as their use of the preaching service was concerned, they were not so very far from each other.<sup>62</sup>

In fact the preaching service, by this time, had evolved into an order almost as fixed as any liturgy, but without being printed. It was underpinned by a particular logic and a theology which lent a certain gravitas to its structure, and from which preachers rarely deviated. The compulsory training of local preachers, introduced by the newly united Conference in 1936 was another factor which, albeit perhaps unintentionally, contributed to an atmosphere

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<sup>61</sup> Burdon, *The Preaching Service*, p.30-33

<sup>62</sup> Burdon, *The Preaching Service*, p.29

of conformity to a pattern of worship which became universally observed with very little exception.

A Connexional syllabus comprising studies in the Old Testament, the New Testament and Christian Doctrine was agreed and implemented, with appropriate handbooks. To these was added, in 1956, studies in Worship and Preaching, at first optional and then made compulsory, but designed to help a preacher construct a service of worship in the mould to which most Methodist congregations had become accustomed.

## **2.5 A SETTLED ROUTINE**

In Methodism, as the years went by, practices did differ slightly. Conscientious ministers and local preachers would prepare beforehand for their services and when they took their appointments would vary in delivery, using no notes, some notes, fuller notes or a complete manuscript, from which to utter their prayers and sermons. Usually the only books used were *The Methodist Hymn Book* (1933) and *The Authorised Version of the Bible* (1611). The Lord's Prayer was said, using the fixed, familiar and traditional form, although some churches sang it. Services had become settled into a tried and trusted routine.

Such a situation prevailed until well into the 1950's and was experienced by this researcher as a youth. Worship services followed the regular pattern of the 'hymn sandwich', as follows:

Call to worship

Hymn (usually a hymn of praise with a familiar tune)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession and the Lord's Prayer

(In a morning, a children's address if required, see below)

Hymn (usually one of penitence and assurance of forgiveness)

Old Testament Lesson or Psalm (if possible linked to the New Testament lesson and the sermon)

Hymn (one which reinforced the importance of the Bible or related to the lessons)

New Testament Lesson (linked with the sermon)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession (often known as 'The Long Prayer')

Notices read by the Society Steward (sometimes at great length)

Offering and Dedication

Hymn (related to the subject of the sermon)

Sermon (perhaps lasting half an hour to forty minutes)

Hymn (one which gave opportunity for response to the word by way of commitment or re-consecration)

Benediction

All the above were usually delivered by the one appointed minister or local preacher. Inevitably the quality varied. However, by and large people attended their church or chapel and were content with this kind of arrangement. If Communion was once a month, there could be seven or nine services following this pattern over four or five Sundays, three quarters of them led by local preachers, unless ministers monopolised the pulpits, as in the larger churches. Whenever there was Communion it would be 'tagged

on' to the end of the preaching service, with members of the congregation having the option of staying for it or otherwise. In some 'high' ex-Wesleyan churches the 1936 *Book of Offices* was used regularly. This contained a full order of Holy Communion, the Order of Morning Prayer and the Collects, Epistles and Gospels.

Sunday Schools were also a feature of church life. Children were usually present for the first part of a morning service, before leaving the main congregation and going to their classes in other rooms on the premises. A children's address, situated between the first two hymns, was expected from the appointed minister or local preacher. It was often said, wryly, that the adult congregation listened more attentively to these than to the later sermon!<sup>63</sup>

The five hymn sandwich type of structure was reinforced by the content of the Local Preachers' textbook for Worship and Preaching at the time (pub. 1956) which provided a rationale for its continued use. The logic underpinning the order of service was a simple one.<sup>64</sup> The congregation began with adoration and praise of God, leading to feelings of their unworthiness and hence prayers of confession. The experience of forgiveness

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63 N.B. Children's addresses still persist today in those churches fortunate enough to have Sunday Schools/Junior Churches/Younger Churches/Sunday Clubs etc. and where children are still expected to be present for the first part of worship. Some churches have parallel services, i.e. a preaching service/communion service purely for adults with another more informal child/family orientated service led by local people as an alternative.)

64 See Morrow T.M. *Worship and Preaching*, London, Epworth, 1956, chs. 1 & 2.

led to thanksgiving for this and indeed all God's merciful blessings. A desire that the whole world should know such a salvation meant that prayers for the needs of humanity could be uttered. The congregation, in order to be sustained and to grow in their faith, were then addressed by the word of God through the exposition of scripture with a challenge to a change of life and a renewed commitment to effective witness and service.

Such an act of worship flowed naturally from one element to another and led to the sermon as the climax of the service, in which God, through the Bible and the preacher, addressed His people who then through such an encounter were led to live as His servants in the world.

The local preachers' study guide which helped to encourage this supposedly extempore 'liturgy' was '*Worship and Preaching*' by Thomas M. Morrow, Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Order. The book, published in 1956, was perhaps the beginning of a process whereby local preachers began to pay more attention to the whole of the content of the acts of worship which they conducted.

The notion of the sermon as the significant culmination of an act of worship was also reinforced by Rev. Dr. W. E. Sangster's best selling publications relating to preaching, especially the art of making sermons. These were '*The Craft of Sermon Construction*', '*The Craft of Sermon Illustration*', '*The Approach to Preaching*' and '*Power in Preaching*' published between 1945 and 1958. These books enjoyed a wide circulation amongst Methodist



preachers both ordained and lay, largely as a result of Dr. Sangster's own fame as an orator and preacher at Westminster Central Hall. Because he was so popular and in such great demand at services and rallies all over the country it was natural that preachers should regard him as an ideal and as a model for their own *modus operandi* for pulpit ministry.

But in effect what had gradually taken place over time and up to about the end of the 1950's had become the very negation of that freedom of worship which, in theory, was still espoused.

It is the freedom of spontaneity which is open to the extempore guidance of the Holy Spirit: and it is the freedom of a particular worshipping community to respond to the reading and preaching of scripture addressed to them as God's living word.<sup>65</sup>

Methodist free form worship had become almost as fixed as any printed liturgy, following the same pattern, almost without exception, Sunday by Sunday, both morning and evening.

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65 Ellis C J. *Gathering, A Theology and Spirituality in the Free Church Tradition*, London, SCM, 2004, p.27

## CHAPTER 3

### ***THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK GESTATION***

#### **3.1 THE RESULTS OF THE USE OF *THE METHODIST SERVICE BOOK (1975)***

In its report to the Methodist Conference of 1990 the Faith and Order Committee acknowledged the

... 'profound effect' of *The Methodist Service Book* on the nature of Methodist Worship since its publication in 1975. It has led to a more frequent celebration of Holy Communion in a more modern language style. It has promoted the use of the lectionary and has incorporated into Methodist liturgy some of the insights of the ecumenical liturgical movement.<sup>66</sup>

Experience since 1975 had shown that a majority of Methodist Churches began and continued to observe Holy Communion more regularly. This became increasingly the main service of the day in the larger congregations, often using a full liturgy, naturally with local variations, and that chiefly on a Sunday morning, because evening services were now in long term decline. This led on to patterns of morning all-age communion with children and young people present. At first they received a blessing by the laying on of hands, and then, as now, being welcomed to partake of both bread and wine, with no lower age limit or church membership qualification, discretion being left to parents.

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<sup>66</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1990, p.105

Another significant result of the use of *The Methodist Service Book* was the introduction of a Eucharistic element into the traditional preaching service which, as we have seen, usually consisted of five hymns, two lessons, two prayers and notices plus offering and a sermon, with little variation.

However, in the draft version of 1968 for the 1975 Sunday Service it was proposed that the prayers of thanksgiving and intercession together with the offering and dedication be placed between the fourth and fifth hymn and the sermon between the third and fourth hymn. This was a radical departure from the usual preaching service where the sermon was regarded as the climax of the act of worship as a whole.

The Response is not just 'The Intercessions but THANKSGIVING, Intercession and OFFERING – and this OF COURSE keeps the Eucharistic shape – even without the LORD'S SUPPER – which was the practice in the REFORMED Churches on the Continent and in Scotland and in the ANGLICAN PRAYER BOOK Ante-Communion Service. All this came out of the LITURGICAL MOVEMENT and the METHODIST RENEWAL GROUP which hit British Methodism in the early and mid sixties.<sup>67</sup>

This innovation appealed to many preachers who were beginning to be dissatisfied with the 'hymn sandwich', and so where the practice of an earlier sermon was introduced it meant that the preaching service had a Eucharistic shape. This one change, however, seemed to bring with it permission to experiment with other patterns and this is what began to

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67 Revd. N. Wallwork, email to the researcher 21.10.08, reproduced as received.

happen. *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975, therefore, was a catalyst for the renewal of Methodist liturgy and a stimulus to the dual tradition.

### **3.2 ORIGINS OF A NEW WORSHIP BOOK**

The first official reference to the possibility of a project for a new *Methodist Worship Book* may be found in the Worship Commission Report to the Methodist Conference of 1988.

The Commission welcomes the intention of the Faith and Order Committee to revise the *Methodist Service Book* (1975) by the end of the next decade.<sup>68</sup>

However, there is no specific reference to this in the Faith and Order Committee Report itself, nor indeed in the Methodist Conference Agendas of 1986 and 1987. The earliest reference, in fact, could be the Faith and order Committee minute of January 1987 which requests the Liturgical Sub-Group to 'get to work on the various required rites'. Additional names are suggested of people who may join this group, thus indicating the beginnings of a major initiative.

Clive Marsh's search of the Faith and Order Committee Minutes also reveals a lack of clarity:

So far as I can see, though (and I've checked back to 1985) there is no specific mention of 'the revision of the Service Book' until 3-4.1.89. My guess is that amongst the many liturgists operating in the Committee at that time, it had become clear

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<sup>68</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1988, p.187

that a new service/worship book was needed/would be useful, and that 'it was only a matter of time', and that this assumption is reflected in the way that the Minute is recorded for Jan 89.<sup>69</sup>

In 1989 there was a report to Conference on the saying of the Prayer of General Thanksgiving and also the setting up of a working party to look at the issue of inclusive language. The report contained the observation:

In coming years the revision of the Methodist Service Book will greatly increase this part of the (Faith and Order) Committee's work.<sup>70</sup>

There was also the express intention:

The (Faith and Order) Committee hopes to bring to the Conference of 1990 a proposed timetable for the revision of *The Methodist Service Book*.<sup>71</sup>

### **3.3 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODIST SERVICE BOOK (1975)**

The Faith and Order Committee, in 1990, recognised that there had been fresh developments, not least those to be found within the pages of *The Service Book for the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom* published in 1989 which bore some similarity with *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975 but also significant differences. The Committee report to Conference that year said that the limitations of the 1975 book were now being exposed for various reasons.

There have been many new developments within the Methodist Church since *The Methodist Service Book* was published, and the Faith and Order Committee has received, in recent years, an increasing number of requests for a revision of the book. The issue of inclusive language, for

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69 Mr. Clive Marsh, email to the researcher 18.12.06

70 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1989, p.100

71 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, 1989, p.122

example, is one that cannot adequately be tackled by piecemeal substitutions in existing texts. It is now common practice in other Churches for the liturgy of the Lord's Supper to supply a number of Great Prayers of Thanksgiving, whereas only one is included in *The Methodist Service Book*. There has been an increasing demand for resource material to supplement the standard forms of worship, and for texts that take greater account of our contemporary understanding of the nature of God and the nature of Christian worship. It is also the case that many developments have occurred in the worship of other Christian communions since 1975, and that we need to be able to take account of the liturgical insights of other Christians ...

The Committee believes, therefore, that the time has come to start work on a new volume, or volumes, to replace the *Methodist Service Book*. To some extent, preparatory work has already begun, inasmuch as certain newly written services have been authorised by the 1989 Conference and others are being presented to the 1990 Conference. These services ... may be seen as a first step in the direction of a new book ...

At the same time, the Committee judges, on the basis of its members' own experience and the considerable correspondence which it has received, that a more comprehensive and varied provision of material for worship should be contained in the new book than was offered to the Church by *The Methodist Service Book*.<sup>72</sup>

Hesitation about the style of the language in *The Methodist Service Book* is expressed by Peter Facer:

My only memory of the making of the 1975 Book was when I asked Raymond George why the Collect for Purity was in such an old fashioned style of English (all those subordinate clauses owed more to Latin than twentieth century English). His reply was that the Committee was keen to stick to the ICET<sup>73</sup> texts!<sup>74</sup>

All these influential factors led to a decision, that it was not merely sufficient

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<sup>72</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1990, p.105

<sup>73</sup> International Consultation on English Texts (succeeded in 1975 by the English Language Liturgical Consultation).

<sup>74</sup> Revd P Facer in letter to the researcher, 17.9.04

to revise *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975, but that it should be replaced by an entirely new book or books altogether. Thus there was a growing sense that a new worship book was required to 'serve the present age', which resulted in the Methodist Conference in 1990 authorising the Faith and Order Committee to begin work on a successor to the Service Book. Nine years later *The Methodist Worship Book* was to be the result.

Initially it was thought that a two-volume production would be necessary, one containing 'standard forms' and the second containing 'resource material'. The Faith and Order Committee's intention was to produce firm proposals and outline services for the Conference of 1991, with the provisional date for the draft of the whole book(s) being the Conference of 1995. The Methodist Conference of 1990 therefore, agreed the following resolution:

The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to begin work on the revision of the Methodist Service Book and to present a report on progress, giving details of the proposed content of the revised book to the Conference of 1991.<sup>75</sup>

### **3.4 A STEP BACKWARD?**

A second resolution at the same Conference was, in fact, one that was lost:

The Conference directs that the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, 1936 Service, be *not* included in the proposed new service book.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, 1990, p.106

<sup>76</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, 1990, p.106

The first resolution shows that the Conference was still thinking in terms of a revision of the 1975 book and not a replacement. The second resolution meant that links with *The Book of Offices* 1936 containing this version of Holy Communion based on the one in *The Book of Common Prayer*, were to be preserved. However, this second resolution, as we shall see, was overturned by Conference in 1997 when it was agreed that the 1936 service should *not* be included. To be quite clear, the intention of the 1990 Conference was that the 1936 service of Holy Communion should be included in the new book.

In 1991, the Faith and Order Committee presented a draft outline of the proposed contents of a new Methodist Worship Book, requesting permission to bring a more detailed report in 1992 or 1993. The magnitude of the task to be undertaken was beginning to be apparent and the time needed to complete the book was going to be longer than had been anticipated.

Additionally, at the same Conference, the Faith and Order Committee proposed a significant change in the usual procedures, which would further lengthen the process of producing the new book by a few more years. The following proposal was agreed by Conference:

The Faith and Order Committee believes that it is of the utmost importance that the widest possible trial of new material, and consultation about it, should take place before the Conference is asked to authorise it. The Committee therefore requests the Conference to permit it to publish draft services, not seen or authorised



by the Conference, in a form which can readily be copied and used by local churches, so as to allow experiment and wide consultation to take place in an effective and inexpensive way before any new material is presented for the Conference's authorisation.<sup>77</sup>

In the event, it appears that the demand for such participation exceeded the expectations of the Faith and Order Committee, which reported to the 1992 Methodist Conference as follows:

In the light of the comments it receives, the Committee hopes to bring a detailed report on the proposed content of the new service book or books to the Conference of 1993.<sup>78</sup>

### **3.5. SLOW BUT SURE PROGRESS**

Thus at the Methodist Conference in 1993, the Faith and Order Committee was able to give a progress report on its work and also a suggested outline of contents for the new *Methodist Worship Book*. The Committee was still receiving comments on the trial services and was expecting yet more. Representations had been received, requesting a greater range of content than in the previous service book:

Compared with the existing Service Book, there is a widespread desire for more material rather than less. The provisions of MSB with regard to funerals, for example, are thought by many people to be inadequate and other material, like a service for a stillborn child or prayers to accompany the burial or scattering of ashes have been requested.

Awareness of the Christian year is much greater among British Methodists than once was the case, and the idea of seasonal services has been greeted enthusiastically by many correspondents.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1991, p.188

<sup>78</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1992, p.124

<sup>79</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1993, p.247

Feedback also indicated that one book, rather than two, would be more acceptable, so long as it included this greater variety of material. However, it was suggested that a set of separate booklets could be published, as with *The Methodist Service Book* 1975, which some Churches might prefer to purchase rather than the complete book. These would consist of the orders of Holy Communion and the Initiation Services.

The 1993 Conference received and debated a Memorial from the Sheffield District Synod, making a significant reply, which was to determine the shape of the services generally known as the 'Public Offices'. The Memorial was as follows:

The Sheffield Synod requests Conference to instruct the Faith and Order Committee, in preparing the new Methodist Service Book, to bear in mind the needs of those whose reading skills are limited, and whose contact with the Church is minimal. In particular it asks that a Service of Baptism be produced in plain style and simple English.<sup>80</sup>

Those who proposed the memorial seem to have had in mind people who attend Church only for baptisms, weddings and funerals and possibly major festivals such as Christmas or Easter, and who have limited literacy skills. It is not stated, but presumably it is the Service of Infant Baptism which is intended, when young couples, who could be married but are often co-habitants, or single parents, bring their child for baptism, frequently with many relatives and friends, who often appear not to be at ease on such an occasion.

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<sup>80</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, 1993, p.247

The Faith and Order Committee responded to the Memorial by saying that, in the cause of 'simplicity', it is not necessary for congregations to use the book at all!

Though the proposed new service book will contain an abundance of material, there will be many occasions when it will be sufficient for the leader of worship alone to be reading from the book.<sup>81</sup>

Defining 'simple English' moreover was by no means easy. Did it mean trying to avoid unnecessarily complex language and sentence structure?

The rich, Biblically based theological language which informs our worship finds expression in liturgical language which to some extent needs to be learned by those who come to share in it ... Good liturgical language creates a sense of mystery ... an attempt to produce service in a style which is immediately accessible to every one would run the risk of impoverishing worship by depriving it of a rich expression of the faith that underlies Christian worship.<sup>82</sup>

The Conference adopted the reply of the Faith and Order Committee to the Sheffield Memorial. From this example it is clear that the issue of inclusiveness for those with limited literacy skills was a live one but also difficult to deal with.

### **3.6 GETTING THERE**

When the Methodist Conference met in Leeds in 1994, the Faith and Order Committee presented a further interim report, due to the fact that the draft services were still on trial in the Churches and the Circuits.

It is hoped that the Committee will be able to revise all drafts in the light of the comments it receives and to present a full (draft)

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81 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, 1993, p.247

82 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, 1993, p.247

text (of the whole book) for approval at the conference of 1997.<sup>83</sup>

The Conference agreed to appoint additional members to the Faith and Order committee in order to cope with the expected increase in workload so as to meet the deadline of June 1997.

At the Conference of 1995 in Bristol the Committee proposed to the Conference that the draft Ordination Services for both presbyters (ministers) and deacons be given trials in 1996 to enable comments upon them to be submitted.

The Conference authorises the use of The Ordination of Presbyters, usually called Ministers and The Ordination of Deacons and Deaconesses at the services of Ordination to be held during the Conference of 1996.<sup>84</sup>

### **3.7 THE DEADLINE APPROACHES**

In 1996 it was reported to the Blackpool Conference that the process of the trial use of the draft services was now almost complete and that the deadline for comments to be fed back was imminent. Already the process of revision in light of comments received was under way. Because the amount of feedback received exceeded all expectations, the work of the Revision Committee, which was considering every submission, was taking longer than had been anticipated.

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83 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1994, p.303

84 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1995, p.232

The Faith and Order Committee hoped that the final version of *The Methodist Worship Book* would be published in time for congregations to use at Easter 1999. Therefore the contents would need to be authorised at the Methodist Conference in July 1998. In accepting the report of the Committee, the Conference agreed to this timetable.

Two other significant decisions were made by the Conference in 1996, on resolution from the Committee. First, extended authorisation was agreed for the trial use of the Ordination Services into 1997, with final revisions to be made by 1998, for inclusion in the new book. Second, it was agreed to adopt *The Revised Common Lectionary*, published in 1992, for use throughout the Methodist Church. This was already in use ecumenically in the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. It would be incorporated into the new worship book with appropriate variations, for its use throughout Methodism.

### **3.8 FINE TUNING**

At the London Conference in 1997 the Faith and Order Committee reported that following the trial use of services and taking into account the comments received, it would be possible to bring the draft of the whole book for approval in 1998. There was debate and decision on three aspects of the content of the new worship book.

First, a Memorial to Conference from the Lowestoft and East Suffolk Circuit asked that the new worship book should

... include the Prayer of Humble Access as an option in each of the new orders of Holy Communion.<sup>85</sup>

The reply, which was adopted by the Conference, stated that:

The Faith and Order committee intended to include this prayer as an option in four of the services, so that it was available as an option on 42 out of the 52 Sundays of the year.<sup>86</sup>

In fact, it was also said that the version of the prayer offered for trial use was closer to the original prayer of Cranmer contained in *The Book of Common Prayer*. This version and the 1975 version would be given as options.

Second, a notice of motion at the Conference of 1996 (eventually withdrawn), asked the Faith and Order Committee to consider the form of words used in declarations of forgiveness, blessings and dismissals, and whether or not the president at Holy Communion should use "you" or "us". The former was seen as implying a more priestly function than the latter, which emphasised more the priesthood of all believers. However, the Committee proposed, and it was agreed by Conference, that both of the forms should be included in most services, so that a choice could be made as to which one to use.

Third, the issue as to whether or not to include the 1936 Order of Holy Communion was finally resolved. The Faith and Order Committee proposed, and Conference agreed, that the service *not* be included in the new worship book, thus reversing the decision taken at the 1990 Conference. The argument was that it was by no means clear that there was still a demand

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<sup>85</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1997, p.250

<sup>86</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, 1997, p.250

for the 1936 service now that the 1975 service had been in use for more than twenty years. Those churches that still wanted to use it would have enough old books containing it, and so there was no need to print it yet again. It was hoped that the variety of provision in the new book would meet the needs of the wide cross section of views amongst Methodist congregations. One tradition, going back to Cranmer and Wesley, was thus finally laid to rest.

### **3.9 DECISION TIME**

The Methodist Conference of 1998 had before it the latest draft services, and dealt with a number of proposed amendments that came from members of the Conference. Right to the last, opportunity was there to make suggestions for consideration about the content of the book. Conference finally approved the contents of the new worship book and authorised its use throughout British Methodism.

The Faith and Order Committee, in 1998, reported that over 20,000 copies of the original draft services had been purchased and many of these, presumably, photocopied in addition, for trial use. Consequently over one thousand letters were received commenting on the content of the services. All of these were duly considered by the small Revision Committee and amendments made to services as a result. The final drafts of the services, therefore, were significantly different in many respects from earlier drafts. What was claimed to be the largest consultation exercise ever held across

the British Methodist Connexion was now at an end. The Faith and Order Committee report stated:

The Liturgical Sub-committee was assisted in its work, not only by the comments received from around the Connexion, but also by the advice of many consultants, both Methodist and from other Churches, from Britain and from other parts of the world.<sup>87</sup>

It was also reported that the Liturgical Sub-committee had met over thirty times since 1990, covering a period of seventy-one days in total. In addition the various sub-groups had met to work on the drafting and the revision of the services. A Conference resolution expressed its appreciation for the work undertaken:

The Conference expresses its gratitude to the members of the Liturgical Sub-committee for their work in the preparation of *The Methodist Worship Book*.<sup>88</sup>

The production of *The Methodist Worship Book* could now go ahead.

The Conference adopts each of the services and other material printed in the draft of *The Methodist Worship Book* and revised by the Conference, and authorises their use in the Methodist Church.<sup>89</sup>

The book was published and available for use on Easter Sunday 1999, and so became the latest in the long line of Methodist Worship and Service Books whose lineage may be traced back to John Wesley himself, and indeed, back to *The Book of Common Prayer* of 1662. The production of the book was mainly designed to enrich the liturgical element of the twofold practice which, as we have seen, has characterised Methodist worship since the early

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87 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1998, p.127

88 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, p.127

89 *Methodist Conference Agenda*, p.127



days. Before we undertake research into how *The Methodist Worship Book* has been received and the effect this has had on Methodist worship generally, it will be useful to compare its contents with those of its predecessors, and then to go on to look at the process of compilation itself.

### 3.10 FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW: A COMPARISON

With the Methodist Conference giving its final approval *The Methodist Worship Book* was published and began to be used by the churches at Easter 1999. Having 605 pages, it was the most comprehensive worship book ever to be published by the Methodist Church and its previous denominations. A comparison of the trinity of service books published since Methodist union in 1932 will give some indication of the way that developments have taken place and an indication of certain trends which have occurred.

| <p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>The Methodist Worship Book 1999</i></b><br/> <b><i>The Methodist Service Book 1975</i></b><br/> <b><i>The Book of Offices 1936</i></b><br/> <b>Comparative Table of Contents</b></p>        |      |      |      |
|--|------|------|------|
| <p style="text-align: center;">* indicates a service included in whatever book<br/>           L: indicates a service published as a separate leaflet<br/>           DW: indicates a service published in Divine Worship 1935</p> |      |      |      |
| Service  | 1999 | 1975 | 1936 |
| Morning Prayer (from BCP)  | -    | -    | *    |
| Daily Prayer Morning   | *    | -    | DW   |
| Evening  | *    | -    | DW   |
| Daily Services First   | *    | -    | -    |
| Daily Services Second  | *    | -    | -    |
| Guidance for ordering a morning, afternoon or evening service with resource material   | *    | -    | -    |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Entry into the Church</b>                      |   |   |   |
| Baptism/Adult/Young Children/Confirmation         | * | - | - |
| Baptism/Adult/Confirmation                        | * | * | * |
| Baptism/Young Children/Infant                     | * | * | * |
| Confirmation/Reception                            | * | * | * |
| Baptism/Young Children/Confirmation               | * | * | * |
| <b>Communion Services</b>                         |   |   |   |
| Advent  | * | - | - |
| Christmas/Epiphany                                | * | - | - |
| Ash Wednesday                                     | * | - | - |
| Lent/Passiontide                                  | * | - | - |
| Easter/Ascension                                  | * | - | - |
| Pentecost/Times of Renewal                        | * | - | - |
| Ordinary 1  | * | - | - |
| Ordinary 2  | * | - | - |
| Ordinary 3  | * | - | - |
| Guidance for Ordering a Service of Holy Communion | * | - | - |
| Home and Hospital                                 | * | - | - |
| Extended  | * | - | - |
| 1936 Communion                                    | - | * | * |
| 1936 Communion (Shorter Alternative)              | - | - | * |
| 1975 Sunday Service                               | - | * | - |
| 1975 Sunday (Preaching)Service                    | - | * | - |
| <b>Holy Week Services</b>                         |   |   |   |
| Palm Sunday                                       | * | - | - |
| Maundy Thursday                                   | * | - | - |
| Good Friday                                       | * | - | - |
| Easter Vigil                                      | * | - | - |
| <b>Covenant and Ordination Services</b>           |   |   |   |
| Covenant Service                                  | - | * | * |
| Covenant Service (with Communion)                 | * | - | - |
| Ordination of Presbyters (Ministers)              | * | * | * |
| Ordination of Deacon/esses                        | * | - | * |
| <b>Admission/Commissioning/Welcome Services</b>   |   |   |   |
| Local Preachers                                   | * | * | * |
| Lay Workers                                       | * | - | - |
| Pastoral Visitors/Class Leaders                   | * | * | - |

|   |   |   |    |
|---|---|---|----|
| Workers with Children/Young People/Sunday School Teachers | * | * | *  |
| Worship Leaders   | * | - | -  |
| Reception of Members from Other Communions                | * | - | -  |
| Welcome/Ministers/Probationers/Deacon/esses               | * | L | -  |
| <b>Marriage and Pastoral Services</b>                     |   |   |    |
| Marriage  | * | * | *  |
| Marriage Blessing   | * | * | -  |
| Thanksgiving/Birth/Adoption                               | * | - | *  |
| Celebration of Christian Renewal                          | * | - | -  |
| Healing and Wholeness                                     | * | - | -  |
| Repentance and Reconciliation                             | * | - | -  |
| Prayers with the Dying                                    | * | - | -  |
| <b>Funeral and Related</b>                                |   |   |    |
| Prayers in Home or Hospital after a Death                 | * | - | -  |
| Commendation  | * | - | -  |
| Vigil   | * | - | -  |
| Funeral and Committal                                     | * | * | *  |
| Funeral/Committal and Service of Thanksgiving             | * | - | -  |
| Funeral of a Child  | * | * | *  |
| Funeral of a Stillborn Child                              | * | - | -  |
| Burial of Ashes   | * | - | -  |
| <b>Blessing and Dedication</b>                            |   |   |    |
| A Home  | * | - | -  |
| Laying a Foundation Stone                                 | * | - | DW |
| Dedication of a Church/ Furnishings                       | * | - | DW |
| <b>Calendar, Collects and Lectionary</b>                  |   |   |    |
| Moveable Dates  | * | - | -  |
| Collects  | * | * | *  |
| Lectionary (as current at the time)                       | * | * | *  |

The Prayer Book practice of the Wesley brothers has been phased out and replaced by other liturgies. The Order for Morning Prayer, included in 1936, is omitted in 1975 and 1999. The service of Holy Communion, based on the Prayer Book is revised and included in both 1936 and 1975 but in 1975 there is

a completely new liturgy for Holy Communion. In 1999 nine new alternatives are given for the service appropriate for the seasons of the Christian year. Some would see this as a drift towards sacramentalism and a possible threat to extempore practice. The question arises as to whether one basic outline service would have been sufficient, so long as resource material was provided for insertion at the relevant times and seasons.

However extempore practice is in fact encouraged by the inclusion of guidance notes for the ordering of a service of Holy Communion and Daily Prayers.<sup>90</sup> These notes provide a significant alternative to the prescriptive liturgies and contain brief instructions concerning the essential elements in these services.

Insofar as Entry into the Church is concerned, the 1936 and 1975 books have similar provision for Baptism (Adult and Infant) and Confirmation (Reception into Membership). The 1999 book adds two more services to allow for greater flexibility with the inclusion of Baptism and Confirmation together for both children and adults. Here again was it necessary to do this rather than build more flexibility into the three basic services? By providing ministers with so many options it could be argued that this demeans their own creativity.

The 1999 book includes more service material for Holy Week not found in previous books, including such practices as processions, washing of feet, vigils, the stripping of the communion table, genuflection, carrying of

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<sup>90</sup> *Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, MPH, 1999, p.221 & p.51ff

candles and ringing of bells, all of this in addition to the ashing ceremony at the beginning of Lent. Such rites, it must be said, are, in this researcher's experience, regarded as distinctly non-Methodist, except by a very small number of enthusiasts who usually belong to the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship. They have not been widely adopted by the majority of Methodist congregations.

The Covenant Service in the 1999 book has undergone further revision from previous orders, mainly to update the language but not necessarily the theological concepts underlying the service itself. (See chapter 6.6) A Communion Service is included this time, presumably to avoid turning to another part of the book for it.

Ordination services are common to all three books, the 1999 services having been trialled at two Methodist Conferences, where ordinations usually take place. Their inclusion is superfluous to the needs of the local church, and, as with some other services, if omitted, could have resulted in a book of more manageable size.

The services of Admission, Commissioning and Welcome, on the other hand, do relate to the needs of the Circuits and local churches, as do those for marriages, funerals and other pastoral occasions.

The services of Blessing and Dedication, which conclude the Book, do provide useful guides for the events for which they are designed, but, on the other hand, it would not be beyond the imagination of ministers, local

preachers and worship leaders to devise them for themselves, or even to use their own extempore prayers. Here again it could be argued that over provision of material stifles creativity. It may also be evidence of a desire to influence what happens in local churches.

Indeed, in general, the 1999 publication is more prescriptive than its predecessors, as for example in the Funeral and Related Services where *The Methodist Worship Book* provides material which would normally be created by the minister 'on the hoof' as s/he seeks to be sensitive to each unique pastoral situation.

If, as it could be argued, *The Methodist Worship Book* is too large, then to produce a smaller volume would compromise the variety which the Church was asking the compilers to produce. Perhaps the example of the 1936 *Shorter Book of Offices* and its companion the 1935 *Divine Worship* could have been useful in 1999, that is, a worship book consisting of necessary local liturgies and alongside it a resource book to enable the variety which was desired. In fact at the Methodist Conference in 1998 it was proposed, by John Vincent, that a shorter book be published based on the practical needs of the local church, but the resolution was defeated and the larger book alone went ahead.<sup>91</sup> In retrospect, bearing in mind the comments of a number of respondents (see chapter 5), the minority view may have been more appropriate.

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<sup>91</sup> *Methodist Recorder*, 2.7.98, p.18

In the very year that *The Methodist Worship Book* was published, 1999, one Methodist minister, Gerald Bostock, on his own initiative, published a compilation entitled *The Essential Service Book*. This contained services for Baptism, Confirmation, Communion, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Marriage and Funerals.<sup>92</sup> Insofar as most Methodist congregations are concerned, Morning and Evening Prayer would be non-essential, so the book could have been even shorter. Gerald assures this researcher that his work was not a reaction to *The Methodist Worship Book* which, apart from the Communion Services, he finds to be “wordy, fussy and uninspiring”.<sup>93</sup>

However upon reading through his book, the researcher finds that the services retain a considerable degree of traditional language and dated categories and metaphors. Some prayers and phrases are borrowed from existing Anglican and Methodist service books and the orthodox Apostles Creed is included, albeit with an alternative Confession of Faith. Altogether the book does not provide a real alternative to the official service books.

But the idea that local churches need only be provided with the services essential for their worship life is good, provided that other resources are available in order to encourage the creativity of the congregation. In fact, as we will show, there are many such resources available and in use (see chapter 5.3)

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92 Bostock G. *The Essential Service Book. Seven Essential Services for the Church*, Buxton, Church in the Market Place Publications, 1999.

93 Information provided in an email from G. Bostock, 16.12.10.

## CHAPTER 4

### *THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK: COMPILATION*

#### 4.1 RESEARCH METHOD

In order to research the process of compilation, a questionnaire was devised and sent to the compilers of *The Methodist Worship Book*, that is, the members of the Liturgical Sub-Committee of sixteen people appointed by the Faith and Order Committee, plus the three members of the Revision Committee. It was done in this way because the members lived all over the United Kingdom. Each member was contacted, initially, by letter, asking if they would agree to complete a questionnaire, which was posted to them on receiving their consent. This process occurred between March and August 2005.<sup>94</sup>

Insofar as the responses from the Compiling Group were concerned; four did not reply and were sent reminders, to which again there was no response, except that one sent an apology for reasons of family illness and two for pressure of work with promises to return the questionnaire eventually but did not do so. A professed 'evangelical' failed to respond, despite a reminder, so unfortunately his views could not be included. Of the members of the small Revision Committee, one responded and one did not and one felt that her views were not appropriate and so declined to respond.

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<sup>94</sup> This predates the requirements of Ethical Review. The members of the Compiling Group were fully apprised of the purpose of the research. See letter at Appendix 1.



It was felt that thirteen responses out of the nineteen people contacted was an acceptable proportion (nearly 70%).

#### 4.2 THE CONSTITUTION OF THE COMPILING GROUP

There were, in all, sixteen members on the Compiling Group (or to give it its official title, The Liturgical Sub-Committee of the Faith and Order Committee, as appointed annually by the Methodist Conference). Their names, stations and professions at the time are public knowledge<sup>95</sup> so we may list them as follows: (N.B. for the ministers, their year of entry into the ministry is given in brackets.)

Revd Dr Martyn Atkins (1977), Principal of Cliff College.  
Revd Dr Stuart Burgess (1965), Chair of York and Hull District.  
Revd Dr Kenneth Carveley (1969), Director of Studies, Northern Ordination Course.  
Revd Judy Davies, (1979), Hospital Chaplain.  
Revd Neil Dixon (1969), Superintendent, Leeds Mission, (Convenor).  
Revd Dr John Lampard (1967), Minister, London Mission, Hackney.  
Revd Donald Ker (1976) Superintendent, Belfast Mission, for Irish Conference.  
Revd Arthur Nelson (1952), Supernumerary Minister, Cheadle, (worked on 1975 M.S.B.)  
Revd Donald Pickard (1964), Minister, Asbury Circuit.  
Revd Neil Stubbens (1984), Minister, Southport Circuit. (from 1994)  
Revd Michael Townsend (1970), Chair, Leeds District.  
Revd Dr. David Tripp (1965), Tutor, Lincoln Theological College, (to 1992, then moved to USA and died 2007)  
Revd Norman Wallwork (1974), Superintendent, Weston-Super-Mare Circuit.  
Mr Dudley Coates, Lay Member, Civil Servant, Dorchester.

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<sup>95</sup> See *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*, London, MPH, 1990, and N Dixon, *Wonder Love and Praise, A Companion to the Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, Epworth, 2003, p.14-15

Mrs Kathryn Schofield, Lay Member, Teacher. Muswell Hill.  
Mrs Christine Sheasby, Lay Member, Devotional Writer, Preston.

The three members of the small Revision Committee were:

Revd Leo Osborn (1975), Minister, North Shields and Whitley Bay Circuit.  
Revd David Gamble (1972), Member of the Connexional Team.  
Revd Sandy Williams (1990), Minister, London (Harrow) Circuit.

Obviously, some stations and positions changed during their time on the Compiling Group. The Group had power to co-opt and consult as it found necessary.

#### **4.3 AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMPILING GROUP AND REVISION COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

The Group was composed as follows:

- Thirteen were ordained presbyteral ministers, twelve of them male.
- Three were lay people, two women and one man.
- Nine members were directly involved in Circuit work, if we include the three lay people. (3 were Superintendents).
- Seven were Chairs of District, on the Connexional Team or in Colleges, i.e. non-Circuit posts.

There were two women on the main Group, whose family and work responsibilities meant that they were sometimes not able to attend every

meeting. The woman member of the Revision Committee was able to attend all its meetings.

The composition of the Compiling Group/Revision Committee was mostly male, white, ministers. Their experience in ministry was as follows:

- Under ten years: 2
- Between eleven and twenty years: 9
- More than twenty years: 7 (including one retired)

It may be concluded that this was a fair spread of experience. However, on the whole there was an under representation of lay people, women, young adults, people from ethnic minorities and overseas Churches.

It was argued that the Group should consist of 'liturgists', and so some of this kind of 'expert' were appointed. There did not seem to be any people appointed who could have provided insights from other relevant disciplines such as theology and education. Perhaps the power to co-opt was assumed to cover all eventualities. However that may be, Neil Dixon records:

So the Liturgical Sub-Committee was appointed, a group of 15 [sic] people who met in plenary session 30 times, mainly residentially, over a total of 70 days, between November 1990 and June 1998.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Dixon, *Wonder Love and Praise*, p.5-6

#### 4.4 THE WORK OF THE REVISION COMMITTEE

The Compiling group, it seems, always had the intention of consulting widely throughout Methodism once they had produced sufficient liturgical material to do so. We note that such consultation to discover the needs of the churches about the content of the worship book did not take place prior to commencing work. Be that as it may, it was decided to consult the Connexion on the matter of the draft Communion Services. Sandy Williams, a member of the Revision Committee, describes its work:

The [Communion] services were made available through the Methodist Publishing House and many churches were able to produce photocopies and use the services on a trial basis. They were invited to send their responses to David Gamble and every response was read by David, Leo and I. We met together over about a twelve month period to consider the points made. We took into consideration the weight of the responses and the theological implications e.g. how many people made the same point and after discussion made our recommendations with regard to every issue raised. (The greatest number of replies related to *The Prayer of Humble Access*.) These recommendations were sent back to the *Faith and Order Committee* who then took time to respond to each recommendation in full committee. When the final version of *The Worship Book* was considered by Conference only two of the recommendations made by Leo, David and I were changed. One of these was to re-insert the word 'Mother' into the prayer on p. 204 and the other was to include two versions of the absolution and blessings as for example on pp. 121 and 220.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted from letter to the researcher, 10.7.05

#### 4.5 THE QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMPILERS

The questions posed to the compilers were designed to discover if the Compiling Group had clear objectives with regard to the task in hand. They were also intended to tease out any individual reflections, which, with hindsight, would provide clues to the inner workings of the group and the factors which influenced the decisions they made, and which, in the end, determined the final form of *The Methodist Worship Book*. The questionnaire was sent out in March 2005, shortly after the commencement of the research period in September 2004. The responses were received within a few weeks.

The questions asked of the compilers were as follows:

1. How was the composition of the compiling group decided? In your opinion did it represent a fair cross section of Methodist viewpoints?
2. Briefly state your understanding of the task committed to the compilers by the Methodist Church in compiling the M.W.B.
3. What were the defined aims of the compilers themselves in assembling the material for the M.W.B? What were the criteria for the selection of material for inclusion, whether from historical or contemporary sources?
4. In the minds of the compiling group, who were envisaged as users of the Worship Book?
5. In addition to the feedback from experimental use, what further consultations took place during the compiling of the Book?
6. How far does the culture of the Worship Book, do you think, relate to our contemporary culture? Was there any intention to relate to the cultures of people unfamiliar with that of the Church?

7. How satisfied/dissatisfied were you with the final version of the M.W.B?
8. Following six years of use, are there things you would have done differently?
9. Are there any other points you would wish to make?

#### **4.6 RESPONSES: NINE QUESTIONS**

The responses to the questions in 4.6 will be reproduced below in full, given the significance of the work of the Compiling Group. For reference purposes, those who responded to the questionnaire may be identified as follows:

SB: Stuart Burgess  
KC: Kenneth Carveley  
JD: Judy Davis  
ND: Neil Dixon  
JL: John Lampard  
DK: Donald Ker  
NS: Neil Stubbens  
MT: Michael Townsend  
DT: David Tripp  
NW: Norman Wallwork  
DC: Dudley Coates  
CS: Christine Sheasby  
LO: Leo Osborn<sup>98</sup>

##### **4.6.1. QUESTION 1**

**i) How was the composition of the compiling group decided? ii) In your opinion did it represent a fair-cross section of Methodist viewpoints?**

The aim of this question was to discover how much care and consideration had been invested in assembling the group charged with the responsibility of compiling *The Methodist Worship Book*.

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<sup>98</sup> The eleven surviving respondents have been contacted (David Tripp and Michael Townsend having died) and their written permission obtained in order to quote them in this thesis and any subsequent publication.

#### 4.6.1.i THE COMPOSITION OF THE GROUP

The responses to the first part of the question are:

SB: Not sure. I was already a member of the Liturgical Sub-Group.

KC: The Liturgical Sub-Committee, as a sub-committee of the Connexional Faith and Order Committee, was appointed by the [Methodist] Conference according to its usual selection criteria. I assume members were asked to serve on this committee who had liturgical expertise, as well as a wide knowledge of the Connexion.

JD: I'm not sure! I got co-opted onto one of the sub-groups well into the process, partly, I think, because I was known to one of the members of that group.

ND: The Faith and Order Committee appointed the Liturgical Sub-Committee.

JL: The composition was determined by the Faith and Order Committee.

DK: I was appointed as the sole representative of the Methodist Church in Ireland.

NS: It was appointed by the Faith and Order Committee on the basis of both expertise and interest in liturgical texts.

MT: People were sought who had the requisite liturgical skills.

DT: The revisers were at first simply members of the Faith and Order Committee.

NW: I have a feeling the Liturgical Sub-Committee was already in existence but may have been strengthened for the Worship Book. The final list would have been agreed and determined by Faith and Order.

DC: The Liturgical Sub-Committee was appointed by the Faith and Order Committee. It needed people who were prepared to write and amend material and thick skinned enough to accept the rewriting of our work by others.

CS: I'm not sure how the whole Liturgical Sub-Committee was compiled, though most members had expertise in the field of liturgy. We were later divided into smaller groups to produce and work on different kinds of services, and at that point new members were drafted on.

LO: I served on the Review Group (Revision Committee) set up by the Liturgical Sub-Committee (presumably with the approval of Faith and Order) to respond to comments received from the Connexion.

#### **4.6.1.ii A FAIR CROSS-SECTION?**

The responses to the second part of the question are as follows:

SB: I think it was a good cross section.

KC: The membership of the Committee represented a fair spread of perspectives within the Methodist tradition.

JD: I would have to say that there were real gaps in representation, e.g. not enough women, under representation from ethnic minorities, and from what might broadly be termed the more evangelical wing of the Church.

ND: It was a group that was thought to be representative and informed.

JL: I think the composition did represent a spectrum of those interested in and with some competence in written liturgy. It was, I think, recognised that there was a dearth of people from evangelical and charismatic traditions who had these skills.

DK: I could not contain in myself all viewpoints but through the consultation process sought to elicit and represent fairly the views of others as well as my own.

NS: It would not be a fair cross-section of Methodist viewpoints since not all Methodists have an interest in writing or using liturgical texts.

MT: We were conscious from the start that lay people and women were under represented. We did make a conscious effort to ensure that there were appropriately skilled evangelicals involved. From the very beginning we intended to have extremely wide consultation throughout the church to ensure that all viewpoints were heard.

DT: Just how representative, in effect, the group was, it is hard to measure, since only interested persons accept nomination.

NW: There was an assumption that whatever the outlook of the members they had to be liturgists.



DC: The Liturgical Sub-Committee itself had a reasonable spread of those who would use a service book. There was a bias towards ministers, but this probably fairly represented potential users. Some of the younger members were not able to attend all the meetings. Unsurprisingly, the Liturgical Sub-Committee did not include people opposed to the whole idea of service books, so that in a sense it was not fully representative of Methodism. The full Faith and Order Committee, which was more widely representative, considered in detail all the final draft services.

CS: There was a variety in the Sub-Committee as a whole, though I would doubt it represented a fair cross section of Methodist viewpoints. I felt that, had this been attempted, it would have been tempered by practical considerations.

LO: There were three of us (on the Revision Committee) who represented different strands of theological viewpoints although possibly not liturgical ones.

#### **4.6.1.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **4.6.1.A.i THE COMPOSITION OF THE COMPILING GROUP**

The answers given to the question as to how the Compiling Group was appointed presents a situation of some confusion and uncertainty. Three members (SB,JD,LO) were not at all sure as to how the composition of the group was decided. Five members (KC,ND,JL,NS,DC) were sure that the Liturgical Sub-Committee was appointed by the Faith and Order committee, which was itself appointed by the Methodist Conference. Other members (NW,CS) had served previously on the Liturgical Sub-Committee and thought that others had been brought in especially to share in the task of compiling the Worship Book. One member (DK) was appointed as a representative of the Irish Conference. Yet another member (JD) was recruited to help with drafting services "well into the process", as it seems were a number of others,

according to a further respondent (CS). It is not stated that the Liturgical Sub Committee had the power to co-opt, but it seems that this must have been the case. Some members did say that people were selected because they were known to have liturgical expertise (KC,NS,MT,CS). It is not stated what kind of expertise was sought, whether knowledge of traditional liturgies or a talent for creating newer liturgies that were more innovative.

Apparently the Faith and Order Committee appointed the main core of the Liturgical Sub-Committee, with the knowledge of the Methodist Conference, but that there were then subsequent ad hoc appointees who were ratified tacitly and retrospectively. These were added to the Committee because they were thought to have certain skills, i.e. a knowledge of liturgy, an ability to write prayers or linguistic expertise.

Overall, the compilers' responses show that there was a lack of clarity about how members were appointed and why, and the particular gifts seen as required for a group working on the composition of a contemporary worship book.

It is difficult to resist the conclusion, from the evidence provided, that an opportunity was missed to make the Compiling Group a more representative body, insofar as experience and expertise was concerned. The under-representation of women, for example, ignored the large pool of talent available in the then Women's Network of Methodism. This is evidenced by the quality of the worship material published in their magazine *Magnet* by such writers as Julie Hulme and Stella Bristow among others. Women are in

the majority in Methodism as a whole (69%)<sup>99</sup> so just four members on the Compiling Group/Revision Committee is hardly a fair representation.

Also the young adult constituency of Methodism overtly expressed a desire to see the worship life of the Church renewed. This issue received a particular mention in the document produced by the Methodist Youth Conference entitled *Charter '95* which proposed:

- extending preacher training (lay and ordained) to required specific refresher courses in new developments such as the increased emphasis on all-age worship.
- more work developing the use of a wider range of musical instruments.
- more use of worship leaders as well as qualified preachers.
- ensuring new worship resources stylistically consistent with these aims (meaning, for example, a radical rethink of the present proposals relating to the new Methodist Service Book).<sup>100</sup>

Thus, among Methodist youth, the keen interest was there but was not utilised by the Compiling Group.

Again, although the Group did consult worship books and prayer books from other Churches across the world, there was (were) no specific representative(s) from these on the Group itself. As Neil Dixon indicates<sup>101</sup> A *New Zealand Prayer Book* of 1989 was often consulted as was *The Canadian Book of Alternative Services*<sup>102</sup>. The Methodist Church of the Caribbean and

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<sup>99</sup> *Church Life Profile*, London, MPH, 2003, p.2

<sup>100</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda*, London, MPH, 1995, p.425-426

<sup>101</sup> Dixon, *Wonder Love and Praise*, p. 241

<sup>102</sup> Dixon, *Wonder Love and Praise*, p. 88

America published its own *Prayer book of the Methodist Church* in 1992<sup>103</sup>. This was basically an updated and improved version of *The Methodist Service Book* 1975 adapted for use in the Caribbean, but not without a certain degree of innovation.

There has been no reluctance to break with tradition, whenever this has seemed to assist an improvement. Nor has there been any hesitation to leave a distinctive signature on each of the major forms of service by which our Church will be recognised.<sup>104</sup>

Afro-Caribbean churches form a not inconsiderable number of Methodist members, especially in Leeds, Birmingham and London and there are several black ministers in the U.K. but not one representative was found from amongst them.

Moreover there were (and still are) quite a number of ministers from overseas stationed in British Methodism on the World Church in Britain programme or who have transferred to the British Conference. None of these were to be found on the Compiling Group.

The composition of the Compiling Group was crucial for the very nature of the new *Methodist Worship Book*. The inclinations of its members would be determinative of its contents and then again the contents would also give clues as to the preferences of its members. The fact that these other sources of quality material were excluded meant that limits would be placed on the very nature of the book itself.

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103 *MCCA Prayer Book of the Methodist Church*, Peterborough, England, MPH, 1992

104 *MCCA Prayer Book of the Methodist Church*, pvii.

#### **4.6.1.A.ii A FAIR CROSS-SECTION?**

The answers to the question concerning whether in the compilers' opinion their group represented a fair cross-section of Methodist viewpoints again presents a picture of confusion. The main aim seems to have been to appoint people who were known to have 'liturgical expertise'. It was a group which one person observed was "representative and informed" (ND), presumably about liturgical matters. There were those who believed that the Compiling Group was genuinely representative of the different strands of Methodist theology and practice (SB,KC,ND,JL,DC,LO).

On the other hand others pointed out serious gaps; not enough women (JD,MT); under representation from ethnic minorities (JD); insufficient presence of the evangelical and charismatic traditions (JD,JL); lack of lay people (MT); and those generally opposed to the concept of a worship book per se (DC), though the latter would probably have declined to share in the task anyway. One member said that since the group consisted of those who had a common interest in "liturgical texts", those who did not share this interest were excluded (NS).

The representative nature of the group did not appear to be a priority because there would be an "extremely wide consultation throughout the Church" (MT), which would ensure that all viewpoints had the opportunity to be heard. Another comment on the representative nature of the group was the remark, "just how representative, in effect, is hard to measure, since only interested persons accept nomination".(DT). If the Compiling Group

consisted mostly of main stream middle of the road Methodists there is no mention of any desire to include radical and liberal view points on the one hand and evangelical and charismatic stances on the other. No steps were taken, as we have seen, to ensure that young people and young adults had an input.

Among some members of the Group, therefore, there was an awareness of serious gaps in representation, but there seems to have been no attempt at any stage to address this issue except for the later consultation exercise. However, it could have been the case that the Group thought that the representation was adequate enough for the task it had been given.

As we have found in 4.5 the composition of the Group was thirteen ministers (twelve men and one woman) and three lay people (two women and one man), a total of sixteen. At the time seven of the ministers were in Circuit work (three as Superintendent Ministers), two were District Chairs, one was a Connexional Officer, one was a College Tutor, one was a Hospital Chaplain and one was a Supernumerary (a retired minister). The Revision Committee consisted of three ministers, two men (entrants in 1972 and 1975) and one woman (entrant in 1990). The Compiling Group, therefore, was predominately men, mainly ministers, some coming up to retirement, and who entered the ministry between 1952 and 1974. Only one member was an entrant in the 1980s' and none since then (1984). Seven of the ministers are, at the time of writing, still active in Circuit work. Of the three lay members one was a professional male and the other two were females with families,

who, it is reported, were unable to attend every meeting of the Liturgical Sub-Committee.

The Liturgical Sub-Committee responsible for compiling *The Methodist Worship Book*, therefore, was probably fairly representative of the Church as a whole, but not proportionately women to men. It was biased towards ministers, but then again they are key people in the use of such books, as they lead congregations in their worship. The preponderance of ministerial liturgical 'specialists' would hold implications for the cultural formation of the new worship book. Insights from the under-represented sections of the Church by way of cultural, educational, liturgical, linguistic and theological viewpoints would not necessarily be fed into the compiling process, so that by the time the draft edition was published, all that it became possible to do, under pressure to produce the final result, was to amend the texts, rather than being able to make any substantial changes.

Therefore there are questions which arise concerning the balance of representation of all the people belonging to the Methodist Church, and whether or not a group of those considered as liturgical experts is the best judge of what is good for the Church as a whole, even though they are appointed by the Methodist Conference. Moreover, it has to be asked whether or not the new worship book would have taken a different form had there been more women and younger adults in the group, as well as people from ethnic minorities whose cultures could have had an enriching effect.

Again, on the matter of valid representation, one member of the group thought that, speaking for himself, he should seek to “represent fairly the views of others as well as my own” (DK) consequent upon the consultation process, again raising another question as to whether anyone may truly “step into another’s shoes”.

#### **4.6.2 QUESTION 2**

**Briefly state your understanding of the task committed to the compilers by the Methodist Church in compiling the Methodist Worship Book.**

The aim of this question was to determine the clarity or otherwise in the minds of the Compiling Group with regard to the work they were required to do by the Methodist Conference in assembling the material for inclusion in *The Methodist Worship Book*. The responses were as follows:

SB: To produce a worship book for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

KC: The task was to compile a successor to the 1975 *Methodist Service Book* in the light of the developments in worship and liturgical studies since that date.

JD: My understanding was that we were being asked to produce a book which would be broadly acceptable and widely used across Methodism, and that this was a book that was meant to last.

ND: To produce a set of liturgical texts which would serve for a generation.

JL: The task was to produce a book which would be widely acceptable to the Methodist Church and which would express the best in Methodist liturgy. The liturgies should represent a wider variety of services than previously provided.

DK: To prepare a book which would be a successor to the *Book of Offices* and the *Methodist Service Book*.

NS: To provide a norm for Methodist worship at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century taking into consideration our own heritage, contemporary needs,



liturgical developments (which include growing ecumenical awareness and experience).

MT: We were charged with compiling/writing a book of services which would reflect the demands of the Church for a much greater range of liturgical material than was provided for in 1975 and which would stand the test of time.

DT: The task, as I recall, was essentially one of enrichment. The main principles of the 1975 book were not rejected or seriously called into question; but the options offered were limited and a wider repertoire seemed to be needed. Far in the background may have been '*Divine Worship*', which was praised for its great richness of prayer sources.

NW: A replacement for MSB 1975. More versions of Communion. Inclusive language. Inclusive imagery.

DC: The tasks were set out clearly and specifically in successive resolutions of the (Methodist) Conference... We had very clear marching orders and deliberately brought to the Conference in interim reports setting out what we were doing, and why, and seeking Conference decisions on sensitive issues.

CS: To produce a new service book for the Methodist church by preserving and using the best of the past while redressing any deficiencies: by drawing on present day insights and material and by looking to the perceived needs of the future.

LO: Not applicable.

#### **4.6.2.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **THE COMPILERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR TASK**

There were a variety of responses to the question. Some of the group specifically said that they were aware that the new worship book was to be a successor to *The Methodist Service Book* (1975) and even *The Book of Offices* (1936), (KC,DK,MT,DT,NW). Without mentioning these predecessors, others were convinced of the need to produce a book for the twenty-first

century, (SB,JD,ND,NS,CS), intended to last for a considerable number of years, possibly a generation or so. Developments in the worship of the Church and in liturgical studies, it was said by some, needed to be taken into account (KC,NS,CS). At the same time there was a requirement for a greater variety in the services provided, especially with regard to Holy Communion, than had previously been the case in the earlier books (JL,NW). There was also an awareness that what was to be produced had to be broadly acceptable to the whole of Methodism (JD,JL), which meant obviously, obtaining the agreement of representatives at the Methodist Conference in the first instance(DC). This member felt keenly the role of Conference in the whole matter.

The book would also be compiled in light of current ecumenical material and experience of it (NS) and with an awareness of the need for more inclusive language and imagery (NW). On the evidence presented, the compilers' understanding of their task was two-fold, to produce a successor to the Methodist Service Book of 1975, and to provide a greater variety of texts and services in the light of liturgical developments. There seemed to be a broad agreement on these objectives.

However, if, as the compilers believed, the new worship book was intended to meet the needs of the twenty-first century and to last for a generation, there is no mention of the implications involved, e.g. with regard to

language style, concepts employed, cultural forms, or of discovering the requirements of local congregations.

### **4.6.3 QUESTION 3**

**What were the defined aims of the compilers themselves in assembling the material for the Methodist Worship book? What were the criteria for the selection of material for inclusion, whether from historical or contemporary sources?**

The purpose of this question was to ascertain whether or not the compiling group themselves had a clear or common idea as to how they would undertake their task and of the nature of the material they intended to include in the book. The following responses were received.

#### **4.6.3.i THE COMPILERS' AIMS**

SB: To produce a worthy liturgical book to be used in (public) worship and privately to encourage personal devotion and daily prayer.

KC: To offer the best of contemporary liturgical writing with a distinctive Methodist character set within the wider liturgical/ ecumenical consensus.

JD: To draw on as wide a selection of material as possible from a range of different sources.

ND: Richness of content, theological soundness, euphonious language, excellence.

JL: These were set out in a variety of papers, which will, I assume, be with the F & O archives.

DK: Having joined the Committee after the start of the process I can't give a definite answer re original aims.

NS: The group addressed this issue by bringing their own views (individual and corporate) and experience of what might/might not be included.

MT: We simply tried to strive for excellence wherever and whenever the material came from. It must be remembered that much of the material was

written by the Liturgical Sub-Committee (I think of all the Great Thanksgivings for example) rather than selected from elsewhere.

DT: Comprehensibility, emotional depth, combined with corporate usability, dignity and beauty.

NW: To have one eye on the universal tradition of Western worship – receiving the best of liturgical understanding from the last 45 years of liturgical scholarship standing broadly within the Anglican Methodist tradition.

DC: No answer given to this part of the question.

CS: To produce a useful, beautiful and both theologically and liturgically careful service book to be used in our churches.

LO: Not applicable.

#### **4.6.3.ii SELECTION CRITERIA**

SB: No set criteria – looked at numerous sources.

KC: This depends on which particular part of the book was being considered at the time. While there might be an overall pastoral/liturgical sense, it might not be viewed in the same way while, say, preparing the services for marriage as it would for writing those for Holy Week. I guess one of the criteria for selection and writing would be to ask if this language/text would be appropriate, yet enduring enough to be used constantly for the next x years.

JD: The criteria were that it should read aloud well, should be theologically sound and of an overall quality that it could be used over the years. I think we were conscious of trying to tread a line between more experimental liturgy (which might be idiosyncratic and arresting, but wouldn't necessarily stand the test of time) and traditional forms (which could run the risk of being conservative and boring).

ND: Excellence was key. New texts were written as needed. 'Old' or 'borrowed' texts were used when they seemed appropriate.

JL: I think the criteria were, what is good liturgy, which will profess the faith, stand the test of time and speak to those who worship.

DK: Criteria were, naturally, not expressed in formulaic fashion – but the basic concern was to include material which expressed Trinitarian theological convictions, was pastorally helpful and which would stand the test of time.

NS: I am not sure I could state the criteria. We made various recommendations to Conference to test what should be included.

MT: The criteria of durability was clearly important to people. There are examples of language used at some distance removed from traditional liturgical language.

DT: We were open to material from all periods, not for the sake of antiquarian interest, but for good things that might have been allowed to drop out of sight.

NW: There was a need for a certain timelessness about the content. Most modern liturgies from groups and movements – e.g. Iona, do not stand the test of time. Many contemporary liturgies have a profoundly unsatisfactory understanding of the Trinity. Much modern worship is one off, groupy, and often just about Jesus! The language needs to carry depth and frequent use. Folk need to be led into depth and mystery. We consulted and raided practically all other official service books from the English-speaking world.

DC: I am not aware of any specific criteria other than those set out in successive Conference resolutions (including those on inclusive language) and the over arching requirement that the material be faithful to Methodist theology. We drew on a very wide range of mainly contemporary sources from within Britain and elsewhere.

CS: No answer given to this part of the question.

LO: Not applicable.

#### **4.6.3.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **4.6.3.A.i THE COMPILERS' AIMS**

The variety of responses shows the comprehensiveness with which the group was approaching its task, although some members were unable to define any aims at all. (JL,DK,DC,LO)

Whatever phraseology was to be used, however, it is clear that the compilers were aiming to produce a book of real quality. (SB,KC,ND,MT,DT,CS) The book was intended:

- For use in public worship and private devotion (SB)
- To retain a distinctive Methodist character, whilst at the same time including ecumenical liturgical elements (KC,NW)
- To draw on a wide selection of possible material (JD,NW)
- To have beauty of language, theological soundness, and liturgical correctness (ND,DT,NW,CS)
- To possess an element of originality (MT)
- To be enriched by the variety of views and experiences of the group (NS)
- To stand broadly within the Anglican-Methodist tradition (NW)

The Group, based on this evidence, had no strictly defined aims other than the generalities expressed in the responses. It seemed to rely on corporate notions of what may be appropriate and acceptable, insofar as choice and composition of material for the new Worship Book was concerned. However, the responses given do show that there were high aspirations as their work progressed.

#### **4.6.3.A.ii SELECTION CRITERIA**

There seems to have been no strictly defined criteria (SB,JD,DC,CS,LO)

However, various members proffered their own views on what they thought the criteria should be:-

- The use of material and language appropriate to the service in question (KC,ND,MT)
- The material used should avoid both contemporary idiosyncrasy and dated traditionalism (JD,MT,NW)
- The use of the best of both old and new material (ND,DT,DC)
- The liturgies produced should be able to 'pass the test of time' (KC,JD,JL,MT,NW)
- The theology expressed should be soundly Trinitarian and Methodist and should conform to Conference resolutions (e.g. those on inclusive language) (JD,DK,NW,DC)

Here again there does not seem to have been any specific forethought with regard to the selection of material to be included in the new Worship Book. There was a reliance on the common mind of the Group concerning the suitability of material for inclusion, which, on the whole, appeared to be sensibly balanced and theologically sound.

We may conclude that the Liturgical Sub-Committee aimed to be faithful to its remit from the Methodist Conference whilst developing its own flexible criteria 'on the hoof' as the compilation of the Worship Book proceeded. The Compiling Group seemed to be free to take initiatives with regard to the content of the Worship Book, on the understanding that Conference would have the last word. But one disadvantage, if this was born in mind, could be a reluctance to include any material which extended boundaries or failed to toe the Conference line. To dismiss and discount the exploratory work of alternative liturgists, as one respondent seems to do (NW), is to marginalise a

considerable amount of expertise which seeks to capture immediacy and the contemporaneous.

#### **4.6.4 QUESTION 4**

##### **In the minds of the compiling group, who were envisaged as the users of the Worship book?**

The aim of this question was to discover whether or not the compilers had a clear understanding as to who the users of the Worship Book would be. Here are their responses.

SB: The Methodist people, but also making an ecumenical contribution.

KC: Methodists and others. I say this as MWB is constantly praised by many Anglicans and used by them.

JD: In my mind, I hoped it would be widely used across Methodism, and would also be a resource for individuals and groups from other Churches.

ND: The whole of British Methodism.

JL: The wide variety of people who come to worship.

DK: Largely those who worship in Methodist Churches and were already, or at least to some extent, using the Book of Offices or MSB, recognising that others might also want to make use of the material.

NS: Primarily, the people of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, both members and others who share in our worship (including those of other Communion sharing in LEPs with us).

MT: The Methodist people. It was our hope that once people got the book in their hands they would suggest using material which they have read and liked.

DT: All ministers and local preachers, all congregations who wished, whether for regular or occasional use; private members.

NW: The outlines of the Preaching Service and the Eucharist and the language in Ordinary Seasons 2 Communion cover a wide variety of folks.



DC: I think we had in mind Methodists who used the Methodist Service Book and who, in our experience, were rather bored with its limited range of material.

CS: The congregations, their ministers and preachers.

LO: I find this a difficult one to comment on as well but I think it was always clear – if not often stated – that the Worship Book would be a standard document for all and would be a valuable resource even if it was recognised that it would not always be used or only certain services were used.

#### **4.6.4.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **THE ENVISAGED USERS OF THE WORSHIP BOOK**

Almost without exception the responses of the compliers show that they envisaged that the users of the new Worship Book would be the Methodist people at their worship, presumably mostly led by their ministers and possibly on occasion by local preachers. (SB,KC,JD,ND,DK,NS,MT,DT,DC) Some responded in more general terms without being denominationally specific, expressing the possibility that there could conceivably be worshippers who may be other than Methodists. (JL,DT,NW,CS,LO)

Other users, on occasion, could be members of other Churches when sharing in either Methodist or ecumenical services. (SB,KC,NS) One respondent saw the book in broader terms, describing the users, hopefully, as 'the wide variety of people who come to worship'. (JL)

One or two others viewed it as a resource. (JD,MT,LO) One regarded the Worship Book as a 'standard, document presumably against which to measure other liturgies. (LO)

We conclude that the new Worship Book was envisaged mainly for use 'in house' amongst those who already belong to the Church. Unfortunately, none of the Group mention the Public Offices (Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals) where the vast majority of people in the congregations present for these celebrations are non churchgoers and therefore unfamiliar with the language, customs and culture associated with acts of worship. There is no mention of the need to make some attempt to ensure that such services are as accessible as possible for those who attend them.

#### **4.6.5. QUESTION 5**

**In addition to the feedback from experimental use, what further consultations took place during the compiling of the Book?**

This question was designed to elicit how broadly, or otherwise, the process of consultation was. The responses were as follows:

SB: Other denominations.

KC: As I recall we did considerable consultation particularly over language, children and the practical use and logistics of the services prepared for the book.

JD: Sorry, I'm not sure. I imagine other members of the Committee would have a better idea.

ND: A number of consultants with liturgical expertise were asked for comment.

JL: Consultation took place with Rev. Raymond George, and a committee of three (Leo Osborn was one of them) on the Communion

Services. There may have been others. (N.B. The committee of three was the officially appointed Revision Committee).

DK: In Ireland there was frequent discussion with the Faith and Order Committee and I addressed a number of groups within the Church.

NS: Conference, on various matters during the process – e.g. lectionary, blessings and declarations of forgiveness (you/us issue), various informal/formal presentations by members of the Liturgical Sub-Committee to various groups, ecumenical consultants.

MT: I find this difficult to remember. I know there were some ecumenical consultations with liturgical scholars.

DT: I was not around for this.

NW: The feedback was huge. Every Methodist had the opportunity to write in where access was given to the material by local ministers.

DC: Almost every year, some aspect of the work was reported to the Conference and in many years Conference decisions were sought on particular issues.

CS: As well as the feedback organised by the Connexion, there was also some less formal experimental use, e.g. members of the groups tested it out while there was work in progress. I believe also that there were some ecumenical consultations.

LO: After the Review Group met for reflection, the Liturgical Sub-Committee made changes. Further minor changes were made at Conference.

#### **4.6.5.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **FURTHER CONSULTATIONS**

Here again there was wide variety in the nature of the responses to the question, but nevertheless revealing that there was considerable consultation, although some were not so sure. (JD,MT,DT)

The consultation process included:-

- Appropriate ecumenical liturgists (SB,ND,MT,CS)
- Methodist liturgists (ND,JL)
- People with linguistic expertise (KC)

- People with knowledge of children's needs (KC)
- The Irish Faith and Order Committee (DK)
- The British Methodist Conference, annually, on various issues (NS,DC)
- The Revision Committee and the Liturgical Sub-Committee of the Faith and Order Committee (JL,LO)
- The feedback from experimental use and reading of the texts (NW,CS)

No one respondent seemed to remember more than one or two of the avenues of consultation that were pursued, but by adding the replies together it is quite clear that the amount of feedback was quite considerable, especially from places where the Worship Book draft services had been used experimentally.

The main oversight in this matter of consultation, however, has to be the failure to consult Methodist Churches at local level with regard to their needs before ever the compilation of the new Worship Book began.

#### 4.6.6 QUESTION 6

**(i) How far does the culture of the Worship Book, do you think, relate to our contemporary culture? (ii) Was there any intention to relate to the cultures of people unfamiliar with that of the Church?**

This question attempts to discover whether or not any deliberate effort was made at correlation between the cultures of Church and society. The responses were as follows:

##### **4.6.6.i THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE WORSHIP BOOK TO OUR CONTEMPORARY CULTURE**

SB: The Worship Book has free and more structured services. What is contemporary culture?

KC: I think this begs a huge question. What is contemporary culture? Do you mean 'high' culture or 'local' culture? Contemporary culture is not mono-cultural.

JD: I think the Worship Book has the problem shared by most standard liturgical texts – Common Worship – etc.-- of feeling somewhat removed from the culture of those unfamiliar with the Church.

ND: Hard to answer – there are many contemporary cultures.

JL: There was a constant debate about the issue of the user group and contemporary cultures.

DK: The question assumes that the Worship Book has 'a culture'. I'm not entirely persuaded by this. My experience is that its content can be adapted to suit a number of different settings.

NS: I think that it relates primarily to the Church since that is who offers worship. Consideration was given to help people follow orders of service by not giving too many options, but enabling services to flow.

MT: I don't know that I can work with the term 'our contemporary culture'. I think that there are a large number of contemporary cultures. And events move on. Even six years on we are in a less obviously 'bookish' era than we were then.

DT: I cannot begin to say. There are too many contemporary cultures to speak confidently in general terms.

NW: Which contemporary culture do you have in mind? There is several in Methodism. In the congregations I serve the language is where they are at.

DC: A printed worship book is unlikely to be used by those within our wider culture who are unused to reading. Similarly, services aimed primarily at people outside the Church will rarely be planned on the basis of a printed liturgy. We were aware of these facts throughout our work but there is little point in putting material for a non-reading culture in any book or in providing a service book for circumstances where no printed liturgy is likely to be used.

CS: The use of language was very carefully considered at every point, in order to make it reasonably accessible while preserving liturgical tradition.

LO: I think there was never serious thought given to the culture of people unfamiliar to the Church, but rather an emphasis more on 'rediscovering the tradition'.

#### **4.6.6.ii THE INTENTION OF RELATING TO THE CULTURES OF PEOPLE UNFAMILIAR WITH THAT OF THE CHURCH**

SB: The Worship Book links to the past and speaks to the present.

KC: How far should Christian worship be something easily accessible to those who do not normally attend Church? What can we take from secular culture to baptise for Christian liturgical use? If you are asking if care was taken to make the services accessible, then I think the response is yes.

JD: I'm not sure there's an easy way around this. I think there is a distinction to be made between liturgy which you might create for a particular congregation/event/set of circumstances, which you can discard after a while, and what you would create for a service book intended to be used over the years across Methodism.

ND: See the reply to a 1992 suggestion in the 1993 Conference Agenda under Faith and Order business. (N.B. This relates to a memorial to Conference requesting the use of simple English for the Service of Infant Baptism. See Ch. 4.5)

JL: I think the MWB relates to some aspects of some contemporary cultures, but not to others.

DK: It was written for people within the Church. Language used reflected this – but sought to be stretching without being abstruse.

NS: Contemporary subjects find expression at particular points, e.g. Good Friday intercession shows greater inter-faith sensitivity than former generations; various prayers, including Ash Wednesday and Covenant Service confessions, relate to environmental and peace concerns (the latter in a good number of collects as well); inclusive language about human beings (*passim*); greater variety of images of God (including some which many would think of as more feminine); equality of male and female (see Marriage Service); etc.

MT: There were some correspondents who asked us to write the whole book in a way accessible to people with no Christian background. We had several discussions about that, and were not persuaded. Texts for Christian worship need primarily to express the faith believed by those who gather for worship on a regular basis. There is a long and proper tradition of using liturgical material as a teaching aid and I think we hoped that the book would do that too; in other words, that it would say to casual attenders, 'You may not find this to be instantly accessible, but it expresses what Christians believe and we are happy to talk about it and to unpack it'.

DT: The book appeals to some of the kinds of people who want to get into the Christian culture, especially folk of a verbal inclination.

NW: It is not the purpose of worship to introduce people to the faith for the first time! There is practically no language or images suitable for those with no knowledge of the faith! This line of thinking is an old wives tail (*sic*). Worship has to be reduced to practically nothing to meet the presumed starting place of the enquirer!

DC: The idea of including outline rites had been discussed by the Liturgical Sub-Committee and (I think) by the full F & O Committee. But the final decision to include what appeared on pages 51 and 221/2 of MWB was actually taken at the Conference of 1998 at the initiative of an individual member of the LSC. However I remain unsure whether most users of the book, let alone those who don't like written texts, have ever read or will ever read those pages! (N.B. The pages referred to contain guidance notes for

those preferring to lead 'non-liturgical' services, i.e. services without a printed order).

CS: There were times when I felt that we should have been a little more experimental and 'modern', but with the plethora of contemporary worship material that is now available I think, with hindsight, that the Committee was right to concentrate on producing a 'classic' service book that sets a solid Methodist liturgical standard and will, I believe, stand the test of time.

LO: Ordinary Seasons 2 and parts of the Baptism and Marriage Services seem to address the non-Church culture a little I think but maybe only by default.

#### **4.6.6.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **4.6.6.A.i THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WORSHIP BOOK AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURE**

.0A number of respondents highlighted the difficulty of saying exactly what 'contemporary culture' is. (SB,KC,ND,MT,DT,NW) Today's culture is seen as complex, not mono- but multi-cultural. (KC,ND,MT,DT,NW) One member of the group highlighted 'the problem shared by most standard liturgical texts' that of being 'somewhat removed from the culture of those unfamiliar with the Church' (JD), illustrating the fact that sometimes those who do not normally attend Church encounter a cultural barrier when they do, especially if they are expected to use a service book with a printed liturgy.

Another of the compilers believed that the issue of cultural relevance was constantly at the forefront of the minds of the group. (JL) A few of the compiling group thought that the Worship Book offered an adaptable approach to worship with both 'free and more structured services' (SB), content 'that can be adapted to suit a number of different settings' (DK), fewer options which enabled 'services to flow' (NS), and a careful use of



language 'in order to make it reasonably accessible while preserving liturgical tradition'. (CS)

But on the whole 'it relates primarily to the Church since that is who offers worship'. (NS) People who use it are expected to be familiar with a 'book culture', whereas generally our society is not necessarily so (MT,DC), in the opinion of some. It is hard to resist the conclusion that here there may have been an area of debate that was not satisfactorily resolved within the compiling group.

#### **4.6.6.A.ii THE INTENTION, OR OTHERWISE, TO RELATE TO THE CULTURES OF PEOPLE UNFAMILIAR WITH THAT OF THE CHURCH**

The responses of the compilers demonstrate that some of them were aware of the issues involved (MT), but one member of the group categorically denied that the Church's liturgy had a missionary purpose (NW). Another expressed the view that the book was written for people within the Church (DK). But the fact of the matter is that, on occasion, an act of worship provides an inter-face between people of faith, people of no faith, little faith, seekers of faith or even deniers of faith, thus presenting an opportunity, through the nature and content of the liturgy, to lead some to an initial step of faith commitment, or, at the very least, to challenge their mind set, ameliorate some of their preconceptions, and create positive and inclusive impressions about the Church.

One of the compilers thought that 'care was taken to make the services accessible (KC) Another that the Worship Book related to 'some aspects of contemporary cultures' (JL), yet another that some parts of some services 'seem to address the non-Church culture a little...but maybe only by default' (LO). One comment was that the book may appeal to 'some of the kinds of people who want to get into Christian culture' (DT). Distinction was drawn, by another compiler, between the immediacy of some liturgies, specially created for a particular occasion, which would be discarded after use, and the longer-lasting liturgies contained in a service book intended to last for many years (JD).

The replies of the compilers, when taken together, give evidence of an ongoing but unresolved debate about for whom the liturgy of the Church is intended. If it is only for believers/Church members, then there is a danger of exclusiveness. If a liturgy admits the possibility that there may inter-face between committed believers and those not yet brought to faith then that means there are implications for the nature of liturgical language and culture.

The impression of one member of the small Revision Committee provides a telling comment on the work of the compiling group. "I think there was never serious thought given to people unfamiliar to the Church, but rather an emphasis more on 'rediscovering the tradition'" (LO). However this could be

a positive thing if the jewels of tradition are taken, polished and brought to light again.

#### **4.6.6.A.iii FURTHER CRITIQUE: LITURGY, CULTURE, INCULTURATION AND CONTEXTUALISATION**

Of all the responses to the nine questions sent to the compilers this was the one to which the longest replies were given, demonstrating that here is a live issue upon which there is an ongoing debate, which will never go away and which may never be ignored. It is clear that the Compiling Group wrestled with the challenge posed by contemporary culture(s). It also seems that they reached no satisfactory conclusions in facing their dilemma. In the end the new *Methodist Worship Book* was what it was and had to be adapted and used in a relevant way in each local church situation.

However, the Compiling Group could have born in mind the considerable amount of scholarship relating to Christianity and Culture which has accrued during the past sixty years or so. Not least would be Richard Niebuhr's perceptive analysis of how Christianity relates to prevailing culture in five specific ways: rejection; agreement to that with which the Church accords; synthesis; confrontation; transformation.<sup>105</sup>

The difficulty today, however, lies in matching any of these preconceived categories to the British situation in cultural circumstances as complicated

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<sup>105</sup> See Niebuhr R, *Christ and Culture*, New York, Harper, 1951

and varied as any there have been throughout the two thousand year history of the Church.

Culture, in the view of Montefiore,

forms the background of the lives of a people who live in a country, and it is compounded of its dominant religion (or lack of it), its ethics and ideology, its literature and art, its science and technology, its philosophical and ethical traditions, and its ethos and way of life.<sup>106</sup>

Whatever the culture in which the Church finds itself, it has to relate to it in some way shape or form, otherwise serious irrelevance sets in.

Whereas Niebuhr's approach was academic, a more recent study, based on actual fieldwork, by Philip Tovey, is entitled *Inculturation of Christian Worship*. In particular he examines the East African Revival in the mid 1960's which was characterised by the Africanisation of Church worship through indigenous music and dance, with prayer and preaching characterised by spontaneous interaction by the congregation. As a result of his researches Tovey defines inculturation as

The dynamic relation between the Christian message and any culture it encounters, producing an interaction between them which has creative results with respect to mission and worship.<sup>107</sup>

In a further study Martin Stringer identifies tri-centennial paradigm changes in European worship culture related to the political and social issues of the times which he describes as 'discourses'. In describing the developments of the later centuries he expresses the view that

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106 Montefiore H, ed. *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, London, Mowbray, 1962, p. 2

107 Tovey P, *Inculturation of Christian Worship*, London, Ashgate, 2004, p.1f

Even in the most recent studies, there is still the tendency to place undue weight on the first few centuries of liturgical history at the expense of the following sixteen.<sup>108</sup>

This is in accord with an observation from a member of the Revision Committee concerning the *Methodist Worship Book*.

I think that there was never serious thought given to people unfamiliar with the Church, but rather an emphasis on 'rediscovering the tradition'.<sup>109</sup>

And in his commentary on the publication of the book Neil Dixon writes that quite a number of

familiar prayers, words and phrases can be traced back through many generations.<sup>110</sup>

But if the recovery of historic texts is seen as a virtue it is an unrealistic exercise because, on Neil Dixon's own admission, the nearest in time we may possibly approach the apostolic period is round about AD600 with the oldest known complete book *The Leonine Sacramentary*.<sup>111</sup> However, in addition, there are small fragments of early liturgies which still survive from the first three centuries CE, notably in the New Testament itself, and in Justin Martyr, Clement of Rome, St. Cyril of Alexandria and others. Whether or not any further discoveries will emerge to enlighten us remains to be seen, but for now

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108 Stringer M D, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship*, CUP, 2005, p. 57

109 See 5.6.6.i, LO

110 Dixon N. *Wonder, Love and Praise, A Companion to the Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, MPH, 2003, p. 37

111 Dixon, *Wonder, Love and Praise*, p. 37

the origin of Christian worship must forever escape us.<sup>112</sup>

The recovery of original texts also carries with it the risk that they may not bridge the culture gap from, or have questionable relevance for, the twenty first century. The worship of God's people today takes place in the context of a politically complex world which changes daily. Social conditions and cultural factors, likewise, provide complicated interaction between different groups of human beings in the constant struggle for justice, freedom and peace and for a comfortable life on planet earth. In addition to this global and national context a meaningful liturgy has also to be earthed in the local situation which has its varied needs with respect to the workplace (or not as the case may be), the neighbourhood and the family.

Only insofar as man's worship is thus firmly rooted in the concrete here and now of our common experience, and accepts the conditions imposed by that experience, will it retain its creaturely quality and develop its full richness and life-changing power.<sup>113</sup>

Susan White also detects, in the Church, a desire for a more local liturgy.

Increasingly, as people begin to recognise that the strength of the gospel lies precisely in the fact that it is able to be expressed through the countless particularities of human culture, the creative amalgamation of Christian worship and local forms of religious expression has come to be the goal.<sup>114</sup>

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112 Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship*, p.57

113 Underhill E, *Worship*, London, Nisbet, 1936, p.15

114 White S J, *Groundwork of Christian Worship*, Peterborough, Epworth, 1997, p.188-9

The task for a nationwide Church, therefore, is to provide a common liturgy with cultural relevance, which may be used in all its constituent churches, from Leafy Tree Avenue in the suburbs to down town Factory Street in the more deprived areas. The Compiling Group for *The Methodist Worship Book* had an immense task on its hands. Time taken to consider the issue of inculturation would not have gone amiss.

#### **4.6.7.QUESTION 7**

##### **How satisfied/dissatisfied were you with the final version of the Methodist Worship Book?**

The intention in asking this question was to find out whether or not the compiling group were content with the end result of their nine years of work.

The responses were:

SB: Very satisfied

KC: Quite satisfied

JD: On a scale of 1 – 10 (with 10 excellent), I'd say around 7. The real plus point is the sheer range of liturgical material on offer particularly in comparison with what was available before... on the minus side I think there could have been more variety and imagination in language and style. Some of it feels a bit prosaic and 'samey' after repeated use. There's a sense in which it is a 'safe' book – but not necessarily one to excite or inspire!

ND: Satisfied

JL: I was very satisfied with the final result, although at every stage there were small aspects I would like to have changed.

DK: Reasonably satisfied. I faced problems in Ireland because of changes made on the floor of the British Conference over which I had no say – but at

least Ireland was included in the process, which hadn't happened in 1936 or 1975!

NS: Very satisfied- though not claiming it's perfect. Proof reading could have been better for example and a few layout issues.

MT: How long is a piece of string! I am sure there are things we could have done better, but it took us nine years and the time had come to wrap it up. On the whole I am extremely satisfied with it, and still find myself impressed with its power to move people. For example, I occasionally conclude an evening meeting with 'Prayer in the Evening'. When I do, I always receive comments about how beautiful and moving people find it.

DT: I have no means of judging the final version. I have only been at two HC celebrations with the new order, and they both worked well. (N. B. This person moved to the U.S.A. part way through the compilation of the book.)

NW: With the exception of some of the collects I was well satisfied really. I still note those parts where I lost out in the Committee!

DC: I was and remain highly satisfied with the work we did. Throughout the period we consulted widely and the end result was in my view the best that could have reasonably been achieved in the real world (or the real Church!) MWB sold (advance orders ran to 200,000, one for every two Methodists!) and still sells very well and is widely used within British Methodism. That in itself is a clear record of success.

CS: As I heard many words of appreciation from congregations, I felt that we had, by and large, produced something that enriched worship. I was perhaps a little too caught up in it to be dispassionate.

LO: Pretty satisfied but recognise contemporary culture was not high on the agenda. It's perhaps for that reason I encourage other forms (or non-forms) to be used as well, especially when we share communion.

#### **4.6.7.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **SATISFACTION WITH THE END RESULT**

Most of the compilers expressed satisfaction with the final published version of the Methodist Worship Book, ranging from 'quite satisfied' (KC) to 'extremely satisfied'. (MT)



Points of appreciation are:-

- The sheer range of liturgical material (JD)
- Its power to move people (e.g. Prayer in the evening)(MT)
- Its enrichment of worship(CS)

Suggestions as to where things could have been done better are:-

- More variety and imagination in language and style (JD)
- Proof reading and a few layout issues (NS)
- Some of the collects (NW)
- Contemporary culture was not high on the agenda (LO)

One member of the group mentioned the pressure of time and that after nine years of work 'the time had come to wrap it up' (MT). Another member laments not being able to get his own way; 'I still note those parts where I lost out in the Committee' (NW).

Still another recognised the inherent imperfection of the final book (NS).

One member commented that the book is 'prosaic' and a 'safe book', 'but not necessarily one to excite or inspire' (JD). Perhaps in her mind, as previously mentioned, was that the book had to be designed to be acceptable to the Methodist Conference and that in the minds of the compilers there was always this aim, which meant compromises all along the way, otherwise people with a particular theological axe to grind would have made a fuss.

Given the circumstances, it seems that on the whole the group was satisfied, within limitations, with the final version of the *Methodist Worship Book*, as published. The Compiling Group did the best they could under the circumstances even though, in the view of some, a better version may have been possible.

#### 4.6.8 QUESTION 8

**Following six years of use (of *The Methodist Worship Book*) are there things you would have done differently?**

This question tried to discover whether or not any of the compiling group had had, in retrospect, any second thoughts about what was done, the way it was done, and the final form of the book. The responses were:-

SB: No.

KC: Some rephrasing in parts. In the light of the difficulty with collects produced for Common Worship (the new C of E book) it would have been good to have had collects in common between Anglicans and Methodists, and others, as we had for MSB.

JD: More thought as to the composition of the group, and more strenuous efforts towards inclusivity – in theological outlook, culture, gender, you name it. (I have an abiding memory of being the only woman there on quite a few occasions!).

ND: Nothing significant.

JL: I cannot think of any.

DK: Apart from a word here and there, not particularly. It is standing up well in my own congregation. The communion services have been introduced to a neighbouring congregation, which was resistant and suspicious! Numbers coming to communion have considerably increased.

NS: I think there are a few things... but I still feel very satisfied with what we and the whole Methodist Church did. It is very interesting, not to say flattering, to hear a number of C of E clergy for example, who think our Baptism rite is better than theirs!

MT: Frankly, no – well, not anything major.

DT: No answer given

NW: On the whole no. The book has been well received in the Churches and Circuits in which I have served. I am aware of ministers who have never made any effort to get their heads round it! Many no longer get their heads round the theology of the hymn book!

DC: My single most important - and purely personal – regret is that I did not press further my view that we should ONLY print the modern language text of the Lord’s Prayer (omitting the modified traditional version). I lost the argument in the LSC but now regret that I did not press it at least to the Conference Revision Committee. Of course, if we were writing it NOW we would have had other newer sources available to us – notably the Church of England’s Common Worship material.

CS: On reflection, I am now happier with it. I’m not sure we’ve quite bridged the gulf between the Wesleyans and the Prims, yet, though!

LO: Not too many although I still wonder whether we shouldn’t have attempted a Children/Family/All-age style communion service even briefer and simpler than Ordinary Seasons 2 which might also have been used on other occasions. I also regret that we couldn’t agree a common form of words with our ecumenical partners for the modern version of the Lord’s Prayer.

#### **4.6.8.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **THINGS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE DIFFERENTLY**

The responses given present a variety of personal opinions, although some of the compilers had no thoughts at all on the matter.

(SB,ND,JL,DK,MT,DT,NW)

Things that other individuals thought could have been done differently were as follows:-

- Some rephrasing. (KC,DK)
- Collects in common with Anglicans and others. (KC)
- The actual composition of the Compiling Group to be more inclusive in gender, culture and theology. (JD)
- More extensive consultation. (JD)
- To have sought to use an agreed modern version of the Lord’s Prayer. (DC,LO)
- To wait and use C of E Common Worship material. (DC)
- To do more to bridge the Wesleyan/Prim divide. (CS)
- To include an even briefer and simpler style of an inclusive communion service. (LO)

Some of the individual comments here are of significance, mainly those which refer to the Anglican *Common Worship* and the idea that it may have been best to wait for this to be published. It was being compiled at the same time and was brought out only a year or so later.

The suggestions for rephrasing some of the texts in the *Methodist Worship Book*, having Collects in common, using an agreed version of the Lord's Prayer and other material could have been met by waiting another year and by more consultation. The idea that Churches should do things separately only when they cannot do things together seems to have been forgotten. And surely the Methodist Conference could have been persuaded to delay another year or two. An opportunity for developing Anglican-Methodist relations and for furthering ecumenical cooperation seems to have been missed.

The matter of the inclusiveness of the Compiling Group has been discussed previously (See Chapter 4.6.1). Whether or not the tension between those who accept the use of printed liturgies (ex-Wesleyan tradition) and those who do not (ex-Primitive tradition and others) may ever be resolved is open to question. The need for tolerance and dialogue is evident.

The suggestion that a briefer simpler inclusive Communion Service should have been included in the *Methodist Worship Book* is a good one in view of the fact in the light of experience perhaps only one Communion service in the book (Ordinary Seasons 2, page 198) is possibly suitable for All-Age

(Family) Communion. Alternatively the 'Guidance for Ordering a Service of Holy Communion' (pages 221-222) may be used by ministers to create a user-friendly service for multi-generational occasions.

#### **4.6.9 QUESTION 9**

##### **Are there any other points you would wish to make?**

This was a question that gave members of the compiling group the opportunity to say anything of relevance, which they have not yet been able to say. The responses are as follows:

SB: The Worship Book is a great spiritual resource and is in my opinion first rate. It is worthy of our Church and stands up well ecumenically.

KC: Only that it probably isn't recognised, except possibly amongst liturgists, what a wealth of worth and scholarship went into this volume.

JD: 'Liturgy by committee' is hard, painstaking work – I have vivid memories of poring over Eucharistic prayers in minute detail, and arguing over phrases, words, punctuation! Perhaps inevitably (?) there is a tendency to move towards a consensus, and to settle for language that doesn't offend, but which sometimes does not catch fire either. Having said that, I'm immensely grateful for being asked to join the committee. It would be inappropriate to single out individuals, but there were people in that group of great talent who put heart and soul into the process. I feel that there are many things in the Book of which we can feel justifiably proud. I hope that the impressions of someone rather more on the edges will be useful to you.

ND: No answer given

JL: Not knowing the approach you are planning it is a little difficult to comment further. I hope you will get further help with your earlier questions from the F & O archives.

DK: I felt it a privilege to be involved and learned very large amounts as a result. Like any resource the Book needs to be used intelligently in a given situation rather than followed slavishly. Nor should people imagine that it is a

'last word'. Clearly it isn't. But it has given a strong core of material which has enriched our worship.

NS: I think I've noted all I would want to.

MT: One of the things which emerged from the huge public consultation exercise in which we engaged (I think it would be possible to make the case that MWB was the product of greater consultation with the Church at large than any other denominational service book in history, and I would be proud to think that that is so), was the inability of some people to distinguish between public liturgy and private prayer. There is a great deal of teaching needed in this area and the ministry is clearly to blame. Some people were asking for the kind of resource material that would be useful in private and small group devotion ('A Liturgy for Beryl's Flat-warming' to quote the title of something once published by John Vincent). But a denominational service book has to be about what the Church does in its public worship. And I think we achieved that on the whole.

DT: No answer given

NW: No answer given

DC: No – I have worked everything I wanted to say in above.

CS: No answer given.

LO: I think I have probably said them all; verbally or in writing.

#### **4.6.9.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

##### **ANY OTHER POINTS?**

The majority of the respondents have nothing further to add. (ND,JL,NS,DT,NW,DC,CS,LO) Some lauded the quality of the Book and its value as a resource for Methodism and beyond. (SB,KC,JD,DK) Two members mentioned the privilege of belonging to the Compiling group and said how much they valued the experience. (JD,DK) One person pointed out that the result of liturgy produced by a committee as having to 'settle for language that doesn't offend, but which sometimes does not catch fire either'. (JD)

There was also mentioned the need to distinguish more clearly between materials used for public worship, personal and private devotion and that to be used in small groups. (MT)

The fact that the opportunity to add any further comment elicited such a small response seems to indicate that there was general overall satisfaction amongst the compilers with the final version of the *Methodist Worship Book*, which they had produced for the approval of the Methodist Conference.

#### **4.6.10 CONCLUSIONS**

In light of the responses received to the nine questions asked of the compilers and the analysis and critique of them we may conclude that the content of *The Methodist Worship Book* could have been different:

- If the Compiling group had been more representative and inclusive.
- If they had consulted the churches of Methodism prior to beginning their work.
- If they had given more thought to the definition of their task.
- If they had given more consideration to the cultural milieu in which Methodism operates.
- If they had waited on ecumenical and Anglican developments current with their own work.

- If they had borne in mind more than they did the needs of those people who come to church to share in the 'Public Offices'.
- If they had not felt as constrained as they did by the authority of the Methodist Conference and the need to seek its approval every year for steps taken to progress the work.

Nevertheless *The Methodist Worship Book* provides a bench mark for liturgical standards in so far as Methodist congregational worship is concerned. We must acknowledge and value the considerable amount of scholarship and expertise which has been employed in its compilation. Only the test of time itself will tell how significant a work it is.



## CHAPTER 5

### ***THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK: RECEPTION***

#### **5.1 MINISTERS' SURVEY: SEVEN QUESTIONS**

Having critically evaluated the compilation of *The Methodist Worship Book*, the next stage in the research aimed to discover how it has been received by the people who actually use it and how they have reacted to it and what opinions they have formed about it.

Methodist Ministers are the key users of the Book. As leaders of worship their decisions are crucial regarding which of the services in the Book shall be used, whether or not they will use the whole of a service or omit or adapt any of its contents. Usually, ministers are solely responsible for these kinds of decisions. This is especially the case when they are presiding at Holy Communion, conducting a Baptism, or officiating at a Marriage or a Funeral. Their decisions about the way services are selected and read affect the nature and the quality of the acts of worship in which their Methodist congregations participate and influence the enthusiasm, or otherwise, with which they approach them.

In order to find out how some Methodist ministers regard and use the Book a survey was devised consisting of the following seven questions:

1. Following six years of use, have you any comments to make (constructive or otherwise) about the M.W.B.?
2. Comment on whether or not you feel the Book meets the needs of your congregation(s)? How have worshippers reacted to it?
3. Is the language of the Worship Book the kind of language you prefer to use? If you are not happy with some parts what do you do?
4. Are there parts of the services that you find difficult or obtuse, or to which you object theologically?
5. Please comment on the level of inspiration you feel that the M.W.B. adds to your services of worship?
6. How many services from the Book have you used? Regularly or occasionally? Which ones do you use the most?
7. Are there any other points you wish to make?

With the permission of the Chair of District the opportunity was taken, conveniently, to circulate the survey amongst the ministers present at the Newcastle Synod on April 20<sup>th</sup> 2005 meeting in the West End Methodist Church, Hexham. Thirty-three were interested enough to return them and so provide some soundings of the views of Methodist ministers concerning their use of *The Methodist Worship Book* over the six years, at the time, since its introduction.

Because the answers to the questions were, on the whole, quite lengthy, the responses are presented in summary form consisting of either shorter quotations from or paraphrases of the answers which were given. Care was taken not to distort their meaning and to be as accurate as possible. Some ministers gave more than one answer to each question.

### 5.1.1 QUESTION 1

**Following six years of use, have you any comment to make (constructive or otherwise) about the Methodist Worship Book?**

This question was designed to tease out the considered views of ministers and their reactions to the Book consequent upon their regular experience in using its liturgies. A summary of the replies is as follows, the number next to each one giving the total of the responses for each point.

Constructively:

It is a good, positive and helpful Book: 8

Appreciation of the wide variety found in the Book: 7

It is a good basic resource: 3

The Book enriches worship: 2

Appreciation of the provision of seasonal Communion Services: 11

Otherwise:

But the style of them is too similar: 2

There is too much choice: 3

And some confusion: 1

The services are wordy: 10

The Book is too long: 2

The size is too large: 4

The Baptismal Service is too long and wordy and the language inappropriate for participants who do not usually attend Church: 5

Language of the Book is dated and theological concepts obsolete: 5

### 5.1.1.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

As may be expected in such a diverse Church as Methodism, the responses indicate the variety of ways in which the Worship Book has been received, with varying degrees of appreciation and criticism. There are those who comment positively on the variety and choice available in the Book's contents. The Compiling Group believed that this was what Methodist churches required and so they provided it. Then on the other hand some were critical, saying that there was too much choice leading to confusion. The Group, perhaps, got it about right.

Other criticisms concerned the 'wordiness' of the Book and the unsuitability of one of the Public Offices, the Baptismal Service for infants. In an interview with the researcher, Neil Dixon said that the Compiling Group had in fact abbreviated the original draft services anyway as part of their own internal revision process.<sup>115</sup>

The issues of the appropriateness of the Baptismal Service and allegedly dated theological concepts will be considered later. On the matter of the similarity of the content of the Communion Services, this is to a certain extent unavoidable because essential elements do have to be included otherwise the nature of the service is compromised.

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115 The researcher interviewed Neil Dixon on March 8th 2005 to obtain guidance on the compiling process.

### 5.1.2 QUESTION 2

**Comment on whether or not you feel the Book meets the needs of your congregation(s). How have worshippers reacted to it?**

The aim of this question is to discover whether or not ministers are aware of the views expressed by members of their congregations. The responses received were as follows:

The Book has been positively received and the variety of content is appreciated: 18

Some congregations gave the Book a more guarded and even negative reception: 10

The Book is used flexibly by abbreviating services often following downloading from the CD Rom: 5

Alternative liturgies are used: 4

The Baptismal Service is criticised: 4

The length, wordiness and size of the Book are criticised: 9

The language is inappropriate for the "working class": 1

The language is too "academic": 1

In the children's version, the page numbers do not coincide with those of the main Book: 1

The Book ignores modern theological thought: 1

Locally written services can give more accessible language and concepts: 1

(N. B. The last single responses are those of five separate individuals)

### 6.1.2.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

The representative sample shows that most ministers think that their congregations seem to have welcomed the introduction of *The Methodist*

*Worship Book*, but there is nevertheless a critical reception from a considerable proportion of them. The respondents repeat issues which were raised under question 1, with the addition of others, these being the revelation that the Book is being used flexibly, that in some instances its language is inappropriate and that locally written services are being used. The mismatch of page numbers between *The Methodist Worship Book* and the children's (all-age) version of the communion services entitled *At the Breaking of the Bread*<sup>116</sup> is mentioned as an inconvenience. It is worth noting that this was not the case with *The Methodist Service Book* (1975) and its all-age equivalent *The Sunday Service*<sup>117</sup>.

### 5.1.3 QUESTION 3

**Is the language of the Worship Book the kind of language you prefer to use? If you are not happy with some parts, what do you do?**

This question is designed to discover whether the language of the Worship Book resonates with the kind of language that ministers prefer to use in their worship services, and whether or not they regard this as an issue. A wide range of responses resulted.

Quite satisfied with the language of the Worship Book: 16

Several respondents took a different view for the following reasons:

Too orthodox and traditional in theology and expression: 1

Need for greater variety using style of other liturgies: 1

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116 *At the Breaking of the Bread*, Peterborough, MPH, 2001.

117 *The Sunday Service Illustrated*, London, MCDEY, 1986.

Could be a bit brighter and more poetic: 1

Old fashioned in its thinking: 1

The language is not suitable for children or incomers: 1

Too theological and abstract: 1

Not to be used every Sunday: 1

Leaves much to be desired: 1

As churchy as 1662: 1

It is stuck in a redemptionist mode: 1

Prefer less formal language: 1

(N.B. = A total of 11 individual comments)

Other observations were:

Good to be flexible and adaptable and abbreviate services: 13

Use other orders of service instead: 5

Issues mentioned again were:

The Baptismal Service: 7

Wordiness: 5

### **5.1.3. A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

About half the respondents were satisfied with the language of *The Methodist Worship Book*. Slightly under half expressed their individual reservations. The findings reveal that the language of worship is very much an issue and is related to the inclusivity or otherwise of a service (e.g. The Baptismal Service), suggesting that the language and concepts used in the liturgy need to bear in mind the nature of the congregation gathered together at any one particular time. So did the compilers of the Book give

sufficient attention to these challenges? Did they consider the kind of congregations who may share in the (Infant) Baptismal Service and what content may be appropriate for them? If they had perhaps a more suitable service may have been the result.

### **5.1.3.B FURTHER CRITIQUE: WORSHIP AND LANGUAGE**

In worship the use of language expresses the thoughts and feelings of its participants towards God by way of praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession and response to the proclamation of the word in the reading of scripture and in preaching. During the past fifty years or so some tensions have arisen concerning various issues.

There were those who argued that, in its liturgies, the Church should retain the use of the classical language of Shakespeare, the Authorised Version of the Bible and the Prayer Book, which, coming from a supposed golden age of English literature, had a beauty and a resonance all of its own. However, because words have changed their meaning and modern sentence construction is different, the continued use of classical language became untenable and has been abandoned in contemporary liturgies, as evidenced by the excluding of the 1936 Communion Service from *The Methodist Worship Book*.

Even so, some wanted to keep the use of 'Thee' and 'Thou' in addressing God as a way of recognising His transcendence. From the mid 1970's



onwards, however, the use of 'You' became standard practice in liturgy as seen in the 1975 *Methodist Service Book*.

Then there has been the issue of inclusive language which is still an ongoing debate. There is a significantly growing discomfort in the Church with the conceiving of God in entirely masculine terms and also in the use of the word 'man' generically. Alternative phraseology of a gender neutral and inclusive nature is now often employed in the liturgy. However it is still not without controversy as evidenced by the mini debate in the Methodist Conference 1998 concerning the inclusion of the words 'God our Father and our Mother' in one prayer in *The Methodist Worship Book*.<sup>118</sup>

These examples highlight the importance of the nature of the language used in the worship of the Church as it wrestles with the question as to how best to express the thoughts, feelings and faith of God's people in their encounter with Him/Her.

According to Neil Dixon the issue of language was a serious consideration in the compilation of *The Methodist Worship Book*. The aim was to provide a language which was durable, albeit without being banal. Language

should assist the creation of an appropriate atmosphere of awe and wonder in the presence of God.<sup>119</sup>

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118 *The Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, MPH, 1999, p.204

119 Dixon N, *Wonder, Love and Praise, A Companion to The Methodist Worship Book*, London, Epworth, 2003, p.21.

Whether or not worshippers understood every word was not altogether important. Christians have to learn the biblical and theological language used in worship. Occasional and first time worshippers would not necessarily find church services to be an inclusive experience.

An attempt to produce services in a style which is immediately accessible to everyone would run the risk of impoverishing worship by depriving it of a rich expression of the faith that underlies Christian worship.<sup>120</sup>

The challenge posed by the presence of the 'outsider' thus remains unresolved. The work of the liturgist is a demanding one, that of composing such forms of service that are inclusive and contemporary yet with a language which is true to the Church's tradition and which has an alluring beauty about it.

#### 5.1.4 QUESTION 4

**Are there any parts of the services that you find difficult or obtuse, or to which you object theologically?**

The purpose of this question was to elicit the views of ministers as prime users of *The Methodist Worship Book*, concerning the theology they perceive it to contain and whether or not they were happy with it. The following responses were the result:

No difficulty with the theology of the services in *The Methodist Worship Book*: 17

The theology of the Book is dated and there is need for more contemporary insights: 6

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120 Dixon, *Wonder, Love and Praise*, p.22

Points made by individuals were:-

Query use of the phrase "Motherhood of God": 2

Triumphalism: 2

Use of the Prayer of Humble Access too restricted: 6

Prayer with the Dying inappropriate in a book: 1

Omission of the Love Feast: 1

Little relationship to everyday life: 1

Creeds are a theological difficulty: 1

Why bless furnishings?: 1

Absolution should use "we": 1

Some services are not in Methodist tradition: 1

Recurring issues:-

The Baptismal Service: 3

Wordiness of the Book: 1

But other comments were:

Overall seems cleverly worded so more than one theological interpretation can be covered: 1

What we have is finely and well-balanced: 1

#### **5.1.4.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

Just over half of the respondents expressed the view that they found no difficulty with the theology of the Methodist Worship Book. A minority of about one in five commented on the dated theology and lack of inclusion of contemporary insights.

Several individuals expressed, what were for them, significant issues, which, when taken together, amount to not inconsiderable criticism. However, the individual reservations expressed demonstrate that there would be disagreement on what acceptable theology would be.

The question does arise, though, as to whether there is an innate traditionalism about the Worship Book and whether or not this is a good thing for the Methodist Church and its congregations in the contemporary world. The Book represents the state of things as they are rather than giving new leads to worshipping congregations.

On the other hand, there was appreciation of the fact that the language used accommodated varied theological interpretations. The answers given represent the broad spectrum of opinion, theologically, to be found amongst Methodist ministers.

#### **5.1.5. QUESTION 5**

**Please comment on the level of inspiration you feel that *The Methodist Worship Book* adds to your services of worship.**

This question aims to find out whether or not it is thought that the Book makes a qualitative difference to the nature of Methodist worship services when it is used. The varied responses were as follows:

The Book adds to the level of inspiration: 8

Some were uncertain that it did: 12

Depends on the way it is used: 6

Involvement of the Holy Spirit is essential: 1

The attitude of the congregation is also important: 5

The Book's role is to be functional: 1

#### **5.1.5.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

The overall conclusion seems to be that, in itself, *The Methodist Worship Book* does not necessarily add to the inspiration gained in worship. It depends on how it is used and upon the attitude of both minister and congregation, and sensitivity to the work of the Holy Spirit.

#### **5.1.6 QUESTION 6**

**How many services from the Book have you used? Regularly or occasionally? Which ones do you use the most?**

This question is intended to find out which services in the Book are proving to be most valued and popular and which are not and therefore may not have needed to be included. The answers given were as follows, details being given according to the order of services in the Book. The numbers indicate all of those who have specifically used various services.

1. Daily Prayer.

Morning: 10

Evening: 10

2. Morning, Afternoon or Evening Services:

First Service: 4

Second Service: 4

Guidance Material: 1

3. Entry into the Church:

Baptism/Answer/Young Children/Confirmation: 0

Baptism/Confirmation: 2

Baptism/Young Children: 24

Confirmation: 15

Baptism/Young Children/Confirmation: 0

4. Holy Communion:

Advent: 32

Christmas/Epiphany: 32

Ash Wednesday/Lent 1: 31

Lent & Passiontide: 32

Easter/Ascension: 32

Pentecost/Renewal: 31

Ordinary 1: 32

Ordinary 2: 30

Ordinary 3: 30

Home and Hospital: 2

Extended: 2

5. Holy Week Services:

Palm Sunday: 11

Maundy Thursday: 13

Good Friday: 8

Easter Vigil: 2

6. Covenant Service: 20

7. Ordination Services:

Presbyteral Ministers: 1

Diaconal Ministers: 0

8. Admission, Commissioning and Welcome Services:

Local Preachers: 4

Lay Workers: 2

Pastoral Visitors/Class Leaders: 7

Workers with Children and Young People: 5

Worship Leaders: 4

Reception of Members of Other Denominations into the  
Methodist Church: 1

Welcome of Ministers, Deacons & Probationers to a Circuit: 5

9. Marriage: 22

Blessing of a Marriage: 2

10. Pastoral Services:

Thanksgiving Birth/Adoption: 2

Celebration of Christian Renewal: 1

11. Healing and Reconciliation Services:

Healing and Wholeness: 8

Repentance and Reconciliation: 1

Prayers with the Dying: 2

12. Funeral and Related Services:

Prayers after a death/Home/Hospital; 1

Office of Commendation: 1

A Vigil: 1

Funeral and Committal: 21

Funeral and Service of Thanksgiving: 10

Funeral Service for a Child: 6

Funeral of a Still Born child: 2

Burial of Ashes: 5

13. Blessing and Dedication Services:

A Home: 4

Laying a Foundation Stone: 1

Church Building and Furnishings: 1

14. Calendar, Collects and Lectionary:

Dates: 2

Collects: 3

Lectionary: 3

One Minister still uses MSB(1975) for Communion and one uses no book at all.



### 5.1.6.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

By far the most used services are those for Holy Communion, with only one respondent not using any at all and one or two others not using two or three of the services, but the Extended Communion and that for use in Home and Hospital are only sparingly used.

The Service for Baptism of Young Children is used by 24/33 of the respondents and that of Confirmation (Reception into Membership) by 15/33. The use of these services is however, dependent on "demand", as is the Funeral Service with Committal (used by 21/33) and the Marriage Service (used by 22/33). The Covenant Service is also well used (20/33), although it is strongly suspected that the vast majority of Methodist Ministers will, in fact, use this service at least once a year.

As may be expected, the Ordination services are never used locally. The one respondent here will probably use the service on a personal basis. All the other services in the Book are used sparingly, probably according to any local demand or ministerial inclination.

Based on this evidence, the question arises as to whether or not *The Methodist Worship Book* needs to be so large, if it is for mainly local needs. Also, could ministers themselves produce such material as is rarely used? (e. g. Prayers with the Dying; Prayers in Home and Hospital after a Death; which, from experience, are generally extempore and very much attuned to

each situation, although, of course, the content of these services in the Book may help guide any extempore prayers).

It is worth noting that all the main services in the Book are now published as separate booklets due to a demand for them.

### **5.1.7 QUESTION 7**

#### **Are there any other points you wish to make?**

The purpose of this question is, obviously, to give opportunity for respondents to share any other significant comments which they may have about *The Methodist Worship Book* and that they feel may not have been covered in the previous questions. The answers given are mostly individual and varied:

It is difficult to produce unstodgy contemporary liturgies: 1

The need for freedom in using the Book: 4

More detailed thought needed in producing the rubrics: 1

The risk of the contents becoming dated: 1

The Book's value as a resource: 1

The need for plain English: 1

The Book is convenient and provides a standard: 1

The Book can sometimes get in the way: 1

The value of a visual liturgy, use of electronic resources: 4

The value of alternative liturgies too: 2

The value of the extempore tradition: 2

The language suits those of senior years best: 1

The value of the excluded 1975 Communion Service: 1

The Book represents one strand of Methodist thought: 1  
Of the contents as a whole 80% is unnecessary: 1  
The Thanksgiving Prayer(s) is/are too long winded: 1  
Controversy re the phrase "God our Father and our Mother": 1  
The Book is not easy to use and requires detailed direction: 1  
The Book does not resonate with the life of the world: 1  
The Book falls between two stools: 1  
The breakdown of a sense of global communion: 1

#### **5.1.7.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

The responses comprise a wide spectrum of views, as may be expected. There is some repetition of previous answers. Whilst there is appreciation of the Book's value as a standard and as a resource there is also criticism of the nature of its language, its length, wordiness and irrelevance. The way it is used could compensate for these factors. Some respondents see value in the use of alternative material and the need to develop accompanying resources, which we now note has been done by the Methodist Publishing House.

As the researches continue we shall take a closer look at how ministers make use of the Book, what materials some of them use as an alternative, and also investigate the reactions of church members and congregations to the its introduction and use.

### 5.1.8 FURTHER CRITIQUE: HOLY COMMUNION IN METHODISM

It is of interest and quite appropriate at this particular juncture to consider, by way of comparison, the Methodist Conference Report of 2003 entitled *His Presence Makes the Feast* which attempted to set out the prevailing beliefs and practices concerning Holy Communion in the Methodist Church as a whole. Whilst our researches cover a wider remit it is useful to focus on this aspect of Methodist worship because of the perceived increased regard in which it is held by congregations today.

The report, prepared by a Working Party of the Faith and Order Committee, highlights the diverse attitudes and practices to be found within Methodism, from a 'High Church' sacramentalism on the one hand to a 'Low Church' Zwinglianism on the other, views mainly being promoted by the particular penchant of ministers and their adherence to whatever historical tradition they feel convinced they should observe. Hitherto there has been no formal attempt to define any doctrinal stance with regard to Holy Communion, but nevertheless all the different strands of Methodism believe that their opinions are scriptural. Indeed it is perhaps best that that no clearly defined theology exists in this matter and that a catholic spirit should prevail, being content that it is expressed in the hymns and liturgies of the Church in an unsystematic way.

## The Working Party of the Faith and Order Committee

decided to conduct a survey to investigate what Methodists believe and do about holy communion.<sup>121</sup>

Questionnaires were accordingly distributed generously at the Methodist Conference 2000, representatives being asked to take three copies, one for themselves and the others for people in their own home settings. Further copies were sent out through one District Synod (unspecified) and to individuals who expressed an interest. 429 replies were received and analysed, a response rate of 30%. Because of the length of the report and the responses it contains, we note here, selectively, the items which relate to these researches.

- The responses come from a variety of churches, from a wide geographical spread and from ministers (34%) and lay people (66%).<sup>122</sup>
- 90% of the respondents celebrated Holy Communion once a month.<sup>123</sup>
- Of the forms of service *The Methodist Worship Book 1999* was used either in whole or in part in the vast majority of cases, *The Methodist Service Book 1975* in less than 10% of cases and *The Book of Offices*

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121 *His Presence Makes the Feast, Holy Communion in the Methodist Church*, Peterborough, MPH, 2003, p.14

122 *His Presence Makes the Feast*. p.16

123 *His Presence Makes the Feast*. p.16

1936 in very few. Nearly half the respondents reported the use of 'other material' (unspecified) either 'occasionally' or 'sometimes'.<sup>124</sup>

- Although the variety contained in *The Methodist Worship Book* was appreciated by some respondents, concerns were expressed about 'churchy language' and 'wordiness'.<sup>125</sup>
- Greater lay participation in Holy Communion services, some felt, was a desirable development including a wider authorisation to preside.<sup>126</sup>
- Holy Communion is regarded by the respondents with varying degrees of importance and for different reasons including Christ's achievement on our behalf; union with all Christians past and present; obedience to Christ's instruction; foretaste of things to come; renewal for witness and service; engages all the senses; strengthens faith and care for one another.<sup>127</sup>
- Christ's gracious presence in the celebration, but not uniquely, is believed to be symbolised by the use of bread and wine.<sup>128</sup>

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124 *His Presence Makes the Feast*, p.20

125 *His Presence Makes the Feast*, p.21

126 *His Presence Makes the Feast*, p.22

127 *His Presence Makes the Feast*, p.24

128 *Hi Presence Makes the Feast*, p.25-26

It may be concluded, therefore, that the responses to the Working Party's questionnaire, being similar in a number of ways, complement those of the surveys undertaken by this researcher, especially with regard to the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*, which is regarded as a valuable resource, widely used, but not without some criticism, as we have already discovered.

The remainder of the report, as we have done in earlier chapters, gives an account of the liturgical aids used in Methodism, beginning with John Wesley's revision of *The Book of Common Prayer 1662* through to the introduction of *The Methodist Worship Book 1999* and its successful sales of over a quarter of a million, which is about one per member of the Methodist Church.

However, the report also says that, alongside the apparent popularity of *The Methodist Worship Book*:

It would appear that there is even greater variety in liturgical use today than ever before. Extensive use is made of liturgies from such sources as the Iona Community, contemporary Christian writers and other denominations, and many congregations use extempore and 'home grown' liturgies, at least on some occasions.<sup>129</sup>

Indeed, as we shall see, our own researches discovered this situation to be true when we carried out our own more detailed investigation.

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129 *His Presence Makes the Feast*, p.29

The report continues by describing the use of hymnody at Holy Communion, how the service encourages entry into and continuance in Christian experience, the place the layout of a church has in the observance of the sacrament itself, the role of Methodist scholars in the development of thinking about its meaning, recent innovations such as the welcome of children to the Lord's Table, the ecumenical influences which have shaped our practice, Conference Statements which have helped to influence the ethos of the denomination over the years, and then concluding with an outline of the theological resources which deal with current issues relating to Holy Communion and which, as yet, remain unresolved.

The report is a thoroughly comprehensive account of where Methodism is at insofar as this significant aspect of its worship life is concerned. It certainly fulfils its aim.

Through deepening our understanding and appreciation of this sacrament and through our sharing with others in all their diversity we may hope to grow in knowledge of and faithfulness to our risen Lord.<sup>130</sup>

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130 *His Presence Makes the Feast*, p.2



## **5.2: A MATTER OF CHOICE: HOW MINISTERS USE *THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK***

### **5.2.1. INTRODUCTION**

By this time in the ongoing researches it was becoming clear that the original dual practice as such, was no longer regarded as the settled pattern of Methodist worship.

Since the days of John and Charles Wesley, as we have seen, this twofold practice had consisted, in essence, of printed liturgical and free forms of worship. The liturgical strand was based on *The Book of Common Prayer*, as revised by John Wesley, through to the publication of *The Book of Offices* (1936) by the Methodist Conference, the united authority of the, by now, one Methodist Church.

*The Book of Offices* was superseded in 1975 by *The Methodist Service Book* commonly used throughout Methodism until 1999, when *The Methodist Worship Book* was authorised by Conference for use in the churches. The 1975 Book incorporated a revised version of the 1936 Communion Service for those who still wished to use a traditional form of words.

Before 1975, as far as Holy Communion was concerned, taking the wider perspective, in both Methodist and Anglican churches, worshippers could have the sense that all over the world congregations were using the same basic liturgy, obviously with minor local variations and in the language of the country concerned.

Since 1975, Methodist churches in the United Kingdom used their newly introduced Service Book in common and here again one could have the sense that all over our nation, worshippers were using the same basic liturgy for Holy Communion. But it was partly a desire for more variety in the liturgy (see chapter 3.1 & 3.3) which led to the publication of *The Methodist Worship Book* in 1999. This contained a much greater range of services than the previous books had done, not least among them twelve Communion services<sup>131</sup>, intended for use in the different seasons of the Christian Year and on various other occasions. A similar development occurred in the Church of England in the production of their book *Common Worship* in 2000.

The next piece of research was therefore designed to investigate the consequences of publishing the Worship Book itself and the effect this has had on Methodist services.

Previous survey questionnaires (see chapter 4) have concentrated on discovering the way in which *The Methodist Worship Book* was compiled, by whom and how, and also the way in which it has been received by ministers in pastoral charge of Methodist churches. A further questionnaire will attempt to elicit the views of individual Methodist church members and Methodist congregations.

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131 The Covenant Service contains the twelfth version.

Hence, specifically, in the autumn of 2008, a questionnaire was devised to investigate the way in which the Book is actually used by ministers when conducting services using these authorised printed forms

The main reason for this questionnaire is because in Methodism, it is accepted mostly without question that ministers, and indeed local preachers, have an absolute discretion in the conduct of worship services which they are appointed to conduct. What they decide and what they do determines the nature of an act of worship. For the most part, however, local preachers do not use the Book.

It was felt, therefore, to be important to investigate the choices which ministers make in using *The Methodist Worship Book* and to reach conclusions from these.

### **5.2.2. THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

The questions asked were as follows, each having a choice of alternative answers:

1. As leader of worship when a communion service is planned, do you use *The Methodist Worship Book* for communion services? Always: Usually: Seldom: Never.
2. Which other services do you use from *The Methodist Worship Book*?
3. Do you use full (unaltered) orders from *The Methodist Worship Book*? Always: Often: Sometimes: Never.
4. Do you adopt a 'pick and mix' approach to *The Methodist Worship Book*? Always: Often: Sometimes: Never.
5. Do you use alternative published liturgies (e.g. Iona, etc.)?

6. Do you use liturgical material that you have written yourself?  
Always: Often: Sometimes: Never.
7. Do you use power point/photocopy/duplicate material for your congregations to use? Always: Often: Sometimes: Never.
8. Do you use a completely extempore approach? a) for communion? Always: Often: Sometimes: Never.  
b) for 'normal' services? Always: Often: Sometimes: Never.
9. Please add, briefly, any further comments.

The method adopted was to visit Circuit Staff Meetings in the Newcastle Methodist District and ask ministers to complete a questionnaire there and then, so as to ensure the maximum number of responses. The researcher chose Circuits where he is already known. Two other ministers in small Circuits were contacted by post. In this way six different Circuit Staffs were contacted with a consequent one hundred per cent result.

### **5.2.3. THE RESPONSES**

Thirty-three questionnaires were completed. The questions and responses, which may be considered to be a representative sample of the views of ministers as a whole around the country, are as follows:

**1. As leader of worship when a Communion Service is planned, do you use *The Methodist Worship Book* for communion services?**

Always: 2/33(6%) Usually: 25/33(76%) Seldom: 6/33(18%) Never: 0/33

**2. Which other services do you use from *The Methodist Worship Book*?**

Baptism: 23/33(70%) Marriage: 23/33(70%) Funeral: 20/33(61%)

Covenant: 20/33(61%) Others: less than 5/33(15%)

**3. Do you use full (unaltered) orders from *The Methodist Worship Book*?**

Always: 3/33(9%) Often: 2/33(6%) Sometimes: 18/33(55%) Never:  
10/33(31%)

**4. Do you adopt a 'pick and mix' approach to *The Methodist Worship Book*?**

Always: 7/33(21%) Often: 18/33(55%) Sometimes: 4/33(12%) Never:  
4/33(12%)

**5. Do you use alternative published liturgies (e.g. Iona, etc.)?**

Always: 0/33 Often: 10/33(31%) Sometimes: 21/33(64%) Never: 2/33(6%)

**6. Do you use liturgical material that you have written yourself?**

Always: 0/33 Often: 5/33(15%) Sometimes: 24/33(73%) Never: 4/33(12%)

**7. Do you use power point/photocopy/duplicate material for congregation to use?**

Always: 0/33 Often: 11/33(33%) Sometimes: 20/33(61%) Never: 2/33(6%)

**8. Do you use a completely 'extempore' approach? a) For communion?**

Always: 0/33 Often: 4/33(12%) Sometimes: 22/33(66%) Never: 7/33(21%)

**b) For 'normal' services?**

Always: 9/33(27%) Often: 16/33(48%) Sometimes: 8/33(24%) Never: 0/33

**9. Please add, briefly, any further comments**

The responses here were of an individual nature with one or two similar comments at the most, but mainly repeating the observations of the previous survey questionnaire of ministers; e.g. with regard to language issues, wordiness, the weight of the Book, the unsuitability of the baptismal service, etc. But they felt nevertheless that it was a Book that is a helpful resource and an 'authorised' standard to measure by.

#### 5.2.4. ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

In our sample it was found that the majority of ministers usually use *The Methodist Worship Book* for communion services (25/33=76%). The other services used on a regular basis are those which one may expect; i.e. Baptism, Marriage, Funeral and Covenant services. All the other services in the Book are used infrequently.

The ministers, mostly, do not use full unaltered orders of service from the Book, (sometimes 18/33=55%, never 10/33=31%)(total = 88%), the majority adopting a 'pick and mix' approach (always 7/33=21%, often 18/33=55%)(total = 76%).

Alternative liturgies published other than by official Methodism are used fairly frequently (often 10/33=30%, sometimes 21/33=64%)(total = 94%) as are liturgies written by the ministers themselves (often 5/33=15%, sometimes 24/33=73%)(total = 88%). Alternative printed material of various kinds is also used (often 11/33=33%, sometimes 20/33=61%)(total = 94%).

A completely 'extempore' approach a) for communion (sometimes 22/33=66%) and b) for 'normal' services (always 9/33=27%, often 16/33=48%, sometimes 8/33=24%) remains a strong element in worship services taken by ministers.

Based on the information provided by this sample, showing the way that *The Methodist Worship Book* is actually used, it appears that what ministers either

want or need, by way of officially published liturgies, is a Book containing basic services (Communion, Baptism, Marriage, Funeral, Covenant and possibly Confirmation and Reception into Membership), but which is not unduly prescriptive, rather providing resources from which to select and use material appropriate to the occasion and to local circumstances. This is borne out by the fact that a 'pick and mix' attitude is adopted by so many and that alternative material to that of *The Methodist Worship Book* is used so frequently.

The 'extempore' character of worship seems to predominate more in 'normal' preaching services than in communion services and on other liturgical occasions. However, the 22 out of 33 (66%) who sometimes use a completely extempore approach means that two-thirds of the ministers opt to disregard the communion liturgies contained in *The Methodist Worship Book* and either compile their own order privately beforehand, or improvise the service as they go along. This finding is quite significant and raises the question as to how far in practice there is a coalescence between the uses of fixed form and free form liturgical practices. From these results we may deduce that *The Methodist Worship Book*, far from imposing a uniform standard for the liturgies of the Church, has actually encouraged a greater variety than that which is provided by the material it contains. There is even the possibility that ministers may have reacted to the over prescriptive nature of the Book, which, due to its attempt to cover every eventuality, seems to

threaten creativity and stifle imaginative endeavour. It seems that the traditional dual practice of Methodism over two hundred years has now evolved into something far more complex.

Until 1999, it is probably true to say that liturgical communion services followed a fairly prescribed pattern. Since 1999 and the publication of *The Methodist Worship Book* it seems to be the case that the use of the varied selection of communion services which it contains has encouraged further developments. These consist of the use of alternative printed liturgical material, whether commercially published or individually written, and also a significant extempore (improvised free form) element. Whereas John Wesley, in introducing the dual practice, was strictly a Prayer Book devotee with an extempore preaching service alongside this, it now seems that such a clear distinction which once prevailed is now being blurred. Therefore the publication of *The Methodist Worship Book* appears to be a watershed in the development of Methodist worship as a whole.

This situation was an invitation to further research to determine how far this was and is the case.

### **5.3 DISCOVERING ALTERNATIVES: WHAT SOME MINISTERS USE INSTEAD**

#### **5.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

As a result of the researches done during the autumn of 2008 it was discovered that a not inconsiderable number of ministers, when leading services, are using alternative printed liturgical material other than *The*



*Methodist Worship Book*, tending to treat this rather as one resource among many, instead of having an unquestioning loyalty to what has been authorised for use in local churches by the Methodist Conference, albeit without compulsion or obligation. In fact, it could be said that this trend is encouraged by the publication of the *Worship Book* itself which states specifically in its preface that

...these forms are not intended to curb creative freedom but rather to provide norms for its guidance.<sup>132</sup>

But, it could be said that providing that 'providing norms for its guidance' is, in itself, a prescriptive measure.

From among those who took part in the autumn 2008 researches six of the respondents were selected carefully and with their full consent for a follow-up exercise. The research method employed was by means of personal face-to-face interviews between February 4<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> 2009 in order to ensure precise responses. During conversation, the ministers were asked which alternative resources they made use of; why they used such resources; whether or not they composed their own liturgies; why they did so if they did; how congregations respond to these; and what additional comments they would wish to make. The number against each response indicates a particular minister. The responses now follow.

### **5.3.2 DIFFERENT RESOURCES**

It was discovered that the resources used by the six ministers were as follows:

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132 *The Methodist Worship Book*, London, MPH, 1999. p.viii

Websites: Liturgies on Line, lectionary material for the Christian year 1

(As this figure seems low, it is strongly suspected that web-site resources are being increasingly used by ministers and preachers)

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Roots: Churches Together all-age learning material | 1         |
| Living Stones: Kevin Mayhew all-age resource       | 1         |
| Iona Community Wild Goose Publications:            | 1,3,4,5,6 |
| URC Prayer Handbook                                | 1         |
| The Intercession Handbook, by J. Pritchard SPCK    | 1         |
| Methodist Companion to the Lectionary, MPH         | 1         |
| David Adam's Books and Resource Materials          | 2         |
| Church House Publishing all-age material           | 2         |
| Methodist Prayer Handbook                          | 3         |
| A wide range of various prayer books and resources | 3,5,6     |
| Donald Hilton's Anthologies, NCEC                  | 4         |
| Johnny Baker's Alternative Worship, SPCK           | 4         |
| MAYC Breakout Material                             | 4         |
| New Zealand Book of Worship                        | 5         |
| C of E Common Worship                              | 6         |
| MSB 1975 for (Infant) Baptisms                     | 6         |

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Each of the six ministers has made his/her own collection of resources as time has gone by and each collection is an individual choice made out of personal preferences for the style and content of material. The popularity of

the material from the Iona Community is notable perhaps due to its imaginative and contemporary nature.

### 5.3.3 WHY SUCH RESOURCES ARE USED

The reasons given for the use of these alternative resources were as follows:

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| To broaden vocabulary about God and experience of liturgy                | 1       |
| To add diversity, depth, breadth, variety to worship                     | 1,2,3,6 |
| To avoid the dangers of the extempore                                    | 1       |
| A felt need for more than <i>The Methodist Worship Book</i> has to offer | 1       |
| To relate to any given context, to be meaningful                         | 2,3,4   |
| To be true to my faith and scientific world view                         | 3       |
| To engage people and allow them to express themselves                    | 4       |
| To say the things I want to say  | 5       |
| To express things the way I would  | 5       |
| <i>The Methodist Worship Book</i> is stilted and at times not understood | 5       |
| To avoid staleness   | 6       |
| To relate to the needs of the people                                     | 6       |

### CONCLUSIONS

The main reasons given by the ministers for their use of resources other than *The Methodist Worship Book* were to add variety to the liturgy of worship and to be contextual. These answers were significant in that one of the reasons for the publication of the Book was to provide such a variety. Apparently it is felt that the variety on offer is not varied enough. The answers given also relate strongly to the vocabulary used in liturgy, and one answer to the need

for liturgy to be understandable, culturally, in terms of today's scientific world view, implying that *The Methodist Worship Book* is inadequate in this regard.

#### 5.3.4 LITURGIES COMPOSED BY MINISTERS

Requests were made for copies of liturgies that the ministers had written themselves.

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| None  | 1,4,6 |
| For all-age worship and healing services using visual aids and congregational responses   | 2     |
| I possess a file full of prayers and services written so that each act of worship is contextual, relevant and personal, especially at baptisms, weddings and funerals | 3     |
| I would write them if I had time  | 4     |
| Yes for baptismal services  | 5     |
| Intend to do for Holy Communions  | 6     |

#### CONCLUSIONS

The examples of liturgies provided all relate to special services or to the public offices. They show a desire to make worship accessible to all, especially to those people who do not attend church regularly. There is a real effort to provide a sense of immediacy, relevance and appropriateness for any given worship context.

#### 5.3.5 WHY THEY HAVE WRITTEN THEIR OWN LITURGIES

The reasons given for writing their own services are as follows:

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| N/A  | 1,4,6 |
| To relate to any given context and to provide breadth in liturgy       | 2     |
| Desire to be contextual and contemporary in expressing the faith today | 3     |

To be helpful to people, meet their needs and help with their understanding of God

5

## CONCLUSIONS

The reasons outlined already are self-explanatory.

### 5.3.6 HOW CONGREGATIONS RESPOND

With regard to congregational response to the use of material other than *The Methodist Worship Book*, all the six ministers reported their experience of positive responses to their liturgical efforts, with openness to exploring different forms and evidence that congregations are more at ease with the language used which is more like the language they use in everyday life.

### 5.3.7 ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

When invited to make additional comments the ministers replied as follows.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Influenced by research into visual media and liturgy   | 1 |
| Using a variety of resources is enriching  | 1 |
| <i>The Methodist Worship Book</i> itself has a range of alternatives and commendable breadth | 2 |
| For (Infant) Baptisms I use power point and pick and mix the liturgy                         | 2 |
| The MWB could be shorter and smaller   | 3 |
| Flexible liturgies are needed  | 3 |
| Sharing of contemporary liturgies would be good  | 3 |
| <i>The Methodist Worship Book</i> is one resource among many and has stimulated more variety | 4 |
| I enjoy creating liturgies, prayers and labyrinths   | 5 |

(NB. A labyrinth is a maze-like pattern of pathways laid out upon the ground or upon a floor with several stations at which prayers may be said and/or times of meditation observed.)

*The Methodist Worship Book* has patches of academic wording and theological jargon

6

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The six ministers seem to regard *The Methodist Worship Book* as being one resource among many, which, although authorised by the Methodist Conference, is not seen as a 'one size fits all' publication. Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, its value was recognised because of its breadth and variety. These, in their turn, apparently have stimulated the liturgical creativity of the ministers interviewed.

Having researched the way Methodist ministers have received and used *The Methodist Worship Book* we now turn our attention to the way in which Methodist Church members and congregations have done so.

### **5.4 WHAT THE PEOPLE IN THE PEWS SAY**

#### **5.4 INTRODUCTION: GOING TO THE GRASS ROOTS**

*The Methodist Worship Book* is intended, as indeed are all other similar compilations, to be used by congregations of God's people gathered together for worship. How they regard these liturgies is therefore of the utmost importance. To take to them enthusiastically means that worship becomes meaningful. On the other hand if this is not the case then worship

could become the routine recitation of words without engaging the heart, the mind and the spirit.

Therefore the next stage of the researches led on to a consideration of the opinions of “the people in the pews”, that is, the ordinary members of the Methodist Church who worship Sunday by Sunday. If the ministers are the “middle management” who decide on forms of worship and the use or non-use of *The Methodist Worship Book*, then the members are the people on “the shop floor” who experience the consequences of such managerial decisions taken on their behalf. In addition there is the question as to whether or not there are any differences in perceptions between members and ministers.

A survey was devised consisting of the following eight questions:

1. Following six years of use, have you any comments to make (constructive or otherwise) about *The Methodist Worship Book*?
2. Comment on whether or not you feel the Book meets the needs of your congregation? How have you and your fellow worshippers related to it?
3. Do you feel at home with the language and culture of *The Methodist Worship Book*?
4. Please comment on the appropriateness or otherwise of the concepts and ideas (theology) expressed in the liturgies. Are there any parts of the services that you find difficult? Or inappropriate? Or strange?
5. Comment on the level of inspiration you feel that *The Methodist Worship Book* adds to your services of worship?

6. How many of the services in the Book have you used? Which have you used? Which ones do you use the most?

7. What changes and improvements would you wish to see in future editions of *The Methodist Worship Book*?

8. Are there any other points you wish to make?

This survey was circulated amongst the Methodist lay members in the Newcastle Methodist District as follows:-

1. Lay people attending the District Synod (Representative Session) meeting at Blyth Community College on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005. Twenty-two surveys were returned.

2. Lay people in the researcher's previous and present Circuits, thirty-one being returned.

3. Other lay people known to be interested in the project. Twelve were returned.

The total of sixty-five surveys returned provided a representative sample of views to be found amongst the membership of the Methodist Church in the Newcastle District, which was a manageable area in which to take such soundings and perhaps giving some indication of the views of members nationwide.

Here again, as with the questions to ministers, the answers were, on the whole fairly lengthy, and so the responses are printed in summary form, the numbers giving the total for each point made.



#### 5.4.1 QUESTION 1

**Following six years of use, have you any comments to make (constructive or otherwise) about *The Methodist Worship Book*?**

This question was designed to tease out the considered views of individual members of congregations and their reactions to the Book, arising out of their experience of its regular use. The responses received were as follows:-

**a) Positive comments.**

Good variety of content: 16/65 replies

Quite happy with the Book: 16

A good basic resource: 7

Easy to understand and to follow, language good: 7

Clear format: 5

Material in the Book may be selected and adapted: 5

Other positive comments of an individual nature: 3

**b) Negative comments.**

Too big and heavy: 8

Contains too much: 6

Too wordy: 4

Too Anglican: 3

Prefer extempore services: 3

Other single individual negative comments included questions about relevance, the Baptismal Service, tendency to introversion, a need for another resource book for contextual worship, and preference for alternative printed services (e.g. Iona): Twenty in all.

#### 5.4.1.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

The positive comments demonstrated an appreciative acceptance of *The Methodist Worship Book* by those who made them. Generally they welcomed the Book as a valuable contribution to the worship life of the Methodist Church. The variety of content was particularly mentioned and the language was perceived to be such that facilitates ease of understanding. The format (design, style and layout) of the Book also found complimentary comment.

On the other hand the negative comments revealed another side to the picture. The Book was thought to be too heavy to handle comfortably, too wordy and with unnecessary content. There was a suspicion of 'Anglican' influence, of irrelevance and of an introverted stance. One person saw the Baptismal Service as a problem because it was not really on the wavelength of those who request the service, who are generally speaking, people who do not normally attend church.

Other comments revealed a desire for a more flexible and contemporary approach to worship. The issue of 'extempore worship' was often mentioned.

Altogether there was no clear consensus about the way in which the Book was received, views ranging from an enthusiastic reception of the services, to a rejection of the whole concept of written liturgies per se. There was still an underlying tension between the two strands of the dual practice, one

which makes use of a book for worship and one which does not. Whereas the Wesley brothers were happy to countenance both practices and to hold them together positively, there still persists today between some church members an underlying suspicion of one practice by the other which had its roots in the nineteenth century divisions of Methodism.

#### **5.4.2 QUESTION 2**

**Comment on whether or not you feel the Book meets the needs of your congregation. How have you and your fellow worshippers related to it?**

This question was intended to find out the views of individual members of congregations and how they actually felt about the book and whether or not they felt at ease with it as they were using it week by week. Here is a summary of the responses representing the views expressed.

##### **a) Positive comments.**

The Book has been well-received. Four or five services are used regularly.

The specific needs of the congregation are met: 23

The Book is used mostly for Holy Communion: 12

##### **b) Negative comments.**

Congregation's needs are not met: 6

##### **c) Other significant comments.**

Enjoy the variety in the Book: 6

People with differing abilities find it hard to use: 6

The Book has had a mixed reception: 4

There were other individual comments, mainly about minor details.

**d) Worshippers have related to it.**

Related well: 6

**e) Worshippers have not related to it.**

Don't relate to it: 4

Prefer spontaneous worship, extempore prayer, etc: 2

**5.4.2.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

In total just over one third of the respondents positively affirmed that *The Methodist Worship Book* met the needs of their congregations, ranging from an enthusiastic to a more measured response to its use.

Only a few registered a negative response to the Book.

Smaller numbers responded to the supplementary question as to whether or not worshippers related to the Book. There were those who expressed a preference for more 'spontaneous' worship.

The fact that only 23/65(35%) made affirmative comments about the Book and 42/65(65%) failed to do so hardly speaks of a real enthusiasm for it, as also the fact that only small numbers were recorded as having made any further comments at all. This may be indicative of a situation, which, in general, could mean that church members are not bothered either way about whether or not this Book was being used, so long as there is an acceptable printed liturgy of some sort to follow, that is, if one was being used at all.

### 5.4.3 QUESTION 3

#### **Do you feel at home with the language and culture of *The Methodist Worship Book*?**

This question was designed to discover the views of individual members of congregations about the way in which the liturgies were expressed in the words that are used and the concepts employed to convey Christian truth.

The responses are summarised as follows:

#### **a) Affirmative.**

Those who felt at home with the language and culture of *The Methodist Worship Book* comprise a considerable proportion: 43

But at the same time some were aware that it may not meet the needs of young people, those unused to such liturgies and occasional (non-regular) worshippers: 10

#### **b) Negative.**

Those registering a definite "No" to the question (5) and those ambivalent (8) were in a minority.

#### **c) Other observations.**

Smaller numbers expressed a preference for other services (3); said that the Book was dated (3); liked the options provided (2); or disliked rigid and formal worship (2).

#### 5.4.3.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

A majority of respondents and regular worshippers 43/65(66%) found the language and the culture of *The Methodist Worship Book* to be quite acceptable, but with some indications that this may be because of a lifetime's nurture in the Methodist Church. A few others were aware that the Book may not connect with young people and those not used to such liturgies and who do not regularly attend Church.

The number of those who rejected outright the nature of the Worship Book's language and culture is fairly small, as was those who expressed hesitancy and other contrary views.

The replies seem to show that *The Methodist Worship Book* was appreciated as an 'in house' publication with no inherently missionary intent. It was regarded, by some respondents, as meaningless to those not reared in Methodist culture. As we have seen (chapter 4.6.6) the Compiling Group were aware of cultural and missionary issues, but nevertheless, apparently, decided not to resolve them, whether deliberately or by default, as the language and the concepts of the Book show. This is evidenced, in particular, by the hesitations which some respondents, both ministerial and lay, have about the Service of Infant Baptism.

#### 5.4.4 QUESTION 4

**Please comment on the appropriateness or otherwise of the concepts and ideas (theology) expressed in the liturgies. Are there any parts of the services that you find difficult? Or inappropriate? Or strange?**

This question was intended to discover whether or not worshippers felt that they were being asked to use words and concepts which do not mesh with their own normal vocabulary or the knowledge with which they are familiar in everyday life. The summary of responses is as follows.

##### **a) Positive.**

Concepts and ideas thought to be appropriate: 22(34%)

(The respondents here spoke in general terms of appreciation; that the Book expresses Methodist theology in summary form and has a commendable breadth of views and words to which one can give one's own interpretations.)

##### **b) Negative.**

Concepts and ideas thought to be inappropriate: 10(15%)

Specific difficulties mentioned were as follows:

The Baptismal Service: 5

Calling God, 'Mother': 4

'Body and Blood' language in Holy Communion: 4

Against C of E, or RC trends in the Book: 4

Prefer plain down to earth approach: 3

Need to have intellectual reservations to use the Book: 2

Other points made by individuals were: that book culture is foreign to many people today; the Lenten practices commended in the Book are not Methodist; nor are the references to Mary; 'Christ will come again' language needs unpacking; as does the theology of the Covenant vows; prayers for the dead are not Methodist.

#### **5.4.4.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

In a minority response only about one third of those who completed the questionnaire thought that the concepts and ideas in *The Methodist Worship Book* were appropriate (22)(34%). Those individuals (10)(15%) who thought that they are inappropriate gave their reasons, in particular what they perceived to be a tendency towards a 'higher' Church theology and ethos. Only a small number questioned various aspects of the Book's theology. On this evidence, taking into account the low proportion of responses, most Methodists in the sample did not seem to, or desire to, question the theological content of *The Methodist Worship Book*. Here again the Compilers were aware of some of the issues mentioned by the respondents but did not deem them important enough for them to make any considerable difference to the contents as a whole. The issue here is whether or not they should have given a lead in helping to inform the minds of the Methodist people with a more contemporary theological outlook.



#### 5.4.4.B REFLECTION: THEOLOGY AND LITURGY

It is debateable, as with the chicken and the egg, as to which came first, liturgy or theology. Certainly they are closely related and one is expressed by the other.

Theology and worship are linked at the deepest level. So complicated is the relationship between them that it is difficult to say which of the two is either logically or chronologically prior.<sup>133</sup>

The people praise the God in whom they believe and each individual's conception of Him/Her will be quite different. But the liturgy helps to form the minds of those who take part in it, the classic example being *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England which expressed Anglican theology in worship for 350 years and shaped the ethos of that Church during that time. On the other hand, Methodist minds were influenced more by its hymn books than its service books, especially the hymns of Charles Wesley. Nevertheless the kind of theology contained in Methodism's authorised liturgies is still of importance.

As we have seen in chapter 5.1.4 and 5.4.4 the questions about this in our surveys of both ministers and members evoked significant answers. Slightly more than half of the ministerial respondents (51%) were accepting of the theology which they believed that the worship book espoused, but a sizeable minority of 20% expressed the view that the theology was dated and lacking in contemporary insights. Two ministers appreciated the

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133 Dearing T. *Wesley and Tractarian Worship*, London, Epworth/SPCK, 1966, p.21

comprehensiveness of the book but one thought that some of the content was not in the Methodist tradition.

In so far as church members and congregations were concerned there was appreciation, in general terms, of the book's breadth of viewpoints and their expression, summarily, of Methodist theology, by 34% of respondents, a slightly less proportion than that of ministers. A few expressed their concern at what they perceived to be tendencies towards High Anglican and Roman Catholic practices, but most Methodists in the sample do not question the theological content of *The Methodist Worship Book*.

The comments by some ministers and members, that the book contains practices foreign to Methodism are borne out by the fact that certain items are included in its contents, which, in previous books, were never considered, and which demonstrates, perhaps, the influence of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, which had a representative minority on the compiling group. These are:

Daily Prayer (Offices)

Holy Week Services (Rituals)

Instructions for Genuflection

Prayer with the Dying

Prayers for the Dead and a Vigil

Adoption of the Roman Catholic Lectionary (now the Revised  
Common Lectionary)

A List of Liturgical Colours for the Seasons of the Christian Year

The inclusion of these services and other material represents practices which have not been part of the Methodist ethos and it is open to debate and choice as to whether or not they should be.

In addition, although again raised by a minority of respondents, there is the point of view that the theology of *The Methodist Worship Book* is not inclusive enough, insufficiently taking note of more progressive thinking, for example, with respect to the nature of God and creation, the human condition, the work of Christ, eschatology and so on. Nor, could it be said, have the compilers accommodated sufficiently those who feel that they are compelled to suspend their intelligence when they are expected to recite the traditional creeds. So the compilers had a difficult balancing act. Some feel that they were successful in achieving the balance while others do not, and the debate continues.

However it is a valid comment that the liturgies published and authorised by the mainstream Churches, recently, do not adequately reflect the progress made in biblical scholarship and theological exploration.

We find that the liturgical studies which have gone to produce new rites seem to have been carried on in isolation, not only from recent biblical studies, but from the whole field of theological thought.<sup>134</sup>

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134 Baker T.G.A. *Questioning Worship*, London, SCM, 1977, p.41

#### 5.4.5 QUESTION 5

**Comment on the level of inspiration you feel that *The Methodist Worship Book* adds to your services of worship.**

Respondents were invited to quantify any improvement to the atmosphere of a service of worship which they believe is attributable to the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*. They replied as follows:

Those who found positive inspiration: 20

Those who found partial inspiration: 19

Those who were not inspired or who made no comment: 16

Those who said that the level of inspiration depended on how the Book was used by the worship leader or members of the congregation: 6

Other single respondents said that the Worship Book may not be inspiring to young people or those unfamiliar with the Church and its theology and that the Book lacked a certain global awareness.

##### 5.4.5.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

The figures speak for themselves concerning the mixed responses to the question and the fact that the way the Book was used is crucial to the level of inspiration.

Other responses of a minority nature again said that the Book may not resonate with young people or those unfamiliar with the Church and its theology, and that a global awareness was lacking from the Book. Questions to be asked concern the nature of the material which encourages inspirational worship (i.e. more traditional language or more contemporary

language; traditional or contemporary theological content, etc) and whether or not the Book (and similar Books) should have a missionary dimension, i.e. should bear in mind that the Public Offices are often attended by a large number of those who are not regular churchgoers.

#### **5.4.6 QUESTION 6**

**How many of the services in the Book have you used? Which have you used? Which ones do you use the most?**

This question attempted to discover which services in the Book there is most demand for and which, being underused, may be regarded as surplus to normal requirements. The responses were as follows, keeping to the order of the services as they appear in the Book itself.

Daily Prayer: 3

Services for Morning, Afternoon and Evening: 5

Baptism of Infants: 37

Baptism of those able to answer: 2

Confirmation/Reception into Membership: 16

All, most or some of the full range of Holy Communion Services: 40

With a special mention of the use of the Ordinary Seasons Services: 9

Ordination of Presbyters: 4

Admission of Local Preachers: 8

Commissioning of Lay workers: 4

Commissioning of Pastoral Visitors and Class Leaders: 10

Commissioning of Workers with Children and Young People: 7

Commissioning of Worship Leaders: 5

Service of Welcome for Ministers and Deacons: 6

Marriage Service: 21

Blessing of a Marriage: 2

Healing and Wholeness: 4

Funeral service: 25

Funeral of a Child: 1

Collects: 2

Lectionary: 3

Use of the M.W.B. as a 'pick and mix' resource: 8

Unclear answers, don't know, no use, no comment: 8

#### **5.4.6.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

The responses confirm what may have been expected, that the services which receive most use are:- Holy Communion, the Baptism of Infants, the Covenant Service, the Funeral Service, the Marriage Service, and Confirmation/Reception into Membership. Services which are moderately well used are the Holy Week Services, Admission of Local Preachers, the various Commissioning Services and the Service of Welcome. The rest receive less than a handful of use or not at all. Usage is determined, apparently, by local needs and preferences and ministerial choice.

A number of respondents regarded *The Methodist Worship Book* as a resource book, and some mentioned that the communions for ordinary seasons receive the most frequent use in their churches.

The question is raised, therefore, as to whether or not *The Methodist Worship Book* is too large for the local churches and whether or not the least used services are such because they do not accord with their established patterns (e.g. foot-washing, healing and wholeness etc.).

These least used services could have been published as separate supplementary booklets with a much reduced hardback volume of those services which churches use the most.

There is also the question, here again, of the language and concepts used in the Public Offices (Rites of Passage: Baptism of Infants, Marriages, Funerals) when, frequently, the vast majority of those present do not regularly attend church.

#### **5.4.7 QUESTION 7**

**What changes and improvements would you wish to see in future editions of *The Methodist Worship Book*?**

The aim of this question was to elicit the ideas of the people in the pew as to the content they would wish to see in any proposed worship book next time one is published. The responses were as follows:-

Reduce the number of (Holy Communion) Services, fewer and shorter services, more user friendly services, etc: 11

Less wordiness, shorter services, smaller book, less weighty, soft back, etc: 7

Improve Baptismal Service, more relevant and user friendly, etc: 5

Omit the services which are predominately for clergy etc: 4

Divide into smaller books, separate services: 4

Don't know, don't republish, no comment, no change, too soon to say, etc: 30

There were several individual suggestions as follows:- Rubrics should not be in red; the Book should keep up with the times with up-to-date language; there should be more emphasis on sin and forgiveness in the morning prayers; intercessions should be more relevant; remodel as a resource book; have extra strings for bookmarks; return to Methodism, less Anglicising; more variety; provide ideas for ordinary Sunday Services; prefer *The Methodist Service Book 1975*; explain the theology behind the Book; more sub-headings as guides; electronic presentation to enable regular update of material; for the future, use the best of the past; have an illustrated edition for children.

#### **5.4.7.A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

A considerable body of opinion seems to be that *The Methodist Worship Book* contains too much. The number of Communion services, especially, could be reduced and the services themselves made shorter by being less wordy, although it would not be easy to do this without affecting their variety which many do appreciate. The Baptismal Service is again singled out by some as being in need of greater relevance to the actual people who attend. Services included for clergy use only (e.g. Ordination) could be omitted. Altogether, the other services too could be fewer in number, shorter in length, less wordy with more up-to-date language and more user-friendly, especially bearing in mind the growing use of electronic means



(PowerPoint). (NB. We note, however, that this is a more recent development). A smaller book, overall, could be accompanied by publishing separate services. (NB. This has now been done by Methodist Publishing, formerly the Methodist Publishing House, as has an illustrated edition for children, albeit cumbersome with mismatching page numbers).

Quite a number of respondents recorded other sentiments: scrap it; no future edition; no comment; don't know; too early to comment; etc. i.e. 30 out of 65(46%) demonstrating quite a reaction against *The Methodist Worship Book* per se. There were also several individual views, comments and suggestions regarding various smaller detailed items with regard to the Book.

#### **5.4.8 QUESTION 8**

##### **Are there any other points you wish to make?**

The aim of this question was to give respondents the opportunity to state any view or opinion, or make a comment or a criticism (positively or negatively), which they felt was not covered by the previous seven questions. This open opportunity, naturally, gave rise to a wide range of responses which were:

People have varied reactions to the M.W.B: 10

The emphasis on 'free worship' is being lost: 9

There is the danger of reading by rote: 4

The Book is useful for personal devotions: 4

The Book has a value for resource, guidance and reference: 3

The Book represents a process of 'Anglicising' and uniformity etc: 3

The old fashioned words of institution in Communion are an issue for some: 2

Separate services would be helpful: 2

Book is easier to understand: 2

Some language is obscure: 2

In the Baptismal Service, query the use of a lighted candle near to a baby: 1

Happy if the use of the Book is optional: 1

A large print version would be useful: 1

The leader of worship has a crucial role: 1

I am not familiar with the Book: 1

Nature of Baptismal vows queried: 1

The Book will date quickly: 1

Smaller user friendly book needed: 1

Some ministers produce their own services: 1

People are confused when they use the Book: 1

Varied content welcomed: 1

Services are often abbreviated by the minister: 1

A quality publication: 1

Confirmation = a welcome term: 1

Easy to use page numbering: 1

Explanation and teaching for users is required: 1

There are too many Communion Services: 1

Modern version of the Lord's Prayer easy to understand: 1

The Book brings a freshness to worship: 1

No response, no comment, etc: 26

#### **5.4.8. A ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

Many of these comments could have been included in the answers to the previous questions. There is little that is new.

On the positive side, the variety of content is commended; the Book is easy to use; valuable as a worship resource; useful in personal devotions; and brings a freshness to worship itself.

However, some significant contributions say that the emphasis on 'free worship' is being lost, and that the Book represents a drift towards 'Anglicanism'; that a shorter, lighter, more user-friendly book in up-to-date language is needed, with different services as separate publications; that some ministers adopt a 'pick and mix' approach anyway and that the Baptismal service is a difficulty. There is no mention of contextual issues or how the Book's relevance is perceived.

There is much that is similar in the responses of both members and ministers and the issues raised tend to be the same. The members do seem to comment more on the physical size of the Book. In so far as its content is concerned there is a general acceptance, with a minority making criticisms comparable with those of the ministers, there being no dramatic difference between them. So far the Book appears to be appreciated, or otherwise, in roughly equal proportions by both ministers and lay people.

## **5.5 MORE CLUES FROM THE PEWS: HOW CONGREGATIONS USE *THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK***

### **5.5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Previous surveys have sought the views of the compilers of *The Methodist Worship Book*, of ministers as regular users of the Book when leading worship, and those of individual members of congregations across the Newcastle District. It was then felt that a more in-depth analysis of the use of the Book was needed by trying to discover how congregations, as corporate entities, actually made use of it as part of their worship experience, and to assess its effectiveness and the value given to it.

### **5.5.2 QUESTIONNAIRE TO CONGREGATIONS**

The following questionnaire consisting of seventeen questions was devised consequent upon advice received from tutors and supervisors at the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield, under whose auspices the research was being conducted. The aim was to elicit more detailed and comprehensive responses from churches which would provide further information from which to draw sound conclusions concerning the reactions to and the use of *The Methodist Worship Book* by congregations corporately.

The questionnaire:

#### **A. YOUR CHURCH.**

1. Define the location of your Church. (tick one)  
City/town centre..... Inner city..... Urban.....

- Suburban..... Small town..... Village.....
2. Number of church members.....
  3. Average number present at main morning service.....
  4. Number of ministerial appointments per quarter.....
  5. Is there a Sunday afternoon or evening service?.....  
Which?.....
  6. How often? Weekly..... Fortnightly.....  
Monthly..... Quarterly.....
  7. Is there a mid week service?.....How often?.....

**B. THE METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK.**

8. How often do you use *The Methodist Worship Book*?(tick as apply)  
At least once a month.....Not at all.....  
At least once a quarter.....Only when a minister leads worship.....  
Less than once a quarter...Usually when a minister leads worship....  
Occasionally when a Local Preacher leads worship.....  
Always for Communions.....Baptisms.....Weddings.....Funerals.....  
Usually for Communions.....Baptisms.....Weddings.....Funerals.....  
Never for Communions.....Baptisms.....Weddings.....Funerals.....  
Which other services are used?.....
9. How relevant is the Book to your Church's local context and culture?  
In what ways?.....
10. Has *The Methodist Worship Book* been a help to the peoples' commitment, faith building and discipleship?  
Yes.....No.....Don't know.....  
If yes, please say how.....
11. Indicate if and how the Book has helped with any of the following:  
Local Mission and outreach.....  
Citywide/town wide/community involvement.....  
Action on national concerns.....  
World mission partnership activity.....
12. Some people have said that *The Methodist Worship Book* was an attempt to imitate the Church of England. Do you agree? (tick one)  
Yes.....To some extent.....No.....

**C. "FREE" WORSHIP.**

13. Approximately what proportion of your Church's congregation would like *The Methodist Worship Book* as a basic book and not have any other book? (tick one)  
100%.....About 75%.....About 50%.....25% or less.....

14. How often does your Church use other written forms? (i.e. books, pamphlets or photocopied materials) (tick one)  
 All the time.....Most of the time..... Sometimes.....Never.....
15. How often do services proceed without any printed worship material of any kind?  
 All..... Most..... Some..... None.....
16. Approximately what proportion of your Church's congregation prefers worship without *The Methodist Worship Book* or other printed materials (tick one)  
 100% .....bout 75%.....About 50%.....25% or less.....
17. What proportion prefers a 'mix' of *The Methodist Worship Book* and other material?  
 100%.....About 75%.....About 50%.....25% or less.....
18. How relevant is your "Free" worship to your Church's local context and culture? In what ways?.....
19. Has "Free" Worship been a help to peoples' commitment, faith building and discipleship?  
 Yes..... No..... Don't know.....  
 If yes, please say how.....
20. Indicate if and how "Free" Worship has helped with any of the following:  
 Local mission and outreach.....  
 Citywide/townwide/community involvement.....  
 Action on national concerns.....  
 World mission partnership activity.....

**D. THE RESPONDENT(S).**

21. Person sending this reply(tick):  
 Minister.....L.P.....Worship Leader.....Steward.....Church member.....  
 Leader/worker with children and young people.....Other.....
22. Age: Please circle. U25. 25-35. 36-45. 46-55. 56-65. 66-75. 76-85. 85+
23. Did you respond to the previous questionnaire? (Yes/No).....

The survey was circulated around the four Circuits in the Newcastle Methodist District, known to the researcher. This occurred during the period

January to March 2008. Sixty surveys were sent out to the Senior Steward of each church, who was asked to make sure that they were completed and returned, thirty six were so completed. Senior Stewards are the key lay leaders of each congregation and the people most likely to respond. The churches concerned are in a wide variety of differing situations, and so may be adjudged to be a fairly representative sample of Methodism as a whole. They could be a fair guide to the way in which *The Methodist Worship Book* is being used at the present time. The questions with summaries of their responses are as follows:

### **5.5.3 QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE NATURE OF CHURCH CONGREGATIONS**

#### **Question 1. Define the location of your church.**

The intention here is to discover whether or not the context of each local church is of significance in the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*. The replies were:-

City/town centre 5: Inner city 1: Urban 3: Suburban 7: Small town 2:  
Rural 18. Total 36.

For convenience hereafter we may regard the respondent churches as being half urban of some kind and half rural, there being a total of 18 churches in each of these two categories.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> It is possible to sub-divide the categories in question 1 even further, e.g. by considering historic origins pre-1932 and socio-economic factors. However, with the passage of time, by now at least two generations, the influx of members from other traditions or none, the closure of buildings identified with particular brands of Methodism and the erection of new ones, all mean that the original differences in types of Methodist have almost, but not altogether, faded into insignificance. Moreover in a situation where ministers alone usually choose whether or not to use *The Methodist Worship Book*, the relative affluence of the

### **Question 2. Number of church members.**

The aim was to see whether or not the size of the church is in any way related to the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*. Memberships varied as follows:-

|                           |    |          |
|---------------------------|----|----------|
| Small churches (under 25) | 9  |          |
| Medium churches (25 – 75) | 16 |          |
| Large churches (75+)      | 11 | Total 36 |

### **Question 3. Average number present at the main service (Sunday morning).**

The aim here was to see whether or not the size of the congregation is related to the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*. The sizes of the congregations varied as follows:-

|                               |    |          |          |
|-------------------------------|----|----------|----------|
| Small congregation (under 25) | 10 | churches |          |
| Medium congregation (25 – 75) | 20 |          |          |
| Large congregation (75+)      | 3  |          |          |
| No figures given              | 3  |          | Total 36 |

### **Question 4. Number of Ministerial appointments per quarter.**

The aim was to discover whether or not the presence of a minister is related to the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*. The numbers of ministerial appointments recorded for the churches were:-

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| High number (10+)   | 10 |
| Medium number (5-9) | 12 |

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congregation is also not necessarily of significance. In addition, it could be argued that the culture of the Book is designed to enhance the experience of those differently educated. In the end, for the purposes of the research, the urban/rural categories were felt to be sufficient, as boundaries had to be drawn somewhere, and socio-economic factors left to other researchers who wished to investigate them.



|                 |    |       |    |
|-----------------|----|-------|----|
| Low number (4-) | 10 |       |    |
| No figure given | 4  | Total | 36 |

**Question 5. Is there a Sunday afternoon or evening service?**

Here we try and see whether or not the use of *The Methodist Worship Book* is related in any way to the times of services. The answers given were:-

|     |    |    |    |           |   |         |    |
|-----|----|----|----|-----------|---|---------|----|
| Yes | 23 | No | 13 | Afternoon | 1 | Evening | 22 |
|-----|----|----|----|-----------|---|---------|----|

**Question 6. How often?**

The aim here is to discover the frequency of services additional to the main Sunday morning worship. The answers as follows:-

|        |    |             |   |         |   |       |    |
|--------|----|-------------|---|---------|---|-------|----|
| Weekly | 11 | Fortnightly | 7 | Monthly | 5 | Total | 23 |
|--------|----|-------------|---|---------|---|-------|----|

**Question 7. Is there a mid -week service?**

Answers as follows:-

|     |    |    |    |
|-----|----|----|----|
| Yes | 11 | No | 25 |
|-----|----|----|----|

**Question 8. How often?**

To discover the frequency of the mid week service.

|        |   |             |   |         |   |              |   |
|--------|---|-------------|---|---------|---|--------------|---|
| Weekly | 4 | Fortnightly | 2 | Monthly | 3 | Occasionally | 2 |
|--------|---|-------------|---|---------|---|--------------|---|

**5.5.4 QUESTIONS REGARDING PRACTICE IN WORSHIP**

**Question 9. How often do you use *The Methodist Worship Book*?**

The aim here is to obtain information as to how frequently the Book is used.

|         |    |           |   |              |   |            |   |       |    |
|---------|----|-----------|---|--------------|---|------------|---|-------|----|
| Monthly | 22 | Quarterly | 9 | Infrequently | 3 | Not at all | 2 | Total | 36 |
|---------|----|-----------|---|--------------|---|------------|---|-------|----|

|                    |   |                       |    |                      |   |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------|----|----------------------|---|
| Only with minister | 4 | Usually with minister | 31 | Occasionally with LP | 4 |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------|----|----------------------|---|

|                        |    |          |    |          |    |          |    |
|------------------------|----|----------|----|----------|----|----------|----|
| Usually for: Communion | 34 | Baptisms | 17 | Weddings | 11 | Funerals | 10 |
|------------------------|----|----------|----|----------|----|----------|----|

|                  |   |                        |   |                   |   |
|------------------|---|------------------------|---|-------------------|---|
| Others: Covenant | 3 | Reception/Confirmation | 1 | Preaching service | 1 |
|------------------|---|------------------------|---|-------------------|---|

(N.B. It is suspected that the figure for the Covenant Service is too low as usually, every Methodist church, without exception, has one each year.)

Further analysis of the figures gives the following results:

| Urban/Rural                     | Urban | Rural. |       |    |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|----|
| Only/usually used with minister | 17    | 17     | Total | 34 |
| Not at all/no book              | 1     | 1      | Total | 2  |

| Size of Church             | Small (25-) | Medium (25-75) | Large (75+) |       |    |
|----------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|-------|----|
| Only/usually with minister | 7           | 19             | 8           | Total | 34 |
| Not at all/no book         | 1           | 1              |             | Total | 2  |

**Question 10. How relevant is the Book to your Church's local context and culture? In what ways?**

The purpose of the question is to discover how the churches perceive the relevance and relationship of the content of the Book to their own "*sitz im leben*". The replies received were as follows:

- Seen as part of our (local) Methodist culture: Urban 9, Rural 5, total 14.
- Not relevant: Urban 7, Rural 6, total 13.
- Don't know etc. Urban 5, Rural 3, total 8.
- No reply Urban 4, Rural 4, total 8.

**Question 11. How often does your church use other liturgies? (i.e. books, pamphlets or photocopied materials)**

The aim is to discover the number of churches using alternative liturgies whether on a regular or an occasional basis.

|                   |           |           |           |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| All the time:     | Urban 1,  | Rural 1,  | Total 2.  |
| Most of the time: | Urban 0,  | Rural 2,  | Total 2.  |
| Sometimes:        | Urban 16, | Rural 13, | Total 29. |
| Never:            | Urban 1,  | Rural 1,  | Total 2.  |
| No reply:         | Urban 0,  | Rural 1,  | Total 1.  |

**Question 12. Approximately what proportion of your church's membership prefers 'extempore' worship? (i.e. without *The Methodist Worship Book* or other printed materials)**

Stewards were asked to give a 'guesstimate' based on their knowledge of the people in their congregation. The idea is to try and find out the strength of the preference for non-liturgical worship. The responses were:

|            |          |          |           |               |
|------------|----------|----------|-----------|---------------|
| 100%:      | Urban 0, | Rural 1, | Total 1.  |               |
| 75%:       | Urban 4, | Rural 4, | Total 8.  |               |
| 50%:       | Urban 5, | Rural 8, | Total 13. |               |
| 25%:       | Urban 6, | Rural 2, | Total 8.  |               |
| Not known: | Urban 3, | Rural 3, | Total 6.  | Full total 36 |

**Question 13. What proportion prefers a 'mix' of *Worship Book*, other material and extempore?**

Here again, a 'guesstimate' is sought based on the steward's knowledge of the congregation. The responses were:

|                  |          |          |          |                |
|------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|
| Accept whatever: | Urban 1, | Rural 0, | Total 1. |                |
| 100%:            | Urban 0, | Rural 1, | Total 1. |                |
| 90%:             | Urban 1, | Rural 1, | Total 2. |                |
| 80%:             | Urban 2, | Rural 0, | Total 2. |                |
| 75%:             | Urban 4, | Rural 4, | Total 8. |                |
| 50%:             | Urban 3, | Rural 6, | Total 9. |                |
| 25%:             | Urban 2, | Rural 2, | Total 4. |                |
| None:            | Urban 1, | Rural 0, | Total 1. |                |
| Not Known:       | Urban 4, | Rural 4, | Total 8. | Full total 36. |

**Question 14. Has *The Methodist Worship Book* been a help to peoples' commitment, faith building and discipleship? If yes please say how.**

The aim is to find out if there is any tangible effect that the use of the *Worship Book* may have had. The responses were:

|             |           |           |                          |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Yes:        | Urban 2,  | Rural 2,  | Total 4.                 |
| No:         | Urban 3,  | Rural 3,  | Total 6.                 |
| Don't know: | Urban 13, | Rural 13, | Total 26. Full total 36. |

There were four replies concerning the question 'how?' saying that the Book is helpful in personal and group prayer and for worship preparation.

**Question 15. Indicate if and how the Book has helped with any aspect of mission.**

A further question about how the Book may have helped inspire the work of the churches which have used it. The responses were:

|                                     |          |          |           |
|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Local mission and outreach:         | Urban 4, | Rural 3, | Total 7.  |
| City/town/community involvement:    | Urban 1, | Rural 3, | Total 4.  |
| Action on national concerns:        | Urban 1, | Rural 2, | Total 3.  |
| World mission partnership activity: | Urban 1, | Rural 1, | Total 2.  |
| Not helped:                         | Urban 6, | Rural 4, | Total 10. |
| Not known:                          | Urban 1, | Rural 2, | Total 3.  |
| No reply:                           | Urban 6, | Rural 8, | Total 14. |
| Not applicable:                     | Urban 0, | Rural 1, | Total 1.  |
| Don't know:                         | Urban 1, | Rural 0, | Total 1.  |

**Question 16. Person sending this reply.**

This was a request to confirm the status of the respondent. In some cases more than one person completed the questionnaire. The replies were:

|                       |           |           |           |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Minister:             | Urban 2,  | Rural 1,  | Total 3.  |
| Local preacher:       | Urban 1,  | Rural 0,  | Total 0.  |
| Worship leader:       | Urban 1,  | Rural 0,  | Total 1.  |
| Steward:              | Urban 14, | Rural 16, | Total 30. |
| Worker w. Ch. & Y.P:  | Urban 2,  | Rural 2,  | Total 4.  |
| Church member:        | Urban 4,  | Rural 2,  | Total 6.  |
| Treasurer:            | Urban 1,  | Rural 0,  | Total 1.  |
| Church Worship group: | Urban 1,  | Rural 0,  | Total 1.  |

### **Question 17. Did you respond to the previous questionnaire?**

The aim was to find out whether or not this survey was completed by different people from the previous one. The answers were:

Yes: Urban 2, Rural 1, Total 3.

No: Urban 16, Rural 17, Total 33. Full total 36.

#### **5.5.5 ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

Taken together, the responses to questions 1 to 9 seem to strongly suggest that irrespective of location, membership, size of congregation, service time and frequency, the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*, in practice, is usually the prerogative of ministers, and is almost exclusively used only on occasions when they lead worship. Amongst the whole sample only four churches record the use of the Book by a local preacher, and then only infrequently. The Book is mainly used by ministers for Holy Communion services and the Public Offices.

Concerning times of Services the main act of worship in all the churches (36) takes place on Sunday morning, supplemented by afternoon (2) or evening services (25) with some in mid week (11) and with varying degrees of frequency. There is nothing to suggest that these figures are directly related in any way to the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*, unless a service is designated as a Communion.

The relationship between the number of ministerial appointments per quarter and the use of the Book (questions 4 and 9) was found to be:

|                     | High (10+) | Medium (5-9) | Low (4-) |       |         |
|---------------------|------------|--------------|----------|-------|---------|
| Monthly             | 7          | 10           | 5        | Total | 22      |
| Quarterly           | 3          | 1            | 5        | Total | 9       |
| Less than quarterly | 1          | 1            | 1        | Total | 3       |
| Not at all          | 1          | 1            |          | Total | 2 (=36) |

With regard to the number of ministerial appointments the churches in question have each quarter, 22 use the Book once a month usually for Communion, 9 once a quarter and 3 less than once a quarter. Most churches have an established monthly celebration of Communion, with others quarterly or less, depending on how many churches a minister may have in her/his charge.

With regard to question 10, *The Methodist Worship Book* is perceived by just over one third of the churches as being useful within a completely local Methodist cultural setting (14)(39%). A similar number of respondents see it as culturally irrelevant (13)(36%). There is a significant proportion of those who say they don't know or who do not reply (8+8=16)(47%). These figures hardly display a whole-hearted enthusiasm for the relevance of the Book to local situations, for which a certain degree of adaptation is obviously necessary.

The responses to question 11 reveal that most of the churches use alternative liturgies sometimes and a small number either most or all of the time, leading to the conclusion that *The Methodist Worship Book* does not necessarily meet the liturgical needs of some Ministers, Local Preachers or Worship Leaders,

who, when left to themselves, use other material, whether this be at Communion services or on other occasions.

A preference for extempore worship (i.e. non liturgical in the sense of the use of no printed materials) is indicated by the high proportions in the 25 to 75 % range in answer to question 12.

The answers to question 13 show that a considerable proportion of the churches (23/36)(64%) are content with a mix of worship styles.

For question 14, the majority of the respondents (over 2/3rds) do not know whether there are any tangible results from the use of *The Methodist Worship Book*. However the four people who answered 'yes' gave the following reasons for their answers:

The Book enhances worship.

It is useful for house groups and prayer groups.

It is useful in worship and prayer preparation.

It forms a focus and a guide for worship.

It is a quality book useful for the seasons of the Christian Year.

But none of these points, however valid, specifically answers the question concerning commitment, faith building and discipleship, suggesting that there is a need to help congregations to see the connection between liturgy and life.

The figures in the answers to question 15 also reveal uncertainty about the relationship between liturgy and mission. The seven affirmative replies relating to local mission and outreach seem to imply that in some cases inspiration has been found for this, but not so much for a world-wide context.

Lay leaders of significant status (Question 16) have completed the survey. It is good that ministers have not taken it over and that we have got 'grass roots' replies.

Because only three people, from those who responded on this occasion, completed the previous survey (question 17) we may conclude that this questionnaire has covered new ground and added some fresh insights to the research process.

Previously, the questionnaire was completed by people who had selected themselves due to their personal interest and individual attitudes to *The Methodist Worship Book* and so could be regarded as being elitist and exclusive. This further survey indicates that the use of *The Methodist Worship Book* in the life of the churches is much less significant than may be imagined.

## **5.6 COMPARING AND CONTRASTING**

Most members of the surveyed congregations seem to accept the pattern of worship determined for them by their ministers and presumably, also, local preachers. Using the results of the surveys we may compare the views of ministers and members to see where they are in agreement or otherwise.



From both ministers and members, positively, there is appreciation of the variety to be found in *The Methodist Worship Book* and it is viewed as a useful resource (Chapter 5.1.1; 5.1.2; 5.4.1; 5.4.2) despite its size, wordiness and the similarity of the seasonal Communion services. Its language and theology is seen as appropriate by a sizeable number of respondents, but too traditional by others (Chapter 5.1.3; 5.1.4; 5.4.7.A). Members seemed happier with the language and culture of the Book than did ministers (Chapter 5.4.3; 5.4.4), but on the other hand they appeared to be more mindful of the needs of those who do not attend church regularly (Chapter 5.4.3; 5.4.6).

Some members, but not ministers, express hesitation about their perceived tendency in the Book towards a 'higher' Church ethos (Chapter 5.4.4).

The findings of the questionnaires also seem to show that both ministers and members would prefer to have a worship book containing those essential services which are used most frequently, hence a book which would be lighter and more convenient in size (Chapter 5.1.6).

Most ministers use those services which we would expect from *The Methodist Worship Book* on a regular basis (Communion, Baptism, Marriage, Funeral), perhaps with adaptations to suit local circumstances to a greater or lesser degree (Chapter 5.2.4) and members seem to concur with this situation

(Chapter 5.4.6; 5.5.5). However, some ministers, with approval and appreciation from their congregations do use alternative liturgical materials (Chapter 5.2.4; 5.3). These are used to give even more variety in worship styles than that provided by *The Methodist Worship Book* with a vocabulary and mode of expression which they believe to be more suited to the contemporary world (Chapter 5.3.3) and to which their congregations respond positively (Chapter 5.3.6).

In our comparison the issue of the Baptismal Service in particular evokes recurring comment (Chapter 5.1.1; 5.1.2; 5.1.3; 5.1.4; 5.4.1; 5.4.4; 5.4.7; etc.) mainly because it is thought to be unsuitable for the people who request it who, whether the church likes it or not, mainly consist of either none or irregular churchgoers, who nevertheless retain vestiges of a folk religion and who feel, even though they may not be able to articulate this, a certain need to undergo the ceremony for the sake of their child and family. A more user friendly service would therefore be appropriate, using language and concepts as meaningful as possible for them.

On the whole, there seems to be very little significant difference between ministers and members of congregations in the way that they regard and use *The Methodist Worship Book*. Members are mostly happy, generally, with the choices their ministers make with regard to the use or the non-use of the material to be found in the Book, although amongst some members there is still a resistance to the use of books in worship per se (Chapter 5.4.1; 5.4.2).

By way of a specific example, and because it is the most used service, it is interesting to compare the views of members of congregations and ministers with regard to the choice of liturgy for Holy Communion. These are not necessarily from the same Circuits and Churches.

| Type of Liturgy used at Holy Communion Services | Methodist Churches Views of Congregations<br>36 replies (Chapter 5.5) | The Views of Ministers<br>33 replies<br>(Chapter 5.1)  |
|---|---|--|
| Use of <i>The Methodist Worship Book</i>        | Usually with the Minister<br>34/36                                    | Always 2/33<br>Usually 25/33<br>Seldom 6/33  |
| Use of other liturgies                          | Sometimes 29/36   | Often 10/33<br>Sometimes 21/33<br><u>When written by Self</u><br>Often 5/33<br>Sometimes 24/33                                       |
| Expressed preference for extempore worship      | 75% : 8/36<br>50% : 13/36<br>25% : 8/36                               | <u>At Communion</u><br>Often 4/33<br>Sometimes 22/33<br><u>At a 'Normal' Service</u><br>Always 9/33<br>Often 16/33<br>Sometimes 8/33 |
| Expressed preference for a mix of material      | 80% : 5/36<br>75% : 8/36<br>50% : 9/36<br>25% : 4/36                  | Always 7/33<br>Often 18/33<br>Sometimes 4/33   |

Comparison of the above figures shows that although Ministers may usually use *The Methodist Worship Book* for Communion Services, quite a considerable proportion *sometimes* adopt a completely extempore approach. The extempore ethos still predominates at 'normal' preaching services. At some services a mixture of materials (both printed and extempore) is also acceptable. Generally speaking, here again, there is little

significant difference between the views and preferences of both members and ministers although the individual responses seem to value the content and usage of the Book more than those which express a corporate view.

## CHAPTER 6

### FIFTY YEARS OF CHANGE 1960 - 2010

#### 6.1 SIXTIES STIRRINGS

In earlier chapters (1 and 2) we have seen how, following Methodist union in 1932, patterns of worship became fairly settled. Most worship followed the style of the five-hymn preaching service, and communion services used either the full order from *The Book of Offices 1936*, albeit but not necessarily abbreviated, or the shorter alternative form or sometimes no printed order at all. As the researcher remembers, this situation was almost wholly a static one.

Whether or not it was something of the secular spirit which influenced the Methodist Church, but during the 1960's signs of dissatisfaction began to appear. What was orthodox and generally accepted began to be questioned both with regard to doctrine and worship practices. The phrase 'hymn sandwich' became a maligned expression and a desire for change and experimentation was aroused. Local preachers such as Bernard Braley gave a lead in this direction. Fortuitously, he was the owner of a small company, 'Belton Books', so was able to publish pamphlets such as '*Replace the Sermon*' and '*Replace the Hymn Sandwich*'. His magazine, '*Living Worship*' published quarterly, contained scores of ideas for worship,

submitted by readers. There was a catalogue of his publications, including drama, music and song, prayers and other readings for use in worship. Bernard Braley's work is but one example of many small initiatives, beginning in the 1960's, which have encouraged imaginative developments in the extempore or free form tradition of Methodist worship.<sup>136</sup>

There was also the Methodist Renewal Group, formed at a meeting of fourteen ministers in Birmingham in January 1961 who were deeply concerned about the irrelevance of so much in the life of the Church, especially, as far as this research is concerned, with the nature of its worship. One of the Group's defined aims was

To discover by study and experiment the pattern and content of worship which will both be corporate and also meet the real needs of worshippers.<sup>137</sup>

The group's membership consisted mainly of Methodist ministers together with some local preachers and lay people, which, in 1968, published a groundbreaking work entitled *Worship for Today – Suggestions and Ideas*.

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136 The two publications *Replace the Sermon; a Pamphlet of Practical Suggestions for 52 Sundays* and *Replace the Hymn Sandwich; a Pamphlet of Practical Ideas Written from a Methodist Standpoint*, both by Bernard Braley were published by Belton Books, Great Yarmouth in 1967. They arose out of collaboration between Bernard and his minister, the Revd. Kenneth Curtis, and others, and from experiments at Magdalen Way Methodist Church, Gorleston on Sea, Norfolk. The magazine *Living Worship* began quarterly publication in November 1970, superseding a series of infrequent bulletins circulated between Bernard and his many contacts. It eventually ceased publication, being followed, after a break, by another entitled *Hymns and Congregational Songs*. This too came to an end and after another interval the magazine was re-titled *Worship Live* and launched in the summer of 1995 under the auspices of Stainer and Bell. From 2012 it became published independently in electronic version thus carrying on the tradition of experiment and encouragement of new material for use in worship, especially hymns.

137 Waterhouse J M (ed) *Beware the Church*, London, Epworth, 1968. From Chapter 1 Vincent J J *Good Seed: Stony Ground?* p12.

The book was the result of collaboration between the group, the Local Preachers' Department and representatives from the Faith and Order Committee who acted as consultants. The book consists of a mixture of varied liturgies and outlines of free form services and was clearly intent on breaking the mould. The book contains orders or outlines for communion services, morning and evening worship, family services, the Christian festivals, youth services, special occasions and themed services. The language used is a mixture of traditional and contemporary and there is much that is innovative in the material that is used in the services. The Renewal Group dared to believe, and it may be argued that it was subsequently proved to be true, that their work in this book and other similar publications was the catalyst which initiated a more creative approach to worship in Methodism as a whole. Rev. A. Raymond George, a prominent member of the Faith and Order Committee, a body not necessarily known for its radical approach, nevertheless commented:

Twenty years ago very few people thought of experiments of this kind, and my main feeling today is one of gratitude that we are living at the beginning of a creative period in the history of worship.<sup>138</sup>

A further observation on 1960's worship has been made by Rev. J. Munsey Turner, a Methodist scholar and historian.

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138 Quoted by Jones R (ed) *Worship for Today. Suggestions and Ideas*. London, Epworth, 1968, p.155

The 1960s... saw a clear desire for much more experiment in worship and alternatives to preaching... Good preaching could exist alongside new styles of drama, the use of slides in intercessory prayers, films and dialogue.<sup>139</sup>

Another important influence upon Methodist worship was the Charismatic Movement, which had its roots in Pentecostalism, but spread across all the denominations including even Roman Catholicism. Again, beginning in the early 1960s this movement grew to such an extent that the Methodist Conference authorised a report on it in 1974. This report, whilst expressing hesitation about some of its excesses, such as speaking in tongues and other ecstatic manifestations, nevertheless affirmed the value of some of its emphases. One of these was the releasing of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

There is a concentration upon the Spirit releasing and directing gifts already possessed but virtually unused.<sup>140</sup>

This affects the worship life of the congregation.

There is also a freedom and a spontaneity which enables full congregational participation: the involvement of the whole man (sic): the evolution of spontaneous group preaching and the removal of unhealthy rigidity in distinguishing between laity and ordained ministry.<sup>141</sup>

Charismatic worship is thus characterised by spontaneity of all kinds, prayers, hymns and songs, choice of Bible and other readings, sharing of experiences, with impromptu addresses and sermons. More people take part than would be usual in a normal church service, doing so with an infectious

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139 Turner J M. *Modern Methodism in England 1932-1998*, Peterborough, Epworth, 1998, p.56

140 *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order. Vol. 1. 1933-1983*, Peterborough, MPH, 1984, p.203

141 *Statements and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order Vol. 1, p.203*



enthusiasm. The movement thus helped to encourage greater participation by members of congregations in Methodist worship as a whole.

There is no doubt that the Charismatic Movement has been a stimulus to Methodist worship, so much so that *The Methodist Worship Book* contains a service entitled "A Celebration of Christian Renewal"<sup>142</sup> designed to affirm and recognise the experience of someone who has, so they believe, entered into a fresh understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, but also encouraging him/her to avoid both the pitfall of individualism and the desire to be re-baptised.

Although the service marks a significant individual experience, this should not be seen in isolation from the life of the whole Christian community. This link between personal experience and the Church's corporate life is given expression in the service itself.<sup>143</sup>

We conclude therefore, that the last fifty years or more has seen, albeit gradually and almost imperceptibly, a remarkable transformation in the nature of Methodist worship. The hymn sandwich of the 1950's, the standard Methodist preaching service, together with the set communion services in *The Book of Offices* became no longer sacrosanct, and there began an era of experimentation and developments in worship which continues to this day.

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142 *Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, MPH, 1999, pp.404-406

143 Dixon N. *Wonder, Love and Praise. A Companion to the Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, Epworth, 2003, p.154

## 6.2 A MOVE FOR THE SERMON

There were further significant changes in the way that Methodism approached its worship, one of which was included in the content of the 'Faith and Worship' course for the training of local preachers.

Prior to 1990 the training of local preachers was text-book based, with examinations in the Old Testament, New Testament, Christian Doctrine and Worship and Preaching, along with oral examinations and trial services. The Faith and Worship course, introduced in 1990, on the other hand, was based on subject module units and encouraged trainees to begin a journey of discovery through researches and experiential learning, but still retaining oral examinations and trial services. Included with biblical and doctrinal studies, preachers on trial were expected to undertake an in-depth exploration of the nature of worship and liturgy.

The content of Local Preacher training is obviously of importance in that the knowledge and experience gained will influence the kind of worship which the preachers themselves will lead over many years to come.

Unit 2 of the Faith and Worship course relates to 'The Nature of Worship'. Following fairly traditional definitions of worship (e.g. the well known one by William Temple<sup>144</sup>) it is suggested that the normal structure of a service is fourfold:

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144 "Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by his holiness; the nourishment of the mind with his truth; the purifying of the imagination by his beauty; the opening of the heart to his love; and the surrender of the will to his purpose". Quoted in Hilton D. *Flowing Streams*, Redhill, NCEC, 1993, p.172

1. Preparation: Approach; Adoration; Confession; Pardon; (Thanksgiving).
2. Ministry of the Word: Bible readings; Sermon; Reflection.
3. Response: (Thanksgiving); Intercession; Petition; Dedication; Commitment.
4. Dismissal: Blessing.

The above sections are, of course, interspersed with appropriate hymns or songs.

In other words, following the pattern of *The Methodist Service Book 1975*, the service has a Eucharistic shape, despite the fact that this is not specifically stated. The sermon is now no longer regarded as being the 'climax' of worship.

Local preachers on trial are advised

If you follow this pattern, you will offer a well-balanced act of worship. It is not intended as a strait jacket to restrict creative acts of worship, but as a simple guide. This structure carries wide ecumenical approval and is used for all the services in the *Methodist Worship Book*.<sup>145</sup>

Although it is later asserted that...

there is no right single pattern to worship...<sup>146</sup>

nevertheless because this structure is part of the officially recognised training course the implication is that this is the norm. So in the training and shaping of the ministry of local preachers the traditional preaching service with the sermon as its culmination has been replaced by a Eucharistic pattern

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<sup>145</sup> *Faith and Worship, Unit 2*, 3rd edn., Peterborough, MPH, 1999, p.7

<sup>146</sup> *Faith and Worship, Unit 2*, p.8

influenced by liturgical principles which have their sources in ecumenical circles and which are not necessarily part of the original ethos of Methodism.

The remainder of Unit 2, based on this structure, then goes on to help preachers on trial with their preparation of services of worship. Unit 16 contains an outline of the origins of Methodism and of its local preachers, but there is no mention of the twofold practice, or, more specifically, of the part that local preachers have played and may still play in fostering the extempore or free form tradition, as embodied in the preaching service.

Currently in hand is the 'Fruitful Field' project involving the reshaping of Methodism's training regime at all levels. It remains to be seen what the content of training courses for ministers, local preachers and worship leaders will consist of in the syllabuses yet to be drawn up.

### **6.3 WORSHIP LEADERS**

The role of worship leader alongside that of local preacher was recognised and authorised by the Methodist Conference in 1996, thus formalising a trend which had been taking place for some time.

Worship leaders are those church members who take a prominent role in conducting a service of worship by announcing hymns, saying prayers and reading lessons, that is, everything apart from preaching the sermon, which they are specifically not permitted to do. In preparing an act of worship they

are expected to collaborate with the appointed preacher who retains overall control of the content.

It is the responsibility of the local Church Council to identify, encourage, nominate, appoint and train suitable people for the role of worship leaders, subject to the ratification of the Circuit Meeting. The Local Preachers' Meeting also has a consultative role in this process, by appraising and renewing these appointments every three years. Worship leaders may only act as such in their own local church, and, if there are a number of them, they are encouraged to form a team which will undertake responsibility, along with preachers, in the planning, preparation and leading of worship as well as initiating developments in the worship life of the local church. There is now a tendency, in some places, for them to serve throughout a Circuit.

In order to ensure appropriate standards, a Connexional Training Manual was published. The content of the course is based on the relevant units from the local preachers' *Faith and Worship* training course. This covers the nature and structure of corporate worship in a similar way to that for the training of local preachers. We note that in Session 2 of the course<sup>147</sup>, there are two alternative 'model' structures, the first is the preaching service pattern with the sermon as the 'climax' of an act of worship, the second the Eucharistic pattern with prayers of thanksgiving and intercession following the ministry of

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147 *Worship Leaders' Training Pack*, Peterborough, MPH, 1996, pp.8 & 9. OHP slide 8

the word, effectively a 'dry' communion. This could be regarded as a subtle introduction to the dual tradition.

With regard to the appointment of worship leaders per se, we are bound to ask the question as to whether or not formalising participation in this way actually makes others feel excluded from offering their talents in the task of leading worship. Once such official appointments are made there is always the danger that some people may gain the impression that their gifts are not recognised. It may have been better to allow the Spirit to move and for participation in worship to develop variously and naturally, each Church Council asking one of its members to fulfil a role in identifying talents and gifts, for example in music, drama and other arts.

#### **6.4 LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS**

In recent years another identifiable trend has led to a situation which means that there are further changes in worship patterns. There are not enough ministers (even with the use of supernumeraries, i.e. retired ministers) and local preachers available to fill the number of appointments on Circuit Plans. Death and old age have taken their toll and recruitment is at an insufficient level, therefore there are fewer trained and authorised ministers and local preachers to take services in Methodist churches and chapels.

Circuit Superintendents have the responsibility of making their preaching plans and there are various responses to this particular need, each Circuit,

seemingly, doing what is felt appropriate for itself, bearing in mind the resources available to it.

During January 2010 the researcher contacted five Superintendents in the Newcastle District to discover the measures adopted in their Circuit.

In the Newcastle West Circuit the Superintendent reported that although the situation is satisfactory at present, worship leaders have been authorised in six churches and they are prepared for those occasions when they will have to lead praise services in the event of a minister or local preacher not being available. They cannot preach but the possibility of them reading a sermon or an address written by a qualified preacher is being considered. One church in the Circuit, which is a Local Ecumenical Partnership, has a worship group which meets to prepare and then conduct informal services with minimal supervision from their minister or a local preacher.

In the North Shields and Whitley Bay Circuit the three larger churches have teams of worship leaders, with the four smaller churches just having one or two each. In the event of no accredited preacher or minister being available the worship leaders will conduct a service of praise and prayer, which is what they are trained to do, but they are not permitted to preach. There is a policy of not putting 'local arrangements' or 'supply' on the plan as such services mean that Circuit control is abdicated. One church has a taped sermon on standby for use in a service if necessary.

The Tynedale Circuit (formerly the Hexham Circuit and now extended) has had a system of readers for a number of years. Being a large and rather scattered rural Circuit, for some time there have never been enough ministers and preachers to fill all the appointments on the Circuit Plan. Therefore, every quarter, each church is normally expected to have at least one reader's service and one local arrangement. The readers, as their title implies, read a complete service. Such services were once supplied by the Local Preachers' Office in London, but now they are provided by a supernumerary minister who writes them. Other Circuits with similar plan-making difficulties have enquired how the system works. When 'local arrangement' appears on the plan then the local church itself is responsible for organising that particular worship service. The church stewards often try contacting local preachers to fill the gap. Often, because preachers have blocked that Sunday, they are unsuccessful in finding one. Therefore the congregation is thrown back onto its own resources and a group of members will prepare a service themselves, usually with supervision from a minister or a fully accredited local preacher, but sometimes not, the content of the worship being taken on trust. Because of a large number of 'local arrangements' on the plan, this researcher, when he was Superintendent of the Circuit, produced a resource handbook to help in the task of preparing for such services. The contents included summaries of lectures given to the Circuit Fellowship by several specialists then in the North East. The subjects



covered were: Why Worship? All-age Worship; Singing New Songs; Patterns of Public Prayer; Using the Bible; Creative Arts; and Multi-media and Audio-visual Aids. The aim of the handbook was to encourage and enable the people in the pew to rise up and take responsibility for their own worship.

In the Gateshead and Jarrow Circuit, when 'Local Arrangement' appears on the plan, churches are expected either to find a preacher or to do it themselves, with supervision. Often this means holding a 'Songs of Praise' service of favourite hymns. Three of the churches have worship groups which meet to prepare services.

In the Sunderland Circuit there is a similar situation. 'Local Arrangement' on the plan again means that a church must find a preacher or alternatively organise a service themselves. One church has a group committed to planning one service each quarter. In another church an Alpha Group, having completed the prescribed course, now meets to plan worship services which they conduct, because they had a feeling that they were called to serve the Circuit in this way. In each case there is supervision from an accredited preacher or minister. This Circuit also, because of reduced numbers of people attending evening services, only holds three, with all other churches being closed and invited to gather for worship at these. One service is a traditional style preaching service, one an experimental contemporary service, and the third an interactive Bible Study service.

These stories from five Circuits in the Newcastle District illustrate the variety of ways in which church congregations are responding to their current situation. The provision of an ordained minister or an accredited local preacher is no longer guaranteed and the people are being challenged to create meaningful acts of worship from their own resources and to accept the need for lay participation to an extent which hitherto has neither been expected nor experienced. This rise of teams of local church members in leading worship is thus becoming evident and is arguably better than worship led singly by a local preacher or minister. Such participation is to be encouraged. With this need in mind the researcher has devised a method whereby congregations may prepare a service of worship for themselves, involving participation both during preparation and as the service itself proceeds.<sup>148</sup>

### **6.5 HYMNODY: SINGING NEW SONGS**

In recent years there has been a significant change in the kinds of hymns and songs which form an important element in Methodist worship, but, to begin at the beginning...

Methodism, unlike many other mainstream traditions, has no formal doctrinal statements other than the standards laid down by John Wesley's *Forty Four Sermons* and his *Notes on the New Testament*. Methodism also cherishes its place in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and as such adheres

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<sup>148</sup> See Appendix 5

to the historic creeds. But apart from these standards, which are often regarded with a certain liberty of interpretation, there is nothing like the Church of England's Thirty Nine Articles, the Westminster Confession or Roman Catholic Encyclicals. Instead, Methodist theology was and is expressed in its hymnody and Methodists have a reputation for singing their faith, often lustily and enthusiastically, a tradition instigated by one of the greatest of hymn writers, Charles Wesley, although John was not above writing a few himself. An example of the way theology was expressed in hymns is illustrated by the classic work entitled *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, edited and with a commentary by J. Ernest Rattenbury who affirms:

I believe that the Wesleys' Eucharistic hymns do actually express, and even more indicate, the way in which the corporate priesthood of the Church is to be exercised both in ritual and ethical obligation.

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A companion volume on the evangelical hymns was also published outlining the particular theological emphases of the Methodist movement.

"Methodism was born in song."<sup>150</sup> So the preface to *The Methodist Hymn Book* declares, and certainly singing was an important element in the original preaching services which Methodists would not necessarily experience in their attendance at Parish Communion.

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149 Rattenbury J.E., *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, London, Epworth, 1948, p.viii.

150 *The Methodist Hymn Book*, London, MPH, 1933, p.v.

Following the Act of Union in 1932 *The Methodist Hymn Book* was published in 1933. Its contents were drawn from the hymns of Wesley and Watts and many other classical writers, and also from the hymns of the formerly different branches of Methodism, with elements of the Moody and Sankey revivals of the nineteenth century. This hymn book was used almost exclusively for fifty years although an experimental collection entitled *Hymns and Songs* was published in 1969 as a supplement. This was well received and seemed to act as a spur to further creativity, so much so that in 1983 a more up-to-date collection was published entitled *Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book*, reflecting the participation of some members of other denominations in the process of compilation. There was also a considerable degree of consultation regarding the hymns and songs to be included, especially through the pages of the *Methodist Recorder*. The editorial policy was expressed thus in the preface to the book:

In compiling this hymn book, the committee has sought to respond to our changing times, and to produce a book which articulates the needs, the joys and the fears of the contemporary world.<sup>151</sup>

A further aim was also stated:

As the music of this book has been selected to encourage congregational singing, so too the words of the hymns have been chosen because they are representative of the best of ancient and modern hymn writing.<sup>152</sup>

*Hymns and Psalms* has been the mainstay of Methodist congregational singing for over twenty five years, but, inevitably, with the passage of time, it

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151 *Hymns and Psalms*, London, MPH, 1983, p.iv

152 *Hymns and Psalms*, p.x

too began to show its age and the need for another collection became evident. This was also because in recent decades there has been the publication of many other books of hymns and songs; the *Mission Praise* and *Songs of Fellowship* series; *Rejoice and Sing* by the United Reformed Church; collections produced by the Iona Community and by individuals such as Fred Pratt Green, Alan Gaunt, Brian Wren, Fred Kaan, Graham Kendrick and many others. Hence we now have the latest collection to be authorised by the Methodist Conference and published in 2011 entitled *Singing the Faith*, which aims to encompass all the recent developments in hymn writing as well as retaining a core selection of the best of the past, affirming that

Singing hymns in worship assists in meeting with the living God and helps us to grow in faith and discipleship.<sup>153</sup>

Once again there was a wide consultation across Methodism through the pages of the Methodist Recorder and also input from the Methodist Church Music Society and the Faith and Order Committee. New hymn texts from the past twenty or thirty years were considered for inclusion so long as their language was gender inclusive, in contemporary English, using appropriate metaphor, accorded with Methodist theology and sought to express Christian faith in fresh and relevant ways.

Nevertheless its production was not without controversy, especially, for example, the hymn 'In Christ alone' which expresses a view of the atonement which many find unacceptable:

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<sup>153</sup> *Singing the Faith*, Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, London, Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd., 2011, p.vii.

Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied,  
For every sin on him was laid,  
Here in the death of Christ I live.<sup>154</sup>

The authors, Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, when consulted by the compiling committee, insisted that their text should stand, but many critics of its inclusion regard the doctrine of God which is expressed in these lines to be totally repugnant. There are also other serious objections to the hymn. For instance can the phrase 'In Christ alone' really be used in today's multi-faith context? Again, the words 'No scheme of man' (vs.4) are not gender inclusive, thus contradicting the criteria in the preface to the hymn book itself.<sup>155</sup>

Others have given voice to their hesitation in accepting an outdated eschatology in such lines as:

Lo, He comes with clouds descending.<sup>156</sup>

Plainly this will not literally be the case and new metaphors are needed to understand the meaning of 'the Coming of the Christ'. However it does have to be said that within the broad span of Methodist theology, historically and generally, such ideas as those above are represented.

It remains to be seen whether this new hymn book will last the twenty eight years of *Hymns and Psalms* or the fifty years of *The Methodist Hymn Book*.

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154 *Singing the Faith*, Hymn 351, vs.2

151 *Singing the Faith*, p.viii

156 *Singing the Faith*, Hymn 177, vs.1

Another interesting fact about Methodism's hymn books is the gradual exclusion of Charles Wesley's hymns. In number these have been:

|                                |     |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| <i>The Methodist Hymn Book</i> | 212 |
| <i>Hymns and Psalms</i>        | 164 |
| <i>Singing the Faith</i>       | 79  |

The hymns of the Wesleys' were intended to give expression to what were called the distinctive (theological) emphases of Methodism, viz:

All men (sic) need to be saved (The doctrine of original sin)

All men can be saved (Salvation by faith)

All men can know themselves saved (Assurance of personal salvation)

All men can know themselves saved to the uttermost (The doctrine of holiness or Christian perfection)

Thus the emphasis in the hymns of Charles Wesley largely lay on the work of God in the life of the individual in deliverance from sin and then the process of sanctification. With the reduction in the number of Charles Wesley's hymns in each succeeding volume, it could be argued that these original emphases are not so prominent as they once were, although the compilers of the new hymn book would affirm, as they do, that they have been preserved, but with a more contemporary expression, as stated in their criteria previously mentioned.<sup>157</sup>

Comparing the contents of *Hymns and Psalms* and *Singing the Faith*, 823 hymns now becomes 728 of which 327 (45%) are to be found in the older book and 401 are therefore new to authorised Methodist hymnody. The

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<sup>153</sup> *Singing the Faith*, p.viii-ix

question arises therefore whether or not it may have been a better course of action to publish a volume of entirely fresh hymns to be used alongside *Hymns and Psalms*, which would have given a greater selection from which to choose. As it is, many churches have purchased the alternative hymn books previously mentioned, and may be unlikely, at this stage, to invest in another.

Nevertheless an appreciative reviewer urges:

As soon as you can, invest in *Singing the Faith* and begin to enjoy all the riches it contains, and the websites that support it to give you even more material. It is an important and timely publication, and a very fine one.<sup>158</sup>

But is *Singing the Faith* as contemporary and relevant as it might be? In 1989 the partly Methodist Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield published a short volume of hymns entitled *Hymns of the City*. Of this selection of 31 hymns only two have been chosen for inclusion in *Singing the Faith*, these two being by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. It could be argued, therefore, that urban life is not represented as fully as it might be in *Singing the Faith*. An examination of the list of contents will bear this out.

Another concern would be what some see as the shallow theology, individualism, sentimental images of Jesus and repetitiousness in many of the worship songs extant today, with a consequent lack of depth giving rise to

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158 Gay P, 'Singing the Faith', in Methodist Sacramental Fellowship Bulletin No. 139 (Epiphany 2012), p.12.



dissatisfaction among some church members concerning the quality of congregational singing. Such songs do indeed have a varied character and perhaps reflect the influence upon Methodism of the pop-style singing of the independent community churches.

As David Chapman comments:

One of the tensions in many contemporary congregations concerns what is sung in worship. With the passage of time fewer and fewer Methodists are familiar with the 'traditional' hymns that sustained the spirituality of previous generations. Some value modern worship

songs for precisely the same reasons that Methodists in the eighteenth century appreciated the hymns of Charles Wesley – because they express spiritual truths in a way that is relevant to contemporary culture. Others regret the shallow content of many worship songs.<sup>159</sup>

However, whatever a person's point of view on the nature and quality of the hymns and songs which are used in Methodist worship, as a denomination born in song it will, hopefully, continue to live by song as an enriching feature of its worship.

## **6.6 THE COVENANT SERVICE**

There is one particular act of worship, observed annually without fail in each church and which is unique to Methodism. This is the Covenant Service, with a Conference authorised format which has certainly been revised over the years, but which, in essence has remained the same.

At the beginning of each calendar year John Wesley expected the Methodist people to renew their commitment to God by following in the way

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<sup>159</sup> Chapman D.M., *Born in Song, Methodist Worship in Britain*, Warrington, Church in the Market Place Publications, 2006, p.194

of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore he devised the Covenant service, a liturgy unique among all the Christian Churches, but drawing on ideas and resources from beyond Methodism itself. He brought together several strands of material; the Biblical idea of the covenant; the writings of the Puritan divines Richard and Joseph Alleine, and influence from the Moravian practice of the Watch Night Service at the turn of the year.

Wesley's singular contribution to the development of the Covenant service lay not in the exposition of an original idea but in his perception of the theological significance of the covenant for Christian experience and its liturgical application to the spirituality of Methodists.<sup>160</sup>

The first Covenant Service was held in Spitalfields in August 1755 using John Wesley's liturgy, for which Charles penned his notable Covenant hymn in 1762.

Come let us use the grace divine,  
And all, with one accord,  
In a perpetual cov'nant join  
Ourselves to Christ the Lord.<sup>161</sup>

The introduction of such a service, which began to be held annually at the beginning of each New Year, enabled Methodists to renew their commitment to the God who, in the first place, had brought about the possibility of a relationship with Him.

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160 Chapman D. M., *Born in Song*, p.171.

161 *Hymns and Psalms*, London, MPH, 1983, Hymn 649. This hymn has been included in every Methodist hymn book since it was written. Indeed, the hymn book of 1933, successor to, and influenced by, the Wesleyan 1904 book, contained a section entitled 'Lovefeast and Covenant Services' underlining the traditional importance attached to hymns of this kind, but no such strictly defined section has been included in later books indicating, perhaps, a slight change in the ways in which they are regarded.

The idea of 'Covenant' has a Biblical pedigree which may be traced back to its origins in the Genesis myths, from Noah, on through Abraham, Moses and Jeremiah. The exilic experience led the latter prophet to believe that previous ideas of a 'chosen people', who would enjoy God's favour and protection if they kept His Law, proved to be inadequate because of their failure to do so, and that a change of the human heart was needed, a change expedited by God Himself.<sup>162</sup>

The early Church, anxious to show that it was the New Israel, saw in the self-offering of Jesus the founding of the new covenant as a fulfilment of the old. On the one side God's saving activity in Christ is seen as an established reality, to which, on the other side, a continuous human response is needed. God and humanity agree, or covenant together, to achieve His will and purpose in the world. His side never breaks down but ours does, therefore we always have a need to be penitent for our failures and to renew our commitment and to ask for the help of His Holy Spirit in the living of the Christian life. Such is the spirit in which the annual observance of this service takes place. It is expected that committed and enrolled members of the Methodist Church will renew their Covenant with God at the beginning of each year. As well as being a rededication to Christ the service represents a renewing of Church membership and an expression of loyalty to Methodism as a movement within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

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<sup>162</sup> Jeremiah 31.33.

The original liturgy composed by John Wesley became criticised for its length but over the years and within the various branches of Methodism more manageable forms evolved. Following Methodist union, the Wesleyan order of service, by and large, was the one which prevailed and was included in *The Book of Offices 1936*. As may be expected further updating occurred in the 1975 and 1999 Books. These were mainly a re-ordering of the liturgy to give the types of prayer, the lessons and the sermon more logical places in the service. These lead up to the explanation of the nature of the covenant and then the covenant vow itself which was amended to give wording that is more contemporary and realistic. The service concludes with Holy Communion which sets the seal on the affirmation of the commitment made by the people. At the heart of the service there is the covenant vow, which, although words differ, remains the same in essence in each of the three books, as follows:

| 1936 Version  | 1975 Version  | 1999 Version  |
|---|---|---|
| I am no longer my own, but Thine. Put me to what Thou wilt, rank me with whom Thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for Thee or laid aside for Thee, exalted for Thee or brought low for Thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have | I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have | I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace. Your will be done when I am |

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|--|---|--|
| <p>nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Thou art mine, and I am Thine. So be it. And the Covenant which I have made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.<sup>163</sup></p> | <p>nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.<sup>164</sup></p> | <p>valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and all I am to serve you, as and where you choose. Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.<sup>165</sup></p> |
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Comparing the three versions, 1975 is virtually the same as 1936 except for the use of 'you' and 'your' for 'thou' and 'thee'. The 1999 version attempts to retain the meaning of the earlier versions but with the use of more contemporary phraseology, thus making it longer. Whether or not this has proved to be a success is a subjective judgement to be made by participants. John Vincent comments

I studied all the recent Covenant Service versions, including those in the Methodist Service Book (1975) and the Methodist Worship Book (1999). My view, strongly confirmed by others, was that both missed some of the drama, clarity, boldness and liturgical power of the service in the Methodist Book of Offices (1936).<sup>166</sup>

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163 *The Book of Offices*, London, MPH, 1936, p132.

164 *The Methodist Service Book*, London, MPH, 1975, pD10.

165 *The Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, MPH, 1999, p288.

166 Vincent J. J., *The Covenant Service*, Buxton, Church in the Market Place Publications, 2000, p.2, quoted as printed.

This is a valid point and raises again the issue of classical language versus contemporary, as discussed in chapter 5.1.3.B, and certainly something is lost by such transmutation, but how to recover the power and the drama which the service demands is still an issue to be wrestled with.

On a practical level, from experience, the researcher has found that church members react to the service in three ways. Some regard it as an annual highlight of their ongoing Christian experience and are willing, solemnly to renew the vow and accept the demands it makes upon them, whilst being aware of the inevitability of failure. Others regard themselves as incapable of making the absolute commitment expected by such a promise and so stay away. Still others do not accept the theology inherent in the vow, that of a determinism which negates human freedom, and so too are noticeable by their absence.

These latter two reasons, together with the fact that the first Sunday of the calendar year is not a good time to hold a Covenant Service because it is now part of longer Christmas holidays, mean that attendances are in decline. This situation is not necessarily remedied by moving it to another Sunday, for example the first in September at the beginning of a new Connexional year. What was once the soul of Methodism seems to be slowly losing its imperative.

The service was devised in an age when commitment was easier because life was relatively uncomplicated. In today's complex society with multiple demands on people's time and allegiance another pressure may be neither sought nor welcome even by committed Christians who do regard themselves as faithful disciples but hesitate to accept the demands which could be made upon them by the institutional Church.

Does it belong to another age, likewise, when a more naive theology prevailed which was prepared to accept a certain degree of determinism insofar as God's dealings with His people were concerned? Today it is still possible that the gift of freedom to the human race is often understated and under-appreciated. From experience people know that God is not directing all our thoughts, decisions and actions. We are neither puppets nor robots but free agents.

The Wesley brothers, John in his liturgy and Charles in his hymns, did seem to accept degree of Calvinism in their insistence that God actively directs the lives of believers, as seen in the covenant vow, whilst, paradoxically, resisting the notion of double pre-destination and espousing a strong Arminianism in which the free response of the individual was essential for his/her salvation.

With modern insights we know that our own psychological make-up, genetic predisposition, relational situations and subconscious inclinations plus the external imperatives of Christian discipleship (love of God and neighbour as oneself), i.e. a complex set of various influences, all go into our making the

decisions we do. The Covenant vow needs to take into account all these factors and could be a more simple and straightforward promise than it is at the moment.

Nevertheless, positively, it is good that Methodists, in the context of an act of worship, do face up to the challenge of the gospel and dedicate themselves to the service of God as their response to the creating and saving activity of His love as revealed in the life, teaching, passion, death and rising again of Jesus Christ.

In addition, we have to say, the Covenant Service has often been considered to be a gift to be shared with other Churches. One experienced minister is bold enough to make the claim:

The Covenant Service is often described as Methodism's liturgical gift to the ecumenical world, and rightly so. Almost everywhere I have been a Circuit Minister the Covenant Service has been the time to welcome ecumenical partners to a Methodist feast.<sup>167</sup>

However that may be, David Chapman observes:

Today the Covenant Service remains a fixed point in the Methodist calendar. For some it is a treasured part of their spiritual devotion and Methodist identity, the annual opportunity to affirm their personal dedication to Christ and His covenant. For others, the Covenant service is an occasion to avoid because it makes demands that no amount of editorial softening can gainsay.<sup>168</sup>

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167 H. Mellor. "No Longer my own but Yours", In *Ichthus, the Journal of L.W.P.T.* Vol. 160/4, Winter 2010, p.4

168 Chapman D.M. *Born in Song* p.194



Nevertheless, the Covenant Service remains a significant feature of the worship life of Methodism to be cherished and fostered because of its devotional ethos and challenging content. As the introduction to the service affirms:

The Covenant is not just a one-to-one transaction between individuals and God, but the act of the whole faith community.<sup>169</sup>

## **6.7 THE LOVE FEAST (THE AGAPE)**

### **6.7.1 ORIGINS**

Beside the Covenant Service, for which John Wesley provided a liturgy, there was another kind of service of an extempore nature, the Love Feast. These two services captured the essential spirit of the worship of early Methodism, the one being a set order and the other free form in nature.

Methodism developed its own distinctive devotional services of which the Covenant Service was one and the Love Feast another... The Lord's Supper was traditional, expressing Methodism's link with the Church of England and historic Christianity. The Love Feast and the Covenant Service were peculiar to Methodism and expressed her own ethos and were a token of its independence.<sup>170</sup>

*The Methodist Worship Book* (1999) contains guidance for the ordering of a service of Holy Communion of an extempore or free form nature. There is no guidance for the holding of a Love Feast, which is most surprising since this practice was an important part of the life of early Methodism which persisted

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<sup>169</sup> *The Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, MPH, 1999, p.281-2

<sup>170</sup> Bowmer J. C., *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism*, London, Dacre Press, A. & C. Black, 1951, p.199

well into the nineteenth century, and which was revived in Primitive Methodism. Although it had all but died out in the twentieth century there are some signs of renewed interest in it in the twenty-first. It is worthy of note that the United Methodist Church in the U.S.A. includes a Love Feast service in its *Book of Worship* 1992.

In adopting the Love Feast as a feature of Methodism, John Wesley believed that he had rediscovered a significant element in the life of the early Church, one characterised by informality and spontaneity. References to fellowship meals are found in Acts 2.42, Acts 2.46, 1 Corinthians 11.20-34; 2 Peter 2.13, and Jude vs12, none of them being in any way strictly Eucharistic. There are similar mentions in Christian writings of the first century, notably of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, Tertullian of Carthage, and Clement of Alexandria. However once the impetus of those early centuries had gone the Agape virtually died out probably due to the growth in prominence of the Eucharist.

However, in 1727, a small community of Moravian Christians led by Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf, rediscovered the practice, regarding it as a common meal for encouraging fellowship, sharing experiences and rejoicing in God. Moravian missionaries and emigrants took the practice to America where John Wesley, himself a missionary there at the time, encountered it in Savannah in 1737, being so impressed that he later introduced Love Feasts to the Methodist Society in Fetter Lane, London, during the autumn of 1738. He regarded them as a return to original apostolic Christianity, and from this

small beginning he encouraged this kind of free worship and fellowship as part of the ethos of Methodism.

In his *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, John Wesley wrote:

In order to increase in them a grateful sense of all his mercies, I desired that, one evening in a quarter, all the men in the band, on the second, all the women, would meet; and on a third, both men and women together; that we might together 'eat bread', as the ancient Christians did, 'with gladness and singleness of heart. At these love feasts (so we termed them, retaining the name as well as the thing, which was in use from the beginning) our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed, not only with the 'meat which perisheth', but with that which endureth to everlasting life'.<sup>171</sup>

The Love Feasts consisted of the singing of hymns and songs, the reading of scripture passages, simple preaching, the sharing of testimonies and personal experiences, and the offering of prayers, all mostly as a result of impromptu suggestion and extempore utterances.

The focus of the occasion was an act of sharing which encapsulated the spirit of Christian fellowship. A common two-handled loving cup containing water or tea was passed around among those present, each drinking from it, and for food there was bread, cake, buns or biscuits. A minister or local preacher, authorised by the superintendent, would normally preside, the whole occasion lasting two or three hours or even longer. Initially there were separate Love Feasts for men and women. On joint occasions men and

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171 Quoted in Flavell D E, *The Love Feast, An Act of Worship to Enrich the Church*, Stowmarket, Kevin Mayhew, 2007, p.26-27

women would sit on different sides of the meeting room. Charles Wesley composed a number of hymns for singing at these gatherings.

Love Feasts could become intense spiritual occasions when people testified to their conversions or to the further work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. These days, perhaps, we would want to encourage members to say more about the practising of their discipleship and the issues they encounter day by day. At the time, Love Feasts certainly contributed to the growth and cohesion of the Methodist Societies.

But they could also give rise to possibilities for excesses.

Wesley himself was well aware of the grave disrepute into which the primitive Agape had eventually fallen, and he was the more careful to shield Methodism from scandal. The very name 'Love Feast' invited abuse, and comparison with the decadent days of its prototype.<sup>172</sup>

It is easy to understand the misunderstandings aroused in the general public.

The name love feast, and the fact that it was for members only, provoked revivals of ancient tales about nocturnal orgies and visions of silly women at midnight.<sup>173</sup>

Therefore Wesley tightly controlled the responsibility for conducting Love Feasts, which were kept strictly under the supervision of the Superintendent Ministers, or those authorised by them. Attendance at Love Feasts was also restricted to ticket-carrying Methodist members. A recommended time limit

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172 Baker F. *Methodism and the Love Feast*, London, Epworth, 1956, p.32

173 Rack H D, *Reasonable Enthusiast, John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd edn., London, Epworth, 2002, p.411

of one to one and a half hours also came to be observed. Such disciplinary measures helped the public image of Methodism and helped to keep excesses to a minimum.

The Love Feast continued as a feature of Methodism well into the nineteenth century, the emphasis on spontaneity and participation being a major part of its appeal.

It also proved to be a major element in the life of the Primitive Methodist Connexion following the outbreak of the revival in the Potteries under Hugh Bourne and William Clowes. A dissertation on Primitive Methodism in Wearside illustrates this point.

Love Feasts were held at regular intervals which provided a social gathering and a sense of community. Love Feasts were well attended; one Nottingham chapel supplied over a thousand Love Feast cakes for the congregation. They generally followed a similar pattern... hymns and prayers followed by the distribution of small pieces of cake and a communal 'loving' cup containing water as refreshment. The minister's address, interrupted by such exclamations as 'Bless the Lord', led to the meeting being open for testimonials. Hymns and prayers followed, concluding with an open call for sinners to penitence and immediate salvation.<sup>174</sup>

However, part of the attraction was that Love Feasts gave people something to do in an age when there were few other attractions.

There is little doubt that in earlier days, when there were few public entertainments, Love Feasts became very popular, particularly of course, with the religious public. A writer in the Wesleyan Methodist

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174 Sande D, *Primitive Methodism, A Dissertation, with Special Attention to the Wearside Area*. Undated. No university named. Held in Newcastle Methodist District Archives.

Magazine for 1836 spoke of them as 'the most popular and exciting of our social meetings', and even William Myles in his sober *Chronological History of the people called Methodists*, could describe a love feast as 'a religious entertainment'.<sup>175</sup>

On the other hand Love Feasts seemed to contain within themselves the causes of their own decline.

The love feast could suffer from the same boredom and tensions as the class meeting, when unwilling people felt pressured to give testimonies and were told that it was 'of the devil' when they felt unable to do so.<sup>176</sup>

With time it is not surprising therefore, that interest in the Love Feast dwindled. Other social attractions coupled with the repetitive nature of their content and failure to maintain freshness and relevance, along with growing infrequency, contributed to their decline.

### **6.7.2. NEAR EXTINCTION**

By the beginning of the twentieth century

Love Feasts were already moribund, martyrs to the reduced emotional content of Methodist religious experience, and to an increasing reluctance to speak of that experience.<sup>177</sup>

Frank Baker mentions attempts to keep the love feast alive in some village settings during the early part of the twentieth century, (i.e. in Alport, Berry Brown, Dallowgill, Horsehouse, Denton Burn, Farndale, etc.) but such became increasingly rare, and, by and large,

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175 Baker F., *Methodism and the Love Feast*, London, Epworth, 1956, p.37

176 Rack H. D., *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.411.

177 Baker F., *Methodism and the Love Feast*, p.56

Methodists have almost lost the art of being vocal in public, and even in private, about their religious experience... In the matter of spontaneous spiritual utterance there has been nothing but decline in extempore prayer, in prayer meetings, in band meetings and class meetings and society meetings, and of course, in the love feast.<sup>178</sup>

However, it is known that they still do take place today at some times and in some places.

### **6.7.3. SIGNS OF REVIVAL**

The question is, could the love feast be significantly re-introduced into Methodism, albeit in perhaps other forms, whilst keeping to the essential spirit?

The essence of the Agape is that it is a common meal symbolising the union of Christians with their Lord and with each other.<sup>179</sup>

In May 1977 at the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs London Weekend, there was a 'giant' love feast in the Royal Albert Hall. The theme of the weekend was 'Worship 77' and the aim of this event was to give the young people present an experience of

the reality of Christian fellowship and to encourage participation in worship by as many people as possible.<sup>180</sup>

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178 Baker F, *Methodism and the Love Feast*, p.59

179 Baker F, *Methodism and the Love Feast*, p.62

180 *General Directions re Agape for Pentecost*, London, MAYC, 1977.

There were more than ten thousand young people present in the Royal Albert Hall and the Westminster Central Hall sharing in this act of worship and fellowship. A flexible liturgy was devised and used and those assembled, after taking part together in London, were then urged to share in the Agape in their own local situations, using the same liturgy and with orange squash and buttered scones as the drink and the food. Obviously it is now impossible to measure the impact of the London event, but at least it did make young people from all over the country and their leaders aware of the potential inherent in the Love Feast as a vehicle for fostering Christian worship, fellowship and faith sharing.

Insofar as the researcher's own experience of love feasts is concerned, these have been when a student at Cliff College, with a house group in his church in Reigate, and then as part of the shared life of the then Low Fell Council of Churches during the 1980's. In this latter situation, on one occasion, the participants included Roman Catholics with their priest and members of an Open Plymouth Brethren Church which, normally, did not permit women to speak in the assembly. But they all accepted, with equanimity, the fact that a woman Methodist local preacher, by invitation, presided at the Agape, and were willing to learn the value of this particular tradition in our denomination. So the potential for growth in ecumenical fellowship and co-operation inherent in the Love Feast could be immense, untrammelled as it is by the regulations governing the Mass/Eucharist/Holy Communion/Lord's



Supper and its presidency and notions of transubstantiation the Agape being as near to a sacrament as it is possible to get without it becoming such, because the living Christ is present in the act of sharing in the food and the drink. It is also known that a colleague of the researcher, Revd. Dr. Eric Wright leads such services on occasion in the Cumbria District.

Frank Baker, in commenting on the roots of division between the Churches (i.e. views on the sacraments, Church order, and the nature of the ministry) suggests that the love feast could help in the way forward.

Some of our difficulties might be by-passed by the revival of the agape on an interdenominational level as a symbol of fundamental Christian unity. The Eucharist is fenced about with tradition, restriction, pre-conception and even prejudice. With the agape we are not thus hampered; we can make up the rules as we go along.<sup>181</sup>

As Methodists we shall be profoundly grateful to Almighty God if in His providence it transpires that our traditional love feast has helped to provide a significant step along the road to Christian reunion.<sup>182</sup>

One minister, especially, in recent times, has devoted himself to the revival of the Love Feast in Methodism. David Flavell urges our churches to try arranging one, no ordained minister being required to preside. He gives talks on the subject, provides a simple order of service on his web site, along with other support materials.

The content of the service is similar to that devised by the Wesleys:

Scripture sentence(s); Hymn or song; Prayers of adoration and confession and the Lord's Prayer; Bible reading(s); Hymn or song;

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181 Baker F, *Methodism and the Love Feast*, p.64

182 Baker F, *Methodism and the Love Feast*, p.71

Short sermon or address; Hymn or song; Sharing of food and drink; Mutual sharing (Those present are invited to contribute prayers, songs, testimonies, readings, etc.); An offering (traditionally on behalf of those in need); Hymn or song; Closing prayers and blessings.<sup>183</sup>

The whole emphasis of the event is on participation and spontaneity and it is part of the free form culture of Methodist worship, but how far the practice will spread across the Church as a whole remains to be seen.

#### **6.7.4. A LOVE FEAST OBSERVED**

The researcher attended a Love Feast on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2011 in Hexham Trinity Methodist Church at 6.0 pm. led by the minister Revd. David Flavell. (see above).

The service was an attempt to provide worship in a contemporary idiom, as opposed to the traditional preaching service or Holy Communion. The congregation met in the church itself, thirty-five people being present, including four children. Before the service began recorded inspirational music was played, then the whole of the service proceeded, using Power-Point presentation throughout. Following a welcome and an introductory prayer by the minister a small band consisting of guitar, clarinet and keyboard with lead singer, led the congregation in three worship songs. These were sung with enthusiasm by the band which was evidently familiar with them, but hesitantly by the congregation who were not. The songs

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183 From David Flavell's website: [www.voteforJesus.co.uk](http://www.voteforJesus.co.uk)

were: 'Great is the Lord'; 'Lifting up the name of the Lord'; 'It's all about you Jesus'.

The minister then led the congregation in an extempore prayer of praise and confession and read the lesson, Luke 9.46-50, which was again followed by a brief prayer asking for God's blessing upon the word. The minister, adopting an informal approach, seated on a bar stool, preached from the text, "He that is not against me is for me". The address was illustrated by pictures on the screen and explained the way in which, although other Christian traditions are not the same as ours, nevertheless God may speak unexpectedly through those who are different from us. So with regard to other Christians, we love them, realise we need them and look out for God to work unexpectedly through them.

Following a prayer of thanksgiving for the Church, there were intercessions in which we remembered Churches of other nations, especially those in time of trial, and asking God's spirit to be with our own church.

The band led the song: 'Who is there like you?' During the singing orange squash and biscuits were distributed to the congregation for consumption during the love feast part of the service which now followed. The minister then invited any members of the congregation who so wished to share a testimony on the theme; When has God spoken unexpectedly to you? Several did so.

A preacher, during his time of preparation for a service felt spoken to through a passage in Isaiah; another person shared the thought that God guides us through scripture and circumstances or even more directly and of how his racial prejudice was overcome; a woman urged us to have no doubts but to trust in Jesus; a man confessed that as a teenager he was rabidly anti-church but that an inexplicable experience in his room one night was life changing; a teenage girl spoke of a friend at school whose difficult situation was resolved; and, finally, a senior man challenged the very idea suggested by the theme, and that because we always know that God's love is with us, we may always expect Him to speak to us.

The minister closed by summing up the testimonies in a few brief sentences. The band then led the congregation in the song "Take us to the river". The minister closed the Love Feast with a blessing and recorded music played as the congregation departed.

#### **6.7.5 ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

The service fitted the pattern of the Love Feast mentioned previously. It was well planned and led by the minister but was obviously stage-managed to the extent that some of those who gave their 'testimony' had been primed beforehand. Moreover if the songs had been more familiar then the singing may have been more fervent. A Methodist 'good sing' we did not have and this is essential to the atmosphere of a Love Feast. The fact that the congregation were seated in church, in pews and scattered about failed to

engender the feeling of fellowship, again, which one associates with a Love Feast. It would have been better if the people had been seated in circular fashion in an appropriately sized room or seated at tables sharing in a full meal. Being tied to the use of PowerPoint with the equipment installed as a fixture in the church, did mean that that was where the service had to be. Generally speaking the use of the PowerPoint throughout was of a professional standard. So this particular love feast, although a meaningful occasion, did present a few issues requiring resolution for the future, not least among them the need for a less structured and a much more spontaneous and extempore atmosphere, which, judging by the descriptions of the Love Feasts of the early Methodists, would be an expected feature of such gatherings. This was not the intense emotional and spiritual experience which characterised the original love feasts of the Wesleys, although it was an honest attempt at re-introducing the practice.

Another criticism which could be levelled at this occasion would be that of introversion. The minister's address, whilst emphasising the need for openness with regard to other Christian traditions, failed to mention the possibility of God's speaking through people of other faiths, or indeed through those who profess no faith at all. The prayers of intercession did not include prayers for the needs of the wider world, i.e. for peace in areas of conflict, for refugees, for the plight of poorer nations, and so on.

The time of testimony, though it avoided the worst excesses of the genre, was nevertheless subjective in tone, with the participants mainly giving voice to what had happened to them or to the manner in which they had been changed in some way or to how they felt about their own faith, displaying a self-concern which contradicts the dictum of Jesus that those who seek to save their lives will lose them and those who are willing to lose them will save them.<sup>184</sup> True faith delivers from self-concern, not least in matters of the spirit.

Love Feasts often seem to invite controversy, but at their best they do give opportunity for a depth of Christian fellowship and a kind of worship not normally experienced in the Sunday worship of Methodists. Time will tell whether or not David Flavell's initiative will be the beginning of a genuine revival of the practice. David Chapman expresses hesitation that it may.

The Love Feast can be regarded as a temporary ecclesial phenomenon that met the needs of a particular culture, but which does not easily translate into another context.<sup>185</sup>

The Love Feast does have a real place in the history of the development of Methodist worship and fellowship but if it is to enjoy serious revival it will need a convinced enthusiast to promote it.

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184 Luke 9.24.

185 Chapman D.M., *Born in Song*, p.150.

## 6.8 ECUMENICAL INFLUENCES

### 6.8.1 METHODISM: AN OPEN CHURCH

Methodism has long valued its place in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and has, as a consequence, been open to influences from other Christian traditions.

The officially authorised worship and service books of Methodism were not, in fact, compiled in isolation from the other denominations of the Christian Church. Of *The Book of Offices* 1936 it was said:

The wealth of liturgical devotion which is the noble heritage of the universal Church has been largely used, and forms of worship belonging to the East and West, to ancient times and to more modern days, have all been explored to enrich these pages.<sup>186</sup>

Similarly, *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975:

The ecumenical movement has brought Methodism into close contact with the worship of other communions...for the investigations of liturgical scholars into the origins and basic structures of liturgical rites have caused a marked convergence in the forms of worship of the various Churches.<sup>187</sup>

And now *The Methodist Worship Book* of 1999:

The orders of worship printed here are the fruit of a long process of drafting and revision. They take account of recent liturgical and ecumenical developments around the world as well as distinctively Methodist traditions of worship.<sup>188</sup>

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186 *The Book of Offices*, London, MPH, 1936, p.7

187 *The Methodist Service Book*, London, MPH, 1975, p.vii-viii

188 *The Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, MPH, 1999, p.vii

It is clear, therefore, from these statements, that those who shaped the officially authorised liturgies of the Methodist Church allowed their work to be influenced by the liturgies of other Christian denominations and of the ecumenical Joint Liturgical Group.

### **6.8.2 THE GROWTH OF THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT**

The kick start of the modern ecumenical movement was the Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. Hand in hand with ecumenical developments since that time has been the co-operation experienced in the Liturgical Movement. As such it was by no means homogeneous, with beginnings in many different times and places.

In his account of periods of liturgical history Geoffrey Wainwright describes the developments which took place during the late nineteenth and then the twentieth century. We summarise some of the various influences which he says contributed to the swelling of a tide in the life of the Churches.<sup>189</sup>

These were the Oxford Movement, the work of Dom Gueranger in France, the Malines Conference of 1909, the worship of the Maria Leach Abbey in Germany in the 1920's, the influence of the proposed revision of the Book of Common Prayer in 1928, the Second Vatican Council in 1962, the World Council of Churches Report *Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist* of 1971, the Charismatic Movement of the 1970's, the influence of Iona and Taize, and

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189 Jones C., Wainwright G., Yarnold E., Bradshaw P., (eds.) *The Study of Liturgy*, London & New York, SPCK & OUP, Revised edition, p.66



many other factors all of which contributed to liturgical change and even renewal in the worship life of the Churches, Wainwright claims.

### 6.8.3 THE EMPHASES OF THE LITURGICAL MOVEMENT

During the 1960's and 1970's the Liturgical Movement became more focussed, and, as a result, certain insights and emphases became defined, and then enshrined, one may say, in the work of the Joint Liturgical Group which was formed in 1963. Raymond Billington in his book *The Liturgical Movement and Methodism* identifies these insights as follows:<sup>190</sup>

1. The nature of the Church as the Body of Christ.
2. The rediscovery of worship as an activity of the whole congregation.
3. The meaning and centrality of the Eucharist.
4. The return to basic Christian teaching.
5. Meaningful symbolism and church architecture.
6. The relationship between worship and witness.

Billington's book published in 1969 is now somewhat dated, but it did prove to be prophetic. He wrote:

There seems, therefore, no reason why the insights of the Liturgical Movement should not have impact upon Methodism. Our system and theology are not inherently alien to a great deal of what the movement suggests.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Billington R., *The Liturgical Movement and Methodism*, London, Epworth, 1969, p.43ff  
<sup>191</sup> Ibid. p119

Indeed one could argue that the ethos of Methodism fits squarely with those insights; the corporate nature of the Church; that worship is of the whole congregation; the specialness of the Lord's Supper; Biblical teaching; worship related to witness; these factors have always been held to be of importance. Only six years later the publication of *The Methodist Service Book*, as we have seen in an earlier chapter (4.1), proved to be a watershed in the liturgical life of Methodism.

Therefore any serious reflection on the history of the Church in the post-war period, especially developments in British Methodism, cannot but lead to the conclusion that these six emphases have found an effective application resulting in the gradual transformation of worship. However, it is worthy of note that the greater participation of the congregation in worship does not form a seventh point. In addition, whether worship follows authorised and formal patterns or is more free form in nature, it appears that the days of a priest/minister/preacher up front leading worship as a solo exercise are slowly coming to an end. An era of collaboration, participation and variety seems to have arrived.

#### **6.8.4 THE JOINT LITURGICAL GROUP**

The Liturgical Movement itself had no formal establishment as an organisation, but the point was reached where the Churches felt that there had been such a co-operation and an interchange that one had become necessary. And so the Joint Liturgical Group was formed in 1963 and

registered as a Trust in 1971. At present it consists of 17 members drawn from the participating Churches. These are the Church of England (2), the Methodist Church (2), the Roman Catholic Church (3), the United Reformed Church (1), the Baptist Union (2), the Church of Scotland (2), the Scottish Episcopal Church (1), the Church in Wales (1), the Greek Orthodox Church (1), Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (1), the Free Church Group (1).

The Joint Liturgical Group itself covers a broad spectrum of faith and practice with regard to worship matters and, according to its website, has a fourfold function:

1. To create and offer rites and texts to Churches and ecumenical bodies.
2. To advise and comment on worship matters.
3. To respond to the liturgical needs of shared churches.
4. To liaise between the denominations about liturgical issues.<sup>192</sup>

The J.L.G. has had a considerable influence on the liturgical formation of the participating Churches, not least Methodism. In the production of the 1975 Service Book and the 1999 Worship Book a considerable number of common texts were incorporated into the various liturgies, as were the collects for the Sundays of the Christian Year. The Common Lectionary was included in 1999. It will be useful now to do a comparison of the use of common liturgical texts by the various denominations to illustrate the convergence which has taken place between them.

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<sup>192</sup> The JLG website.

**6.8.5 COMPARISON OF COMMON TEXTS FROM THE JOINT LITURGICAL GROUP USED IN THE SERVICES OF THE AUTHORISED WORSHIP BOOKS OF FIVE DENOMINATIONS**

| COMMON TEXT FROM THE JLG as listed on the website | METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK | ANGLICAN COMMON WORSHIP | WORSHIP FROM THE URC | BAPTIST GATHERING FOR WORSHIP | NEW SUNDAY MISSAL (R.C.) |
|---|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| The Lord's Prayer                                 | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             | *                        |
| Kyrie Eleison                                     | *                      | *                       | *                    |                               | *                        |
| Gloria in Excelsis                                | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             | *                        |
| The Nicene Creed                                  | *                      | *                       | *(R&S)               |                               | *                        |
| The Apostles Creed                                | *                      | *                       | *(R&S)               | *                             | *                        |
| Sursum Corda                                      | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             | *                        |
| Sanctus and Benedictus                            | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             | *                        |
| Agnus Dei   | *                      | *                       | *                    |                               | *                        |
| Gloria Patri                                      | *                      | *                       | *(R&S)               |                               |                          |
| Te Deum Laudamus                                  | *                      | *                       | *(R&S)               |                               |                          |
| Benedictus  | *                      | *                       | *(R&S)               |                               |                          |
| Magnificat  | *                      | *                       | *(R&S)               |                               | *                        |

|                  |   |   |   |  |   |
|------------------|---|---|---|--|---|
| Nunc<br>Dimmitis | * | * | * |  | * |
|------------------|---|---|---|--|---|

N.B. R&S = the *Rejoice and Sing* Hymn Book of the United Reformed Church.

#### 6.8.5.A OBSERVATIONS

As the above table shows, the Methodist Church, the Church of England and the United Reformed Church have included all thirteen of the Common Texts in their respective worship books. The Roman Catholic Church has included ten and the Baptist church only four. The Baptist book *Gathering for Worship* includes much material that is original to the book itself, thus having less in common than the worship books of the other four denominations. For our purposes the main point to note is that Methodism's use of the common texts is on a par with that of the Church of England and the United Reformed Church and almost with the Roman Catholic Church. This therefore shows the degree of mutual cross-fertilisation which exists and how much Methodism has been influenced by the ecumenical co-operation which takes place within the Joint Liturgical Group.

#### 6.8.6 COMPARISON OF OTHER COMMONLY USED TEXTS USED IN THE SERVICES OF THE AUTHORISED WORSHIP BOOKS OF FIVE DENOMINATIONS

These texts have the same if not similar words but are not specifically agreed by the Joint Liturgical Group.

| Other Non JLG texts with the same or similar words | METHODIST WORSHIP BOOK | ANGLICAN COMMON WORSHIP | WORSHIP FROM THE URC | BAPTIST GATHERING FOR WORSHIP | NEW SUNDAY MISSAL (R.C.) |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Collect of Approach                                | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             |                          |
| The Confession                                     | *                      | *                       | *                    |                               | *                        |
| Absolution   | *                      | *                       | *                    |                               | *                        |
| The Peace  | *                      | *                       | *                    |                               | *                        |
| The Acclamation                                    | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             | *                        |
| Prayer of Humble Access                            | *                      | *                       |                      |                               |                          |
| Post Communion Prayer                              | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             |                          |
| Blessing: Go in Peace                              | *                      | *                       | *                    |                               | *                        |
| Eucharistic Prayer of Thanksgiving (various)       | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             |                          |
| Words of Institution                               | *                      | *                       | *                    | *                             | *                        |
| Affirmation of Faith based on Apostles' Creed      | *                      | *                       |                      |                               |                          |

|                            |   |   |   |   |  |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| The Ten Commandments       | * | * |   |   |  |
| The Two Great Commandments | * | * | * |   |  |
| Aaronic Blessing           | * | * | * | * |  |

#### 6.8.6.A OBSERVATIONS

Here again these fourteen familiar, historic and traditional prayers are used in the Methodist and Church of England liturgies, with the United Reformed Church using twelve, the Baptist Church six and the Roman Catholic Church seven.

Methodism's liturgical practice is again shown to have much in common with that of the other Churches, based as it is on a common core of classical prayers and other scriptural material. Again the mutual influence of Churches upon each other is demonstrated, and especially the absorption by Methodism of the work of liturgists from the different Churches.

In this part of the thesis we have tried to show that what is happening in Methodist worship is part of a much broader scenario.

Each denomination of the Christian Church has been influenced by ecumenical developments, especially the work of the Joint Liturgical Group.

The insights of the liturgical movement have been incorporated into the officially authorised books of the denominations.

However an underlying and as yet unresolved tension we strongly suspect lies beneath the surface of things, between those liturgists who view their task to be that of recovering the historic texts of the early centuries of the worship of the Christian Church and restoring them for use today, and those who view the task more creatively, that of renewal, encouraging the whole people of God to take responsibility for their 'work'.

The liturgical renewal movement may be distinguished from the liturgical restoration movement in this way: Liturgical restoration sought to recover the order, texts and rubrics of historical rites and put them in place; liturgical renewal sought to recover the liturgy's essential character as the public work of the people.<sup>193</sup>

Whether or not it was realised at the time *The Methodist Worship Book* could be an attempt to resolve the tension. There has been a recovery and a use of historic texts, but also the writing of new material by members of the compiling group. An account of this writing process has been given by Neil Dixon.<sup>194</sup> However, the book is still not the 'work of the people' in the strictest meaning of the word 'liturgy', rather the composition of a group limited in number to those who had been selected and appointed to the Liturgical Sub-committee of the Faith and Order Committee of the Methodist Conference. It could be argued, however, that they were doing the work on

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193 Senn F.C., *The People's Work, A Social History of the Liturgy*, Minneapolis, USA, Fortress Press, 2006, p.305

194 Dixon N., *Wonder, Love and Praise: A Companion to the Methodist Worship Book*, Peterborough, Epworth, 2003, p.6ff



behalf of the people as their appointed representatives. Whatever the case they did accept influences from beyond the bounds of Methodism in order to enrich its more formal worship.

But there is another dimension, other than the printed pages of worship books, to which we need to turn.

### **6.9 EXTEMPORE PRACTICE: PRAYER AND PREACHING**

In early Methodism the twofold worship pattern of the Wesley brothers was that of Prayer Book services alongside preaching services. These practices both incorporated extempore elements. The use of printed liturgy of *The Book of Common Prayer* could also include the prayers of the ministers' own devising on the spur of the moment. The preaching services had a skeleton of hymns and scripture readings, but prayers and sermons could be mostly extempore in nature, although not necessarily unprepared.

It was understood, and still is, that the extempore experience in worship occurs when the preacher or minister or other participant contributes to the service in complete reliance, so the tradition runs, on the momentary inspiration of the Holy Spirit for his or her prayer, sermon or testimony, with the minimum use of books, usually only a hymn book and a Bible, and precluding officially authorised worship and service books. Yet

the most fervent and most helpful prayers that ever came from the inspiration of the moment will be found to owe much in their

expression to the remembrance of the language of the Bible, of the great liturgies, and of the hymns of Methodism.<sup>195</sup>

Typical examples of such occasions were the prayer meeting and the class meeting, which, almost exclusively, had an extempore content, although for fellowship rather than worship. As the years went by a gradual decline set in which is attributed to the fact that they became routinely repetitive. In this researcher's youth at Balby Road Chapel the Sunday night prayer meeting had become a matter of the same people saying similar prayers, in turn, week by week. The Society Steward at the time always began by praying that our chapel would become 'a light on a hill'.

As far as the extempore element in preaching service was and is concerned the same pitfalls apply, those of superficiality and repetitiveness. To pray and to preach extemporarily is a skill which needs much preparation by way of reading, thinking and personal prayer. For instance it is known that the renowned Methodist preacher, Donald Soper, would preach from the briefest of sermon outlines jotted on the back of an envelope. He could not have done this without being the well-read scholar that he was.

There are those who, misguidedly, do rely on a spur of the moment approach. W. E. Sangster refers to such a man, who was attending a conference of lay preachers. In open discussion he admitted to his method.

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195 *The Book of Offices*, London, MPH, 1936, p.8

Having prayed, he went to his appointment, opened the Bible for the text, and the Holy Spirit did the rest. He concluded by saying: 'I have never failed for a message yet'. A man, who had actually heard him preach, responded: 'I never knew the Holy Spirit was so boring, repetitive and unoriginal'.<sup>196</sup>

An extempore service cannot properly be delivered, therefore, without thorough preparation.

In introducing this particular element into their worship practices the Wesley brothers, being first rate scholars, had a distinct advantage. They were well-read and cultured men and Charles, especially, made his particular contribution through the quality of his hymn writing. His words were often a remoulding of biblical phraseology, which, when coupled with well-known tunes of the day, lent depth and meaning to the Methodist preaching services. When John's perceptions changed and lay or local preachers became part of Methodism, and their taking of services became established practice, obviously there was a greater risk of differing standards. However, by and large, they were men and then women who preached from the heart with prepared minds and out of their own life's experience, be they miners, farm labourers, fishermen, or from other working class occupations. There were also some professional men, teachers, doctors, mill owners and the like. Such preachers were expected to have a certain 'charisma' and it was believed that their services were more 'effective' when the use of printed or written material was kept to the minimum.

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196 Sangster W.E., *Power in Preaching*, London, Epworth, 1958, p.48f

An extempore preaching service, essentially, was believed to be an occasion in which the presence of the Holy Spirit was known and felt, the emotions being stirred, the mind stimulated and the will led into a conversion, a deeper commitment or an ecstatic manifestation. Enthusiasm characterised worship, with hearty singing, prayers punctuated by 'Amens' and 'Hallelujahs', and sermons which evoked ready response. Such was the nature and culture of the early Methodist free form preaching service.

The difficulty with such 'free' worship, as time was to show, was that it could not be sustained without the regeneration of 'enthusiasm' and the continual stimulation of the hearts and minds of the participants, so that freshness did not degenerate into routine habit.

In his historical novel, describing the early growth of the Quaker movement, Jan de Hartog describes another difficulty with such worship.

That was the only drawback of spontaneity; on rare occasions the 'Presence' did not manifest itself and the expectant crowd was gradually reduced to a haphazard group of people waiting for something that never materialised.<sup>197</sup>

Without real substance extempore worship tends to become all  
sound and fury signifying nothing.<sup>198</sup>

It needs the infusion of sound biblical scholarship, theological depth and a reasoning mind, which, when coupled with the springs of warm emotion and the fires of enthusiasm, results in an act of worship which, assuming, but not

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197 Hartog Jan de, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1973 edn., p.151

198 Shakespeare W, *MacBeth*, Act 5, Scene 5

presuming upon, God's gracious presence, creates a real and vital divine/human encounter.

### 6.9.1 RENEWING THE PRACTICE TODAY

Helen Cameron is at present Co-director of the Centre for Ministerial Formation at the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham. She has a concern for the renewal of the extempore element in Methodist worship because such spontaneity has to do with

a God who is uncontainable, full of mystery, and who keeps breaking through into our lives, our world ... God's presence can be discerned in order and in that which is familiar and composed, but also in that which is fresh, unfamiliar and improvised.<sup>199</sup>

Helen Cameron seeks a revival of extempore practice after the pattern of the Wesleys, when even in formal liturgical services there was room for spontaneous expression, as well as in the less formal preaching services.

She believes that the practice is in danger of being lost because of over dependence upon scripts, with preachers reading their material rather than having the confidence to utter and proclaim what is in their hearts and minds without being tied to the printed word.

Cameron suggests ten points for preachers and ministers to bear in mind with regard to extempore practice.<sup>200</sup>

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199 Cameron H.D., "The Extempore Tradition", In *Icthus: The Journal of the LWPT*, Vol. 60/2, Summer 2010, pp.10-11

200 Ibid. pp.11-12

1. Be aware of this tradition in Methodism.
2. Be fully prepared beforehand when taking a service.
3. Allow yourself to be a channel of God's grace here and now.
4. Be willing to combine the liturgical and the extempore as part of worship.
5. Build in opportunities for the extempore as part of worship.
6. Encourage people to pray, tell stories, to share insights and to participate.
7. Find the God already deep within you and allow His expression.
8. Let worship have the simplest of forms.
9. Rehearse prayers and preaching beforehand.
10. Trust in God and take risks.

In this way, Cameron believes, the extempore tradition may be revived. In this researcher's experience resistance to it arose because extempore prayer became repetitious and cliché ridden, whilst preaching came from ill-prepared individuals who mistakenly believed that they were relying on the Holy Spirit.

The Latin phrase *ex tempore* means 'that which is of the present moment of time'. In our context the meaning has to do with that inspiration of the moment which arises from the direct prompting of the Holy Spirit. But prayer and preaching which is genuinely relevant and insightful may only arise from a life which is as fully prepared as possible, not only with the insights of contemporary scholarship, but also with an awareness of the issues prevalent in today's world. What a preacher feels deeply within the heart and is convinced of in the mind may then result in an act of worship delivered with evident passion and intellectual integrity.

The extempore tradition celebrates the real presence of the incarnate Christ among us in our limited yet ostensive language. In finding words in and for the present we find Christ the Word, who is in

and who is for the present, and who abides in us just as we abide in Christ.<sup>201</sup>

This practice is not exclusive of the liturgical tradition, and it is a mistake to foster tension and competition between the two. Rather, if tension exists, to allow it to be creative and to encourage cross fertilisation, each enriching the other.

Just as John Wesley often had a place for the extempore as part of the liturgy of Holy Communion, so today we may learn from this practice and find the traditions to be mutually complementary, instead of each regarding the other with mutual suspicion.

Perhaps there is a need for us to re-discover a creative tension between freedom and form and refuse to be coerced into a choice between one and the other. Does this not demand of us a need to integrate thought, feeling, reason and experience in what we offer to God in worship in a more holistic way? <sup>202</sup>

The recovery of extempore practice may also encourage an ethos of participation and inclusion, whereas, on the whole, the liturgical tends to the style of one person reading the service from a book. If it is known that anyone may pray or speak or read scripture during a service, then members of a congregation are more likely to want to do so, and worship become more truly the 'work of the people'.

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201 Cameron H.D., *The Extempore Sacrament, Finding Words in and for the Present*, Tiverton, Devon, MSF, 2009, p.3

202 Ibid. p13

Thus the word is conveyed in and through the human frame of black and white, male and female, old and young, and the Word is made flesh anew and offered as a source of wisdom and gospel for the church and the world.<sup>203</sup>

This also implies that congregations will need to be accepting of people of differing abilities and of different stages in their faith development. Leaders of worship will also need sensitivity and discernment in the tactful handling of such free worship, so that people who have a tendency to monopolise proceedings are not allowed to do so.

However, Helen Cameron's chief anxiety is that student ministers, both presbyters and deacons, have little confidence in their ability to preach or to pray extemporaneously, so that they have to be encouraged to do it, for example by learning a classic prayer and then rephrasing it in their own words, without committing themselves to pen and paper. It seems that we may have to start from basics in recovering this tradition, but such a situation does raise the question, still, as to where the momentary inspiration of the Holy Spirit enters the equation.

Cameron could also have recognised that much has to do with the psychological make-up of the individual, which is largely formed in the early years of childhood. If there has been encouragement and the building up of self-esteem during that time then a person is more likely to be bold enough to make a spontaneous contribution to an act of worship. If on the other hand, a person has low self-esteem and little confidence then it is less

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, p.13



probable, due to feelings of unworthiness, that they will do so. Knowing oneself and feeling at ease with oneself will mean having the confidence to participate in an extempore occasion.

In this chapter so far we have considered the significant changes which have occurred in patterns of Methodist worship during the last decades and the various influences, both Connexional and local, which have impinged upon them.

By attending services himself the researcher then aimed to investigate the present situation and to discover what changes have taken place in actual practice for Methodists at worship.

## **6.10 SOME SERVICES OBSERVED**

### **6.10.1 INTRODUCTION: PRACTICAL MATTERS**

In preparing for acts of worship which take place in Methodist churches and chapels irrespective of size it tends to be assumed that various practical arrangements will occur. These are more or less common to every congregation and ministers and preachers depend upon them.

About half an hour before service time stewards and door stewards will arrive to unlock the church and ensure that the heat is on. The system will have been pre-programmed to make sure that this is the case, but very occasionally emergency measures will need to be taken. Hymn books, worship books, any printed materials and notice sheets will be put ready to

give to each member of the congregation upon arrival. Some churches already have the books placed in the pews, often including the Bible too. Hopefully a warm handshake and a cheerful welcome will be given.

Before the service begins the steward will pray with the minister in the vestry, either using an extempore prayer of his/her own or using a prayer from a number of books now available such as *A Book of Vestry Prayers* by Norman Wallwork. The steward will then go to welcome the congregation, give out any extra or urgent notices and welcome the preacher publically. Where a church has a choir there could well be an introit to start the service or sometimes congregations themselves may sing one together such as 'Be still for the presence of the Lord'. The preacher then begins to lead worship. Collection plates will be at the ready for stewards to receive the offering when required to do so at an appropriate point during the service.

These days, especially given the construction of new churches and the refurbishment of older ones, seating arrangements may vary, from the serried ranks of fixed pews to more comfortable chairs, not necessarily arranged in rows. Indeed Methodist buildings vary considerably in design from traditional preaching places with a prominent pulpit, the Gothic Anglican style with choir stalls and distant communion table, to the more contemporary layout with flexible worship centres surrounded by seating. Each design speaks of a particular emphasis in the style of worship, be it the sermon, the Eucharist or the gathering of God's people. These days the main preference seems to be

that of a communion area with moveable pulpit, lectern, table and font to give flexibility of use according to the nature of the service in question.

Appropriate music is played as the people arrive, whether on an organ, a piano or by an instrumental group or band. The numbers of the hymns and songs chosen will be displayed on a prominent board. These are generally chosen by the preacher and submitted beforehand for the instrumentalist to check the tunes. Readers for the Bible passages may also be by prior arrangement. Collection plates will be ready for stewards to receive the offering when required to do so. The choir may also sing an anthem during worship.

Less than two thirds of Methodist churches now have children and/or young people present for worship. In places where they are then the content of the first ten or fifteen minutes of a service may be designed to bear this in mind, before they leave the congregation, with a blessing, after the second hymn, to go and share in their own activities. Some churches invite them to return just before the end of the service to give feedback to the congregation.

The adult members of the congregation stay together for the remainder of the service to hear the Bible readings, sing hymns and share in prayers, which will often include opportunity for responses. The sermon usually lasts about fifteen to twenty minutes, sometimes being delivered in two or three separate parts, punctuated by the hymns readings and prayers.

If the service includes communion this usually follows at this point, children and young people returning to participate whether by partaking of the elements like everyone else or by receiving a blessing by the laying on of hands, discretion being left to parents or the minister or local decision.

Many churches now provide a time of informal fellowship, following worship, in which refreshments are served and conversation encouraged. Newcomers and visitors are thus able to receive a welcome and follow up contact as appropriate.

Such practical arrangements, as outlined here, enable worship to take place, indeed, it could not do so without them. Bearing the above in mind we are able to undertake further research and to observe some services of worship as they take place.

#### **6.10.2 RESEARCH METHOD**

As we have seen a number of changes affecting worship patterns have occurred during the past fifty years or so whether from Connexional influences or arising from local needs and pressures. The next researches therefore consisted of an investigation as to how these had affected services taking place in Methodist churches Sunday by Sunday and how these were structured and conducted. The researcher attended some services at random as and when he was able to do so, without announcement, so as to experience worship as it actually happened. Six worship services were

attended between April and September in 2008 in order to note how they proceeded. The services attended and a description of them is as follows.

### **6.10.3 Service at Seaton Sluice Methodist Church on Sunday April 6<sup>th</sup> 2008 at 10.30 am, being the Third Sunday of Easter, taken by a minister.**

There were sixteen people in the congregation. There were no children present. The hymn book being used was *Hymns and Psalms*.

The service opened with a welcome from a church steward.

The minister read a call to worship from an anthology of resource material, invoking the presence of the Risen Christ.

First Hymn: HP 187: Away with gloom.

The first prayer praised God for the reality of the resurrection experience, both then and now. God was praised because the Living Lord was among us making our worship real. His name was to be praised both now and forever. The prayer was pre-prepared and read and was original to the minister himself.

The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer was said together.

A reading from Albert Schweitzer affirmed the presence of the living Christ as we perform our daily tasks.

Second Hymn: HP 578: This is the day.

A pre-prepared prayer of confession acknowledged our failures in the work of the Kingdom of God, asking that we may be set free to live in the power of the Risen Christ.

The Gospel lesson from Mark ch 16 vs 1 – 8 was read by a member of the congregation.

Then followed the first part of the sermon based on the text "He is not here, He has been raised", noting that with the resurrection, an initial experience resulted in such a change in the disciples of Jesus that they were motivated to continue His work.

Third Hymn: HP 204: Now the green blade rises.

The second lesson, 1 Corinthians ch 15 vs 1 – 11, was read by a member of the congregation.

The second part of the sermon tackled the subject of our experience of resurrection now. The Gospel stories are clues to those situations in which we may encounter the presence of the Risen Christ for He is no longer bound to those distant years in Palestine.

A reading from P.W. Turner emphasised the fact that Christ jostles with us in the streets of our contemporary world.

Fourth Hymn: HP 191: Good Christians all.

There followed a reading from H. A. William's sermon on True Resurrection, affirming that those who experience resurrection now may do so forever.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving to God expressed gratitude for all of those people in whom we find the presence of the Risen Christ today.

Prayers of intercession followed for the needs of the world and for needy people we know. To the versicle: 'Lord of Life' there was the response: 'Hear us in your love'.

The offering was received by the duty stewards and duly dedicated.

Fifth Hymn: HP 190: Christ is alive.

The service closed with an affirmation, read from an anthology, of Christ's presence in every varied human situation.

**6.10.4 Service at Cullercoats Methodist Church, Sunday April 27<sup>th</sup> 2008 at 6pm, being the Sixth Sunday of Easter, led by a local preacher (a retired nurse).**

There were nineteen people in the congregation. No children were present. The hymn books used were *Hymns and Psalms* and *Songs of Fellowship (Combined Words Edition Volumes 1 & 2)*. PowerPoint was used throughout the service.

On the screen the congregation were invited to prayerfully prepare for worship in the minutes before the service.

The steward welcomed the congregation and handed over to the preacher.

The preacher invited the congregation to share in a period of silence. Prayers to the Holy Spirit, recognising His various activities, were then offered. These were read from a book.

First Hymn: SOF 188: Holy Spirit we welcome you.

There then followed prayers of adoration and confession; The Holy Spirit was adored for His varied work and for His particular coming at Pentecost. In the prayers of confession we acknowledged that we often failed to recognise the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of other people. A time of silence was observed for personal confession and a word of absolution was pronounced. The prayers were read and were either pre-prepared or from a book.

Second Hymn: HP 288: Holy Spirit, come confirm us.

A member of the congregation then read the lessons, these being two of the four principal lectionary lessons appointed for the day:

1 Peter ch 3 vs 13 – 22 and John ch 14 vs 15 – 31.

Third Hymn: SOF 334: Let your living water flow.

The Sermon: The preacher expounded the lesson from John's Gospel.

1. The Holy Spirit is our helper in coping with life and for living victoriously.
2. The Holy Spirit is our teacher.
3. The Holy Spirit is our remembrancer.
4. The Holy Spirit gives us peace.
5. The Holy Spirit gives us love.

The sermon concluded with a challenge: Do we experience these aspects of the Holy Spirit's activity in our daily lives?

Fourth Hymn: SOF 511: Spirit of the living God. (Whilst the congregation sang an appeal was made for anyone to come forward and receive the Holy Spirit or for counsel or help.)

Prayers: Thanksgiving – for the Holy Spirit's varied activity especially in the ways outlined in the sermon. Again pre-prepared or read from a book. Then intercessions with silences for our own needs, the sick and bereaved etc., our society and world issues, war, hunger, poverty, etc. To the words: Spirit of God breathe into our lives, we were invited to respond: Breathe into the Church, Breathe into the world.

The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer was said together.

The Offering was received by the stewards and dedicated by the preacher.

Fifth Hymn: SOF 544: There is a Redeemer.

The preacher pronounced The Grace to conclude the service.

**6.10.5 Service at North Shields Methodist Church on Sunday July 27<sup>th</sup> 2008 at 10am, being the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, conducted by a worship leader and a local preacher (a Circuit lay employee).**

A pencil and a small piece of paper were distributed to each member of the congregation on arrival.

The service opened with a welcome from a church steward who then introduced the local preacher and the worship leader. There were about sixty people in the congregation, but no children, this being the second

Sunday of the summer holidays. The hymn books being used were *Hymns and Psalms* and *Songs of Fellowship (Combined Words Edition Volumes 1 & 2)*.

A call to worship was issued by the worship leader who invited us to enter into Christ's rest and to offer our praises.

First hymn: SOF 73: Come on and celebrate.

The worship leader then led the congregation in prayers which had been pre-prepared and were read. These consisted of praise and adoration expressing a sense of awe as we met to greet our God. God's forgiveness was sought for our underestimation of His grace. Thanksgiving was offered for this day's opportunities for rest and worship.

There were no children present, nevertheless the local preacher gave a short 'children's address' based on two handheld barbells, illustrating the fact that all of us carry burdens in some form or another but today's lesson contained the promise that Christ would carry our burdens.

The local preacher then offered a prayer of thanks that we may all lay our burdens at the foot of the cross and have them removed.

At this point in the service the offering was received and blessed by the worship leader.



The only lesson, Matthew ch. 11 vs. 25-30 was read by the worship leader. (This was not the gospel for the day).

Second hymn: HP 559: What a friend we have in Jesus.

The local preacher gave the sermon based on Matthew ch. 11 vs. 28-30. Each one of us has burdens we are carrying. The congregation was asked to name these by each person writing them down on their piece of paper. These were collected and the preacher said a short prayer asking God to deal with the burdens written upon them.

Two short songs were sung consecutively.

SOF 89: Faithful One so unchanging.

SOF 124: Give thanks with a grateful heart.

Pre-prepared prayers of intercession were led by the worship leader. We were invited to pray about the burdens of the world and for local needs. We then prayed for the leaders of the world, especially in the United Nations, that they may have wisdom, courage and the strength to work for justice and peace. We prayed for people whose names had been entered into the church's prayer book. We prayed for ourselves, to possess peace and a quiet confidence and that our burdens may be lifted, so that we may be channels of blessing to others. The prayers did not include responses.

The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer was said together.

The local preacher then gave an appeal for help with a cafe church based in another church in the Circuit.

Closing hymn: HP 687: When we walk with the Lord.

The blessing, given by the local preacher, consisted of a prayer of thanks that we may all lay our burdens at the foot of the cross and with the injunction to "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord".

**6.10.6 Service at St. John's Methodist Church, Whitley Bay, on Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008 at 10.30 am, being the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, taken by a local preacher (a retired head teacher).**

There were about eighty to ninety people in the congregation including a smattering of children sitting with their parents, being the last Sunday of the school holidays.

A church steward welcomed the congregation and the local preacher as leader of worship. The hymn book being used was *Hymns and Psalms*.

The local preacher then gave her own welcome to the congregation and a call to worship, that our eyes may be opened and lifted up to see God's activity and purpose.

First Hymn: HP 353: With wonder Lord

The first prayer then expressed the feeling that God may be praised for His creativity, that he is ever present with us and shares in all our experiences. His forgiveness was sought for all our failures in living together, and in working together. He was asked to forgive us and to help us in our search for truth and justice.

The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer was said together.

Second Hymn: HP 534: Now let us see thy beauty Lord

A short talk was then given for the benefit of the children (and adults!) present. (NB. Prior to the service, a helium filled balloon had been allowed to float high up into the rafters of the church.) The question was asked as to whether anyone could see anything different in the church. Various answers were given until mention was made of the balloon, the lesson being that we needed to learn to look up, i.e. to raise our sights above the level of the ordinary.

Psalm 121 (HP 877) was then read together by the congregation, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills, etc."

The Bible reading, Matthew ch 20 vs 20-34, was read by a member of the congregation, this not being the appointed gospel for the day.

Third Hymn: HP 743: My Saviour how shall I proclaim

The offering was received by the duty stewards and dedicated by the preacher.

Fourth Hymn: HP 792: Fill thou my life

The sermon was entitled "Lift up your eyes", which was the Psalmist's invitation to the people to enlarge their vision and look beyond themselves and their immediate environment. Illustrations were given about various 'eye openers', giving us new insights into knowledge and culture. Mountain

scenery always impresses and opens our eyes to the greatness of God. Introverted spiritual vision can never change us. We need to lift up our eyes to see beyond ourselves to the wider horizons of life, by entering into Jesus' attitudes and purposes.

Prayers of intercession then followed using HP 769 vs1, line 4 as a response:

“When the earth shall be filled with glory of God as the waters cover the sea” to the bidding phrase: “That the time will come”.

The subjects for the different prayers were; places of turmoil, confusion and injustice; places where there is suffering and devastation; people engulfed by grief or abused or exploited or finding life hard.

Fifth Hymn: HP 457: Christ whose glory fills the skies.

The preacher, to conclude the service, used a dismissal prayer of her own composition.

**6.10.7 Service at Cleadon Methodist Church on Sunday September 7<sup>th</sup> 2008 at 10.45 am, being the 23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, taken by a minister. The service was an all-age Communion not using *The Methodist Worship Book*.**

There were about 50 people in the congregation, with a good mix of different ages, including ten or more young children. The hymn book being used was *Hymns and Psalms*.

The service opened with a welcome from a Church Steward who read the collect for the day in order to create a worshipful atmosphere.

The minister gave his own greeting and welcome and issued a call to worship.

First hymn: HP 565: Praise Him, praise Him, all His children praise Him.

The first prayer was one of adoration, in which God was praised as the One who enlarges our experience, widens our perceptions and broadens our vision, ever leading us into a deeper knowledge of His ways. The prayer was pre-prepared and read by the minister.

There followed a short time of sharing with one another in which members of the congregation, especially the children, were encouraged to say where they had been and what they had enjoyed about their holidays.

The offering was received and blessed, two children and two adults acting as stewards. (The offerings were brought forward together with the bread and wine for Communion later.)

A Song (Jesus' love is very wonderful) chosen by leaders of the Junior Church was then sung, including actions performed by the children and most of the congregation!

A blessing upon the children and their leaders was said by the minister before they retired to their groups, some parents going out to join them also.

The lesson, Matthew ch 23 vs 1–12 (not the gospel for the day), was read by a member of the congregation.

The sermon entitled 'Examples—good and bad', based on the text Mt. 23 vs 3: 'They do not practise what they preach', began by evoking memories of people in the past whom we had regarded as good examples, and referred to Jesus' warning to the people to avoid the example of the Pharisees. He and they were at loggerheads for three reasons: 1. Faith is meant to be a joy and not a burden; 2. Faith is meant to be an inward experience and not an outward show; 3. Faith is concerned with service and not with status. The conclusion, that faith as a joyous inward experience is expressed in the service of others, so that we do practise what we preach!

Third Hymn: HP 704: O Jesus I have promised to serve thee to the end: was sung to the Geoffrey Beaumont tune.

Then followed prayers, all pre-prepared.

Those of confession expressed the knowledge that God cannot be deceived and that the real state of our lives cannot be hidden from Him.

Those of thanksgiving expressed gratitude that in Christ all human made divisions and distinctions are done away and that every person is equally loved by God and reconciled to Him.

Those of intercession: Following each separate prayer, to the words "The Lord hears our prayer", the congregation were invited to respond; "Thanks be to God". We prayed for those affected by flood and hurricane; drought; and conflict and war. We prayed for the needy people of our community and our churches and finally for ourselves, that we may practise what we preach.

Fourth Hymn: HP 595: As your family, Lord, see us here.

The children and their leaders returned to join the congregation and shared with everyone the content of their group activity, based on the story of the men who built their homes, one on sand and one on rock, the latter being the better example for us.

The minister, bearing in mind the presence of young children (babies, toddlers and infants), adopted an extempore approach explaining the story of the Lord's Supper and what it means in very simple and straightforward language. The bread and the wine were consecrated and, after he and a steward had partaken, the congregation then did so, coming forward to the communion rail. Children received the elements too, if they and their parents so wished, or they were blessed by the laying on of hands. Two members of the congregation, being quite elderly, received the bread and the wine seated in their pew.

When all had partaken, the minister invited the congregation, following a few moments silence, to pray the traditional version of the Lord's Prayer together.

Fifth Hymn: HP 619 Now let us from this table rise:

A blessing, pronounced by the minister, concluded the service.

**6.10.8 Service at North Shields Methodist Church on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2008 at 10.00 am, being the 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time taken by the minister in pastoral charge of the church.**

There were about eighty adults and ten children in the congregation. The hymn books being used were *Hymns and Psalms* and *Songs of Fellowship (Combined Words Edition Volumes 1 & 2)*.

A church steward gave a welcome to all present and to the minister about to lead the service.

The minister then gave his own warm and cheery welcome to the congregation.

First Hymn: SOF 870: Jesus is the name we honour.

For younger members of the congregation the minister told a short story about Peter, Paul and Patch the cat which had been deliberately put into a tumble dryer, with the consequent need for the culprit to then seek forgiveness.

A short extempore prayer followed, saying sorry for the things said and done that we should not have, and thanking God that He forgives us.

Second Song: SF 208: If I were a butterfly. The children and some adults joined in the actions and clapped in the chorus.

A prayer of blessing was said for the children and their leaders as they went into their groups. Some parents also went out to join them.

A Prayer of thanksgiving was then offered by the minister. The prayer expressed thanks for the gift of life and all its varied experiences; for the beauty of creation and the sun, sea and rain; for the food we eat and its different tastes; for relationships with all their joys. Thanks were expressed for Jesus, His life, teaching, example and obedience; the gift of the Holy Spirit and all that this means. This prayer was completely extempore and was a general thanksgiving in the fullest meaning of those words.

The traditional version of the Lord's Prayer was said together.

Third Song: SF 229: I'm accepted, I'm forgiven.

The lesson, Matthew ch 18 vs 21 – 35, was read by a member of the congregation, this being the appointed gospel for the day.

A short prayer followed, that we may all be open to God's voice and to the touch of His Spirit.

The sermon: No text was announced, but it became evident that, arising out of the gospel passage, the subject to be dealt with was forgiveness. Jesus' answer to Peter's question was that forgiveness is limitless, but the servant in the story, having been forgiven, failed to forgive others. Because Jesus died to pay our 'debts' we may be forgiven and then we too must go and strive to show forgiveness.

Fourth Hymn: HP 739: May the mind of Christ my Saviour.

The Prayers of Intercession began with the set prayer for the day (14) from the *Methodist Prayer Handbook*. Prayers were offered for the victims and loved ones of the plane crash in Russia, the train crash in the USA, and of the hurricanes and floods in Cuba, Haiti and Texas. Locally we prayed for those affected by the floods in Morpeth and Rothbury. Members and friends who were ill or in hospital were remembered, that they may be granted peace and wrapped in God's love.

Fifth Hymn: HP 668: Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine.

The Grace was pronounced by the minister to conclude the service.

### **6.10.9 ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE**

The paragraph numbers refer to the previous sections of this chapter.

1. Although, as a rule it is not wise to generalise from the particular, it is nevertheless possible, from this sample of six services, to confirm that the gentle tides of change which began in the sixties, still continue today. The services are all of different patterns from the standardised format which had prevailed a generation or so ago.

2. During the services sermons were not necessarily preached as a whole for twenty minutes or more. One was divided into three parts, interspersed with hymns prayers and readings, the others preached continuously for between fifteen and twenty minutes in length. They were of different modes of delivery, whether from full notes, part notes or skeletal notes. In three of the services shorter simpler addresses were given, in addition, because children were present. In one service the minister engaged the children in conversation. The sermon is not necessarily seen as the climax of an act of worship.

Of the Bible readings, those from the lectionary for that day were used on two out of the six occasions. All the lessons were read by members of each congregation or, in one instance, by the worship leader. One minister used readings from another source.

3. Worship leaders are taking their place in some services alongside ministers and local preachers in conducting services. They often take most of a service leaving the minister or preacher simply to deliver the sermon. There is also evidence of the fact that members of congregations are reading lessons and sharing in responsive prayers. In some churches it is known that a member of the congregation will lead the intercessions, which is especially pertinent if there is a visiting preacher, because a local person will be more aware of the needs of people in the church and in the community. These factors are evidence that there is more participation than used to be the case.

4. None of these acts of worship were local arrangements services.

5. All of the services, save one, have five hymns, which is to be expected in Methodism where singing has always been a major element. The one exception has three hymns and two choruses or songs. Two hymn books are used, *Hymns and Psalms*, as authorised by the Methodist Conference and published in 1983, and *Songs of Fellowship*, a book published in several parts by the independent group Kingsway Music from 1998. Another source was used by one church for its children's hymn. This seems to show a desire for a wider repertoire of hymnody than hitherto. One church used the PowerPoint facility for the hymns, and also readings, during the whole of a service, an indication of a growing trend, especially with larger congregations where some people have the necessary technical ability and where there is a



willingness to invest in the equipment. (NB. *Singing the Faith* had not been published at the time when these services were visited.)

**6 & 7.** None of these services were Covenant Services or Love Feasts.

**8.** Insofar as extempore practice was concerned, only one minister undertook to pray in this manner. Most of the prayers were either pre-prepared by the preacher or taken from books. There is still quite a way to go if this practice is to be revived. By and large the prayers followed the customary patterns; adoration and praise; confession; thanksgiving; intercession. Four of the prayers of intercession included responses for the congregation. The prayers of thanksgiving in two of the services and of intercession in four of the services were positioned after the hymn following the sermon thus following the Eucharistic pattern. We note that one minister conducted an extempore Communion.

Although this sample is a small one, nevertheless when these experiences are taken together with what is happening in the wider Church, there seems to be a desire growing in Methodist congregations for a greater variety in the content of worship. The original two practices of Prayer Book style worship and the preaching service have both evolved into forms which have departed from their earlier patterns, although both still exist in essence if not in detail. It seems to be the case that a third alternative pattern is emerging as Methodism continues to adapt and change to meet the challenges and

the needs of the contemporary world in which its congregations worship. In the last part of this thesis we shall examine the evidence that this is the situation.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **PRESENT PRACTICE**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Our research has consisted of a journey through Methodist history, the development of Methodism's authorised and published liturgies, examination of free-form services and influential factors affecting worship patterns whether local, connexional or ecumenical. We have seen how the limited pattern of worship which prevailed until the 1950's has evolved into the varied situation of the present time. From observation we may conclude that the original twofold pattern of Methodism has become threefold. The dual tradition is now triple in nature.

1. Book-based worship (successor to Wesley's use of the Prayer Book).
2. Services of the Word (successor to the preaching service).
3. Alternative worship (new patterns with different forms, at different times and sometimes in different places).

But even this kind of categorisation is too simplistic, as we have discovered, because of crossover between them, as varied use of worship material indicates.

## 7.2 BOOK BASED SERVICES

A variety of practice has been found to occur in worship based on services in which there is the use of officially authorised and other published liturgies, mainly used for Holy Communion, but not exclusively so.

i) The use of *The Methodist Worship Book*. The Book is still a preferred resource (Ch. 5.2.3.3) always for 2/33 ministers and usually for 25/33 ministers when they lead a Communion service. Thus this strand of the original twofold practice still continues.

ii) The use of other published materials. (e. g. that by the Iona Community) Ministers are not averse to the regular use of alternative published liturgies (Ch.5.2.3.5), often 10/33 and sometimes 21/33 thus perhaps building on the spirit of variety encouraged by the *Worship Book* itself.

iii) The use of liturgical material of the minister's own composition. This is now a significant element in Methodist worship (Ch.5.2.3.6) as practiced often 5/33 and sometimes 24/33 by ministers.

iv) The use of material from a mixture of the above sources. A 'pick and mix' approach to *The Methodist Worship Book* is adopted by 7/33 ministers always, 18/33 often and 4/33 sometimes (Ch.5.2.3.4) thus inferring the use of other materials of some kind alongside those in *The Methodist Worship Book*.

v) The continued use of *The Methodist Service Book* (1975) for Communion services. Although not included as a question in the survey the researcher is aware of the fact that *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975 is still being used, albeit rarely. The previous minister of the researcher's present church used this book, as indeed one village church in the researcher's last Circuit which had seen no point in purchasing *The Methodist Worship Book* when it was quite happy with its current practice.

As an example of the complexity of modern Methodist worship practice, a description has been provided from the situation in the St. Ives and Hayle Circuit in Cornwall. Their minister at the time, Rev. Peter Facer, wrote:

Communion practice in the St. Ives and Hayle Circuit is very varied. [The ex-]Bible Christian, [at] St. Ives, expects an extempore service after the preaching service and receives the elements in their seats. Angarrack, ex-Wesleyan, prefers extempore but comes to the rail to receive. There is still hesitation about prayers from books! Fore Street, St. Ives, ex-Primitive, sometimes uses the 1975 service and sometimes extempore words. Hayle has complained about its two ministers since I left because they used extempore ways instead of the 1999 book! In Falmouth it's mainly 1999 with an odd 1975. My folks at Penryn like 1999 because they can join in more and there is variation with the different communion orders.<sup>204</sup>

### **7.3 MULTIFORM PREACHING SERVICES**

Preaching services now follow a variety of patterns:

- i) Services where published prayers are used.
- ii) Services where prayers of the preacher's own composition are used.

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204 Letter to the researcher from Revd. Peter Facer dated 17.9.04

- iii) Services where the content, other than hymns and Bible readings, is completely extempore.
- iv) Services where the 'preaching of the word' is regarded as the 'climax' of worship.
- v) Services where the prayer of (thanksgiving and) intercession and the offering are regarded as the 'climax' of worship.
- vii) Services where the sermon or address is preached as a continuous whole.
- viii) Services where the sermon or address is given in parts.
- ix) Services where there is a mix of some of the above.

Attendance at worship, therefore, may be a far from predictable experience.

#### **7.4 EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED**

A further account of the significant changes in Methodist worship during the last forty or fifty years is described by the now retired Secretary of the Methodist Conference in an interview for the Methodist Recorder:

In my lifetime the changes have been immense. When I was a young person in the church on a Sunday morning you could pretty well predict what you got; the same hymn book was put in your hand; the structure of the service was pretty well the same; there was a standard format for a sermon which lasted roughly the same time – the predictability of what was there was fantastic. Today, none of that holds true: when you go into a church you've no idea what is going to be put in to your hands –if anything; much of it is now on a screen in front of you and if there is something in your hands it might be on a piece of paper, it might be in one or two books, who knows? It's certainly no longer encapsulated in one authorised hymn book.

Many more people participate than was the case a generation ago, in prayers, in testimony bearing, in contribution to Bible study – there isn't a reserve slot twenty minutes long with a three point sermon to be taken necessarily as an ingredient. Of course it often happens still, but many other ways of engaging with the Word of God and trying to make sense of that in our contemporary setting is now to be found: music traditions are much more diverse so you've no longer got just the organ; it's the organ, the piano, and bands. Silence is now a feature of many aspects of our worship in a way that was inconceivable a generation ago. So the changes have been immense.<sup>205</sup>

The evidence demonstrates therefore, that the original dual tradition which characterised Methodist worship for so long has developed in more recent times into a multiform practice as illustrated above. In the past, there was a certain amount of variety, but in the present, significant changes are taking place which are transforming the nature of Methodist worship as we know it and which may possibly lead to an even greater variety in the kinds of services which congregations will experience, especially with growing introduction of PowerPoint.

### **7.5 THE ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE**

Recent and present experience also shows that the traditional pattern of Methodist worship is being increasingly challenged by the circumstances of our contemporary times.

Certainly the twofold practice still exists; the Conference-authorized printed liturgies are being used, but not strictly adhered to; the preaching service is

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205 Revd. David Deeks interviewed by Ed Standshaft, *Methodist Recorder*, 29.5.08. p.12

still a major part of worship diet, but not in rigid form. As we have seen, the past several decades have given rise to significant factors, both from within and without Methodism, which have metamorphosed the original practice of the Wesleys, giving rise to a much more fluid situation than has prevailed hitherto.

Declining congregations, especially since the end of the Second World War, are evidence that Methodist worship is losing its ability to appeal to those people who were connected with them. Sociological influences have also played their part; the advent of television, car ownership, Sunday sports and entertainments, family circumstances, shop opening hours, have all affected the way in which people view their priorities. Attending worship, with its difficulty in engaging the emotion and the imagination, is not among the foremost of them even with supposedly committed members of the Church.

New directions in worship have become a necessity if people are to see that this activity may become an important element in their spiritual journey, which may or may not, these days, be undertaken in connection with a local church.

So it is that an alternative pattern has arisen, which, at the present time exists alongside the twofold practice, but which is growing in prominence. It has come about, partly through necessity and partly through the perceived



inadequacy of the traditional patterns to engage with worshippers, both of the regular and occasional kinds.

## **7.6 LIQUIDITY AND FLUIDITY**

We have seen how the three books published since union in 1932 have influenced the worship of Methodism.

*The Book of Offices 1936*, still based essentially on *The Book of Common Prayer*, was designed to reinforce the dual tradition of liturgical worship and the extempore preaching service. These were usually kept separate and Holy Communion did not necessarily have the significance it warranted.

*The Methodist Service Book 1975* still reinforced this twofold practice but elevated Communion to a much more meaningful place, as the main service, held monthly, on a Sunday morning, with children present and participating, either by a blessing or receiving the elements.

*The Methodist Worship Book 1999*, in theory, adheres to the same dual tradition. Its preface reaffirms the 1975 Service Book position on this. However, the evidence seems to show that the Worship Book, along with other current responses to contemporary demands, has helped to spark off a burgeoning spirit of variety in Methodist worship, albeit unintentionally perhaps, but helping to give rise to the third pattern, the alternative practice, now emerging alongside the previous two.

It seems, therefore, that the future will be even more varied, experimental, imaginative, surprising and inventive, and that perhaps never again will there be such a clear distinction between the liturgical and the extempore, the written and the free-form. Rather, each tradition will enrich the other, producing a diversity in the nature of worship, which, it is trusted, will indeed bring glory to a God who Herself/Himself delights in such variety, as evidenced by the biodiversity of creation itself. But with Michael Taylor we may recognise that

on the whole the argument over whether worship should be fixed or free is a non-issue as long as it is seen in terms of 'both/and' and not in terms of either/or'.<sup>206</sup>

Such a fluid situation, comments Pete Ward, demands a 'liquid church'. In his book of the same name he distinguishes between two types of church, the one solid, traditional, institutional, conventional, safe refuge, a heritage, nostalgic; the other the liquid church, flexible, fluid, participative, with variety, a sense of community, flowing, moving, changing, networking, concerned with relationships, evolving.

Perhaps this dichotomy is too strict and rather an Aunt Sally, because there may be elements of both sets of characteristics in each type of church. But, with regard to worship, he says that a liquid church means that there is a fluid congregation at work which

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206 Taylor M., *Variations on a Theme*, London, Galliard Stainer and Bell, 1973, p.45

offers a way of experiencing a deep encounter with God in an individualised but also a communal experience.<sup>207</sup>

This would be a worship pattern, the alternative practice, which, with flexibility, praises God in community but recognises personal needs and preferences, whilst at the same time affording a word of challenge.

So there is a need for a creative approach, as we give expression to this part of the image of God within us as we worship.

To find new forms of life, new ways of living, new patterns of worship -- all this is to take risks, which are no more, though no less than, the necessary risks of creativity. Yet it is to this that Christ summons us and not to security, to dull routine, to repetitive prayers, to worship by rote.<sup>208</sup>

## **7.7 ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP PATTERNS**

Whilst for many congregations in Methodism the communion liturgy and the preaching service still form the basis for their worship, local churches are increasingly turning to different patterns both to meet the needs of the people for greater variety and to make use of services as an aspect of mission. Alternative practice is gradually being established as a third tradition in the Methodist Church as a whole. Examples from the Newcastle District help to show that this is the case, beginning with the researcher's own church.

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207 Ward P., *Liquid Church*, Carlisle, Paternoster, UK edn., 2002, p.97

208 Davies J. G., *New Perspectives on Worship Today*, London, SCM, 1978, p.128

### **7.7.1 MESSY CHURCH**

Initiated by the minister and the children's and family worker, Messy Church is held at North Shields Methodist Church six times a year on the last Monday evening of each half term. It is a condition that children must be accompanied by an adult, whether parent(s), relative or guardian. At 4.0 pm those attending gather for drinks and biscuits in the cafe/foyer, then at 4.15 proceed into the church hall for craft activities related to the theme for the day, which, usually and conveniently often suggests itself, whether Christmas, Mothering Sunday, Easter, Harvest, Olympics etc. Ten tables or so are set out with different crafts which engage the attention of children and adults alike, involving their creative talents. Then at 5.15 everyone assembles in the church sanctuary for informal worship. During a sharing time the results of their previous activities are displayed and discussion ensues around aspects of the topic. There are short Bible readings, prayers and songs.

After worship there is a meal together in the hall, which meantime has been re-arranged with tables and chairs. The people go home at about 6.0 pm. The whole occasion is one of participation, happy involvement and buzzing with life and interest, usually attended by between seventy and ninety adults and children, most of whom do not normally attend Sunday worship.

Messy Church, in fact, is becoming a national phenomenon. It began in 2004 at a parish church in Portsmouth and the idea is spreading rapidly across all the denominations. It is a contemporary form of alternative worship and aims

to involve families and people of all ages, everyone together, in practical, craft and art activities related to worship, i.e. modelling, painting, cooking, photography, drama, music and song, games, etc. PowerPoint is often used in worship also. As the website says, Messy Church is

working with people on the edge of church life through a programme of Bible-based activities.<sup>209</sup>

### **7.7.2 COMMUNION AND COFFEE**

Also at North Shields Church, each Wednesday morning, a short service of Holy Communion is held, followed by a coffee time in the cafe area of the premises. The worship which is of an informal nature usually consists of two or three hymns, a Bible reading and a short address. Then extracts from one of *The Methodist Worship Book* Communion Services may be used or the minister may use words of institution of his own or from another contemporary liturgy. The service appeals to some church members and others who appreciate its devotional atmosphere and also to some who cannot come to worship on Sundays because of work and family commitments. Young mothers with children in buggies may also turn up.

This is an example of a church which, like many others, is beginning to 'think outside the box' and to hold worship other than on a Sunday morning and evening, and thereby to be accessible to the growing number of people who have commitments during those times.

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209 Messy Church website

### 7.7.3 HEALING SERVICES

A number of churches hold healing services on a regular basis as part of their caring ministry. At North Shields, for example, these are once a month on a Sunday evening. They are simple in structure with three or four hymns, suitable Bible readings and a short address related to some aspect of personal need. There are prayers for any people known to be ill or passing through some time of crisis. The service usually includes Holy Communion either of a straightforward kind or using the liturgy in *The Methodist Worship Book*. After members of the congregation have received the elements they may remain in a standing or kneeling position to request a prayer and a blessing by the laying on of hands, asking for whatever healing is possible and appropriate for them. Whatever results is usually of an unspectacular nature, but normally of a great comfort and encouragement to the person requesting such. There has not yet been an example of an overtly physical healing, although the way the services are conducted does recognise the psychosomatic nature of illness. Once or twice a year the service may be announced as a 'Service of Solace' when members of families and friends of recently deceased people are invited to attend, specifically those whose funerals have been conducted by the local minister.

Such a healing ministry, it is believed, is part of sharing the gospel in the community. Attendance varies, but it is known that the services are valued and appreciated by those who feel a need for this kind of pastoral encouragement.

#### **7.7.4 ALL-AGE WORSHIP**

Several times a year on significant Sundays, North Shields church holds all-age worship usually led by the minister. The aim is to hold a service which is inclusive of the generations in its nature with hymns and songs, lessons, talks, and activities, hopefully, at a level which may be appreciated by the vast majority. Participation is encouraged, especially with the children, through simple games, question and answer, humorous repartee and so on aided by PowerPoint presentations. The church may be full on those occasions when uniformed groups are on parade or if there is an infant baptism included.

Over the past thirty or forty years or so all-age Worship has become an established pattern in Methodism, especially in churches where there are families with children. Initially this type of worship was designated as a Family Service, but the realisation that this was an excluding term provoked the change to the description "All-age Worship", with the aim of being totally inclusive. Other terminologies such as "Inclusive Worship" or "Multi-generational Worship" do not seem to have caught on.

At the least this practice tends to be a children's service with simpler hymns and a children's address. But Maggie Durran urges that we

avoid the pitfall of creating a children's service. Plan all-age worship, for then children are nurtured through being among a worshipping

people; it does little for them to be the focus of the service, when the stated purpose of a worship event is to focus on God.<sup>210</sup>

At its best, however, all-age worship is seized upon as an opportunity for participation in various ways; drama, sketches, choral readings, bands, instruments, audio-visuals, and so on. They are often held on strategic Sundays, Mothering Sunday, Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, Pentecost, Harvest, Remembrance, etc. When done well all-age worship does appeal to families with children as well as other individuals, but if not, those children who prefer a Sunday School as usual, tend to stay away, as do traditionally minded adults who have a propensity for a preaching service.

All-age worship has proved to be a mixed blessing therefore, with its quality depending on the leadership and enabling of the appointed minister or preacher. Certainly all-age worship should involve a great deal more preparation than that of one person in the study. Ideally it demands group preparation so that maximum participation by members of the congregation, both young and old alike, becomes a distinct possibility. Despite all the hurdles in the way

All-age worship is possible, desirable, and can be excellent. All-age worship is demanding, challenging and difficult to deliver.<sup>211</sup>

However, the result may be enriching and inspirational and worthy of God given the right approach.

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210 Durrant M., *All Age Worship*, London, Angel Press, 1987, p.6

211 Harding N., *All Age Everything*, Stowmarket, Kevin Mayhew, 2001, p.11



### **7.7.5 CAFE CHURCH**

Elsewhere In the North Shields and Whitley Bay Circuit the lay employee has taken the initiative and arranged a monthly act of worship called "Cafe Re", held on Tuesday afternoons from 2 – 4 pm. This meets in the Oxford Street church, a multi-purpose hall set out like a cafe with small tables surrounded by chairs. People are seated informally and enjoy refreshments and conversation to start with. They may come and go at any time during the two hour period. At various intervals there may be a hymn or a song, a prayer, a Bible or other devotional reading, or a brief talk or a contribution from one of those present. (NB. At the present moment of writing up the thesis this venture is suspended for the time being for evaluation and re-launch in spring 2013.)

This style of cafe worship is now being tried in many different places and seems to have an appeal to some people who do not find the formal worship of the church to be meaningful.

Wherever held, cafe church can be very much a locally focussed meeting, where people worship informally together and share in themes which are of importance to them. The choice of the contents for such worship depends on the decisions and preferences of those who attend, and has the potential to be a 'work of the people'. It could be argued that cafe church is another form of the Love Feast because the emphasis, here again, is on informality and a sharing of faith experience in an unregulated and

spontaneous way and within a context of the partaking of food and drink which may be Eucharistic or otherwise. This researcher has instigated this kind of event on appropriate occasions, e.g. with a party on holiday when a hotel restaurant has been the venue. The people share in an act of worship (Communion) and then begin to chat informally in small groups around their tables without any prompting to do so.

#### **7.7.6 SUNDAE SPECIALS**

At Wylam in the Tynedale Circuit there is another example of a different style of worship, held at tea time on Sundays and designed, especially, to appeal to families with younger children. The atmosphere is relaxed and no one worries about unscheduled noises and wandering toddlers. The format consists of a song time with either a CD or guitar accompaniment. There may be a game or two, a story often using puppets, brief prayers, and all lasting about half an hour. Themes are decided for a few months ahead and different mums and dads will organise what happens each time. People from other denominations may turn up as indeed those with no previous church connection. The service is followed by tea time which, to be attractive, consists of party type food prepared by someone from the church. This is not worship as traditionally understood, but worship nonetheless.

### 7.7.8 THE NEWCASTLE METHODIST DISTRICT: CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

In order to ascertain the nature of worship patterns currently practised in the Newcastle Methodist District the following survey, with the permission of the Chair, was circulated around all the ministers on his email list during September of 2012. It was envisaged that this would give a fair indication of the state of play of the alternative practice in the District as a whole. The survey is reproduced below.

#### Newcastle Methodist District Alternative Worship Survey

Dear Colleague,

Our Chair of District has kindly agreed that I may circulate ministers in the District to request co-operation. Please will you assist me in the final stages of my research project into 'The Worship of Methodism' by completing this short survey concerning patterns of alternative worship in our District. By alternative worship I mean anything other than Holy Communion and normal preaching services. This will not only be of help to my research but also, on being made available to the District, will give an overall picture indicating current trends and where possible resources and training may be targeted. A return within a week by email ([richard@firthfolk.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:richard@firthfolk.fsnet.co.uk)) will be much appreciated. With warmest thanks in anticipation, and best wishes for the work that you do.

Yours sincerely,  
Richard Firth (Revd.)

| Nature of Service  | Name of Church | How often held | Day of week and time held |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| Messy Church       |                |                |                           |
| Cafe Church        |                |                |                           |
| Mid-week Communion |                |                |                           |
| Mid-week service   |                |                |                           |
| Healing Service    |                |                |                           |
| Praise service     |                |                |                           |

|  |        |  |  |
|--|--------|--|--|
| Service <u>OFF</u> church premises                                       | Venue? |  |  |
| Activity based services e.g in Mother and Toddler group, or a club, etc. |        |  |  |
| Services planned by a group  |        |  |  |
| Other type of service, please specify<br>.....<br>.....                  |        |  |  |
| Other type of service, please specify<br>.....<br>.....                  | Venue? |  |  |
| Any other comments re worship patterns?                                  |        |  |  |

#### 7.7.8.A THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The indifferent response of 19/68 (=28%) ministers representing 47/173 (=27%) churches, even though the survey was conveniently on line, makes it difficult to reach conclusions about the patterns of worship across the whole of the Newcastle District. Be that as it may the results of the survey were as follows:

Messy Church is taking place in twenty-one churches ranging from monthly to twice a year.

Cafe Church occurs in twelve churches, again differing in frequency.

Mid-week services occur in four churches and mid-week Communion in six.

Off church premises services take place in eight care homes for the elderly; in schools two carol services and harvest services are taken by ministers and one in a pub. It is suspected that these figures are low.

Groups plan services in three churches, usually when no preacher is appointed.

Praise services take place in eight churches, seemingly as and when needed if there is no preacher, these being planned by members of congregations. They are mostly services using published song books, such as *Mission Praise*, *Songs of Fellowship*, etc. with prayer and testimony included.

All Age Worship in various forms takes place in six churches.

In one Circuit, in small villages, experimental services are taking place based on DVD recordings.

## **CONCLUSION**

The indicators seem to be that more informal, creative and participatory styles of worship have taken root in a considerable number of churches. These are likely to increase in number because of factors beyond the control of Circuits and churches, factors such as the shortage of ministers, deacons able to take services, local preachers and worship leaders, coupled with too many buildings.

## **7.8 CORROBORATION FROM OTHER DISTRICTS**

**7.8.1 The Bolton and Rochdale District**, on its website, provides examples of how the cafe church approach to worship is being used, examples being an after school cafe church; a pram service cafe church; Tuesday Church, i.e.

Holy Communion with a lunch club; songs of praise services; breakfast and worship; multi-media cafe worship; a SWAD service, i.e. Sunday worship with a difference; Refresh, an ecumenical youth service; and so on.

**7.8.2 In the Liverpool District**, in September 1999, Barbara Glasson was appointed as minister to Liverpool city centre where there was no building and no congregation! The questions were; how to be a minister, how to engage with people and how to arrange worship? She had an inspirational idea. She would do it by making bread. The meeting place was a kitchen above a bookshop in the centre of the city when:

Each Tuesday and Thursday whoever turns up is welcome to make bread around a large table and, if they choose, to take some quiet time, to light candles and say prayers.<sup>212</sup>

As the event became known, a congregation consisting of an eclectic mix of people gradually assembled to share in this act of worship, again not worship as is usually conceived, but worship nevertheless. The group shared in the whole process of bread making, not just practically, but in depth, as thoughts and feelings were verbalised and a rich quality of fellowship experienced. The bread thereby made was used in fellowship meals, both of the agape and of the communion variety, in which worship became truly sacramental, and creative of a special kind of community.

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212 Glasson B., *I am Somewhere Else. Gospel Reflections from an Emerging Church*, London, DLT, 2006, p.8

All we are doing is making bread, this little community of strange friends, mixing, kneading, waiting, rising, cooling, sharing, enjoying, leaving. This is how I am, how we all are, somewhere else.<sup>213</sup>

This is evidently a kind of worship which experiences the transcendent in the midst of life. Barbara moved to another appointment in 2009. She comments:

I see the experiment as the surprising emergence of a church which will always be fragile, quirky and short of cash, but is authentically Methodist, full of God's grace and a place of deep joy and struggle.<sup>214</sup>

There are also cafe churches in the same District; a cafe church in an independently run coffee shop; the New Song cafe, a Warrington Circuit monthly event; a Knit and Natter fellowship in Whitby, Ellesmere Port which incorporates prayer worship in its meeting; a Walk and Worship group which pauses for worship at a convenient stopping place.<sup>215</sup>

Such examples also identify a further trend in which acts of worship are linked to a specific activity or interest. Worship is not occurring for its own sake but as part of another event or corporate experience. This could be seen as an evangelistic ploy, or as a genuine attempt to demonstrate that the whole of life is worship, and that it engages people in ways that are relevant to them.

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213 Ibid. p.125

214 Email to the researcher, 1.2.11.

215 The researcher is grateful to Christine Dutton, a fellow student at UTU Sheffield, for this information.

**7.8.3 In the Sheffield District**, since it was founded in 1969, the Urban Theology Unit, amongst its broad range of interests, has had a concern for the development of worship in the context of urban life. In 1989 the UTU published a selection of hymns entitled *Hymns of the City*. Associated with the Unit is the Ashram Community, which, under the leadership of John Vincent, and as part of its life together, shares in acts of worship which comprise alternative liturgies to those of the mainstream Churches. These are published in the compact volume *Community Worship 2000* published in 1999, coincidentally the same year as *The Methodist Worship Book*. The book is by no means intended to be prescriptive but rather suggestive, aiming to spark off other alternative liturgies and imaginative acts of worship. The contents include orders for morning and evening prayers, an act of worship for the evening, a contemporary version of the Lord's Prayer, examples of creeds for today's Church, an order of service for a community agape, three Eucharistic liturgies, an alternative Eucharistic prayer, two acts of commitment and a housewarming liturgy.

The basic concept underlying the liturgies is that they focus on what it means both to worship and to live in community as a disciple of Jesus today. They deserve to be more widely known and used. They embody the desire for a radical element to permeate Methodist worship as a whole.



## **CONCLUSION**

Sufficient evidence has now been accumulated to demonstrate quite clearly that the tide of a third tradition, an alternative practice, is now flowing strongly, and that the worship of Methodism has irrevocably changed. The question is, as we voyage now through uncharted waters, can we be sure that we are on course for our intended destination, that is, contemporary worship which is meaningful and moving, relevant and vital, but which above all leads to transforming encounter with God?

## CHAPTER 8

### METHODIST WORSHIP: A WORK IN PROGRESS

#### 8.1 CONNEXIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Contrary to what some may suppose, the Methodist Connexion, far from exercising a central control, actually encourages the alternative practice by urging local churches to examine their worship patterns and to change them appropriately.

The emergence of this third style of worship with a spirit of experimentation has progressively been given due recognition by recent Connexional reports.

The report entitled *Let the People Worship* (1988) stressed the need for a renewal of worship, calling upon local congregations to recover the true spirit of the liturgy as that of 'the work of the people'.

A further report, *Called to Love and Praise*, accepted by the Methodist Conference in 1999 emphasises that praise of God, resulting in the loving service of our fellow men and women, is a priority for the Church at every level of its life, but chiefly the local church.

The *Our Calling* process set in motion by the Methodist Conference in 2000 highlighted Connexional priorities, listing worship as the first of four emphases believed to encapsulate the reasons for Methodism's existence, namely:

1. Worship
2. Learning and caring
3. Service
4. Evangelism

Thus worship is seen as the prime activity from which all else proceeds. It provides that vital encounter with God which is the source of inspiration for the other three aspects of the life of the Church.

A challenge was issued to each local Methodist church to answer with four questions designed to encourage the renewal of its worship:

1. What helps us to centre our worship on God?
2. What helps us to express awe and wonder, thankfulness and praise, and love towards God?
3. What would help our worship to make sense to people who come only occasionally?
4. Is our worship the same all the time? Should we explore styles and traditions of worship from other denominations and other parts of the world?<sup>216</sup>

Alternative practice, in all but name, was again given official encouragement by the published conclusions to the consultation process, which, between 2000 and 2003, flowed from the *Our Calling* document. The matter of worship

requires deepest attention... The central question of God and responses to God, flow through the priorities for the Methodist Church from start to finish... Imagination, flexibility and varieties of style in worship services are now urgent concerns. So are the quality of

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<sup>216</sup> *Methodist Conference Agenda 2000*, London, MPH, No.34 Sect.5

worship and the care with which it is prepared, whatever the style. There is need to look afresh at participation in worship, so that the breadth of human experience – joys and sorrows, successes and failures, conventional feelings and also troubling doubts and fears – are prayerfully placed within the mercy of God.<sup>217</sup>

We note here, especially, the stress on ‘imagination, flexibility and varieties of style in worship services’.

Further grounding of the alternative practice is provided by the Fresh Expressions initiative, a joint venture between Methodism and the Church of England, which seeks to encourage of new forms of being church for the twenty first century.

If, as the old Westminster Confession affirms, the chief end of human beings is to glorify God, then the fact that for Methodism worship is priority number one is undeniably right. To lead people into worship of God is also, in effect to help them to become and to be practising disciples of Jesus Christ in the strength of the Holy Spirit. To worship, in the broadest sense of the word, assuming that it embraces the whole of life is also to learn and to care, to serve and to evangelise. To do so using different styles means that worship, being thus enriched, is more likely to relate to contemporary life.

The question as to whether or not this newer worship pattern is entirely in keeping with the original ethos of the Methodism of the Wesleys is one to which we shall return.

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<sup>217</sup> *Priorities for the Methodist Church, Methodist Conference Report, London, MPH, 2004, Sect. 5.4.iii*

## 8.2 ABUNDANT RESOURCES

The variety which now characterises Methodist worship is also encouraged by the abundance of resource materials currently available. These include publications which provide themes and ideas for each Sunday of the year based on the lectionary, examples being:

*Roots* – published by an ecumenical company, Churches Limited.

*Salt* – published by Scripture Union.

*Searchlights* (by David Adam) – published by Church House.

Other publications on the market include those by the Iona and Taizé Communities, the anthologies of Donald Hilton of the United Reformed Church, the *Dialogue Worship Book* by Paul Glass and the resources available from Kevin Mayhew and other publishing houses, not to mention the numerous websites which offer such material, too many to list here, and from every point of view on the theological spectrum. It remains to be seen how the internet will influence the worship of the Churches. Recently the Methodist website [seedresources.com](http://seedresources.com) was launched providing worship material for all ages and for every Sunday of the lectionary year. This is sponsored by the Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust and Twelve Baskets (a newly formed spirituality group in Methodism).

There has never been so many resources available, all at the click of a mouse. No church's worship may go without being enriched by what is on

hand. No minister, preacher or worship leader need have any difficulty in finding fresh content for any services they are called upon to lead.

### **8.3 BUT IS IT ALL REALLY METHODIST?**

Methodists at worship today may experience a limitless variety of patterns in their services. The original twofold practice has morphed into a multi-faceted scenario with the development of the alternative tradition. It is impossible to know what may happen when the Methodist goes to church! There is a glorious mixture of styles and an interchange between the strictly liturgical and the purely extempore. Methodist worship is in the melting pot and we do not know what will emerge from this crucible.

In such a situation there is a need to encourage open tolerant church communities which welcome and experiment with all practices in the worship spectrum from "book" to "free" so that services continue to be enriched by the variety of every taste, style and tradition. Worship of God demands the best that we can offer as human beings. This may, hopefully be achieved by an inclusive and visionary approach.

The question is: because this third alternative practice has arrived on the scene, has Methodism lost its distinctiveness? The twofold practice sustained Methodist worship for over 200 years. The last 50 years have seen dramatic and unprecedented change and future patterns of worship are uncertain. Is Methodist identity still secure or is it under threat?

To answer the question we must go back to Methodism's roots and to John Wesley's own convictions. He defined a Methodist as a person who, in the words of Jesus, 'loved God with heart, soul, mind and strength and neighbour as one's self'. This attitude of love of God and neighbour was sustained initially by the weekly Methodist Society Class Meetings and Band Meetings held in members' homes but, also, as time passed, by the worship and spirituality afforded by both the Prayer Book and the preaching service. But we note that a Methodist was not necessarily thereby defined by the style of worship in which he or she participated, but by the personal and group disciplines which characterised the Methodist movement and its local societies.

John Wesley also demonstrated a catholic spirit,<sup>218</sup> which is a spirit of openness and acceptance of people of other Christian traditions and their devotional riches. We cannot but believe, therefore, that in our own time, for example, the resources made available from the Joint Liturgical Group and elsewhere should be welcomed and used, as indeed they have been in both *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975 and *The Methodist Worship Book* of 1999. Nor must the contributions from the Charismatic Movement of the 1970's, the Iona Community of the 1990's, and other influences be forgotten.

The Methodist Deed of Union, also, specifically states that

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218 See his sermon no. 39 *The Catholic Spirit*, in Jackson T., *The Sermons of John Wesley*. London. 1872

The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ.<sup>219</sup>

If this is an active relationship, then it is implied that Methodism is open both to give to and receive from the Universal Church in all its various branches. Its worship may thereby be enriched by the liturgical assets and practices of other Christian Communion and, likewise, other Communion may be enriched by the practices of Methodism.

Another of Wesley's convictions was his concern for relevance. His brother Charles expressed it so well:

To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfil;  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master's will.<sup>220</sup>

It follows again, therefore, that attempts of Methodists today to develop patterns of worship appropriate for the times in which we live are to be welcomed, whether liturgical, extempore, fluid and experimental, or, as is more likely, a mixture culled from a variety of resources. The question is "Is what is happening today distinctively Methodist and is Methodism still Methodism now that there are three kinds of practice instead of two?" The answer will very much depend on a person's point of view.

The answer will be "no" if we believe that we should still strictly follow the customs and traditions of John and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century

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219 *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, MPH, London, Vol.2. 2002 edn., p.213

220 *Hymns and Psalms*, London, MPH, 1983, no. 785



and if we believe that their approach was given for all time. But today's Methodism, in fact, would not be recognisable by them.

The reply will be "yes" if we believe that Methodism and its worship should respond to the cultures and needs and challenges of the contemporary world in the way that the Wesley brothers did in theirs. In this way the distinct ethos of Methodism is retained.

What is distinctively Methodist is to serve the present age. The changes being made in its patterns of worship are evidence that as a denomination it is seeking so to do. This cannot be anything but a progressive development as Methodism seeks to relate to the world in which it exists.

#### **8.4 IS IT LITURGICALLY ACCEPTABLE?**

The importance of liturgy as the enabler of worship can never be over estimated.

One aim of liturgy must surely be that of creating conditions whereby this experience of encounter with God may occur.<sup>221</sup>

Liturgy is the form that worship takes. It is the way that its constituent material is arranged for use by the congregation. It may vary from a completely printed and prescribed order on the one hand to a completely spontaneous and extempore service on the other.

A liturgy therefore, is the means whereby worship is expressed. It is intended to encourage effective, meaningful and reciprocal encounter with God.

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221 Underhill E., *Worship*, London, Nisbet, 1936, p.15

The liturgy allows Christians the opportunity to praise God, to thank God, to offer themselves to God. It gives expression to the deepest human longing for God.<sup>222</sup>

As is well-known, the word 'liturgy' literally means 'the work of the people'.

The word liturgy itself is a combination of the Greek *laos* (people) and *ergon* (work), clearly meaning the activity or work of the people of God ... Worship is the activity of the whole body of people and depends on the contribution and response of the entire congregation.<sup>223</sup>

In early Christian history the word became associated with the enactment of public worship. More specifically it became applied to the Eucharist.

If liturgy is the people's work then the implication is that the people are actively engaged in the eventful experience of worship and are not merely passive spectators of a drama performed by the ordained. The above definition of the word, moreover, raises the important question; 'the work of which people?' Is liturgy the work of 'experts' in the form of committees set up to devise orders of service which are then authorised for use in local (Methodist) churches, or should liturgy be the work of each congregation as it constructs its own services for its own context? Or is it possible that there can be a combination of these two approaches? To answer these questions we need to consider how it is that liturgy is 'the work of the people'.

In his book *Worship as Pastoral Care* W. H. Willimon states that there are four ways in which the people are at work as they participate in the liturgy, by

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222 White S.J., *The Spirit of Worship*, London, DLT, 1999, p.25

223 Owen D., *Sharers in Worship*, Redhill, Surrey, 1980, p.23

which he seems to mean, mainly, the Eucharist or Holy Communion.<sup>224</sup> We may summarise these as follows:

i. People are at work because they are sharing in the consequences of the 'saving events' associated with the coming of the Christ into the world. This is especially true when the sacraments are observed. Baptism identifies the baptised with the dying and the rising of Christ and admits people into the community of faith. Holy Communion sustains the disciples of Jesus today as they share in the reality of His sacrifice and the fruits of His resurrection.

ii. People are at work as they make confession and pledge themselves to perform acts of penance and make practical restitution, by way of putting right what is wrong in the world and restoring personal relationships.

iii. People are at work as they join together in acts of communion (worship and fellowship) as the Christian Year proceeds through its various festivals and annual events, and also as they regularly remember Christ's death and resurrection at Holy Communion.

iv. People are at work as they praise God and give Him His due, by the offering of the whole personality, body, mind and spirit, including innermost motives, thoughts and emotions, becoming lost in 'wonder, love and praise'.

C. S. Lewis once made the point that this focussing of the whole being upon God is for our benefit not for His, since He is not a self-centred God but a loving, gracious self-giving God.

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<sup>224</sup> Willimon W.H., *Worship as Pastoral Care*, USA, Abingdon, 1979, pp.58-62

Although there is great value in Willimon's analysis of the liturgy as the work of the people, there are two further points which he seems to have overlooked.

v. He does not mention the correlation between worship and daily work; or that because human creativity is part of the divine image in us it is through our work that we share in God's ongoing work of creation. If work is to become worship and worship is to become a work, then the hallowing of daily life is an important aspect of liturgy and which would be, at the very least, reflected in the prayers of intercession.

vi. If liturgy is to be literally a work of the people then we would expect that they would have a share in the composition of a liturgy, and that it would arise out of their own knowledge, experience and context.

As we have seen already, the main Christian denominations, including the Methodism, often take a prescriptive approach to liturgy. Printed orders are officially authorised and commended so that congregations may then follow them. But a liturgy may hardly be described as a work of the people when they have done nothing to put it together and if it does not arise out of or relate to their immediate real life situations. Truly meaningful liturgy surely needs to be contextual and relevant to people's lives whilst at the same time encouraging a sense of the presence of God.

Taking the examples of Messy Church and other similar participatory forms of worship then these may be considered to be more a 'work of the people'

than the published liturgies of Church committees, because congregations themselves are sharing in the preparation of an act of worship through the practical activities they are involved with, whether model making, painting pictures, assembling collages, collaborating, discussing, rehearsing and so on. All of this creative togetherness is then brought to the act of worship which concludes the event. So generally speaking we may say that this aspect of the alternative practice is liturgically acceptable. As Willimon would expect the people are involved in thinking about the consequences of Christ's coming, sharing in the rhythm of the festive seasons, working out for themselves how they wish to worship and how it connects to their lives. This helping to create an act of worship, albeit not in a conventional way, nevertheless fulfils the true meaning of the word 'liturgy'.

### **8.5 SOME HESITATIONS**

Even though the alternative practice may accord with the Methodist ethos and be liturgically acceptable there are nevertheless hesitations which deserve mention.

The brevity of some of the forms of alternative practice, such as Messy Church and Cafe Church causes unease amongst those who prefer a fuller service. It is argued that shorter times spent in worship do not admit of the same in-depth treatment of a subject as a well-thought out twenty minute

sermon would provide.<sup>225</sup> Messages come in short capsules of time to match the limited attention spans which people seem to have these days. The challenge which faces ministers, preachers and worship leaders is how the truths of the gospel may be communicated in a simple yet uncomplicated way and how people may be led into a sense of the presence of God when time is at a premium.

The issue of discontinuity is also one which requires attention. The differing forms of the alternative practice seem to bear little relationship to the more traditional practices of the Church whether of the officially authorised published forms of worship or the usual four or five hymn pattern of the preaching service. Each form of the original dual tradition had its own core of content inherited from historic sources, be they the literary jewels of *The Book of Common Prayer* or the corpus of the hymns of Wesley and Watts and similar writers. Much of the content of the alternative practice is completely fresh and bears little or no relationship to the ethos of the past. It is, supposedly, an attempt to come to terms with the contemporary world and its demand for that which has instantaneous appeal.

The accusation of shallowness is often levelled at alternative practices in that the nature of such acts of worship does not permit the longer in-depth treatment of the great Christian themes such as love, salvation, grace, faith,

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<sup>225</sup> The meaning here is that of a didactic sermon intended to exhort and to educate existing members of congregations rather than a kerygmatic sermon aiming to 'convert'. Very rarely, these days, do the 'unconverted' attend Methodist services. In any case leading people to their own meaningful faith is not necessarily as straightforward as some commonly assume.

holiness, assurance and so on, or the use of the classic liturgies such as that of *The Book of Common Prayer*, honed and honoured by the use of generations of Christian people gone by, these being superseded by trite and simplistic informal prayers to God and chats to those assembled. Here again as with the issues of brevity and discontinuity, this is a danger to be aware of and a challenge to be faced.

Another hesitation is that posed by the irregularity of much alternative worship. For instance, Messy Church at North Shields only takes place six times a year on the last Monday afternoon and evening of each school half term. A certain constituency of people attend these events but not the regular Sunday morning services. In other places people will attend Cafe Church but not the weekly worship. Alternative practice seems to be producing congregations which are regular but infrequent and unrelated to the core attendees on Sundays, but the latter, nevertheless, are those who are prepared to support the newer forms of worship with material resources, leadership and help.

However, the fact of alternative practice, the third 'tradition', does provide the churches with opportunities for growth on a scale not seen for many years, and the challenge to devise forms of worship which are meaningful for people today. In this matter the issue of training cannot be ignored.

## 8.6 RELEASING POTENTIAL: TRAINING AND RESOURCING

For quality worship to take place, those who lead and enable worship will need training and equipping, irrespective of whether they are ordained ministers, local preachers, worship leaders or simply members of congregations. The gifts of the people will need to be identified, developed and utilised in the worship of God.

Those talented in music and song, drama and other spoken arts, audio-visual technology, movement and dance, need encouragement in order to enrich the liturgical content of worship services. Latent talent needs to be discovered and developed. In smaller congregations where such a pool of talent is limited, ways need to be found to encourage meaningful participation. There is no place in the twenty-first century for the abhorrence of John Wesley at the non-ordained Thomas Maxwell daring to preach at the Foundery Chapel. Today, the Holy Spirit is at work, we believe, in ways appropriate to our time, encouraging the people of God to share in what is, after all, their work, the worship of their Maker, Liberator and Re-creator.

In Methodism, the current Fruitful Field Project<sup>226</sup>, amidst wider initiatives, holds out the prospect of more effective training than at present for those leading and enabling worship. The Connexion, in order to raise standards, will need to be rigorous in insisting that trainees, both ministerial and lay, accept the challenge of the new syllabus to be introduced by the Discipleship,

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<sup>226</sup> *The Fruitful Field: Consultation Document from the Ministries Committee of the Methodist Church*, Peterborough, MPH, Autumn 2011.



Ministries and Learning Network about to be established by the Methodist Conference. Much still remains to be decided as a result of the Fruitful Field Report of 2012 which aims to radically overhaul all aspects of training for ministers, local preachers, worship leaders, lay workers and pastoral visitors with the conduct of quality worship as one of the priorities.

Presumably improving on the original *Faith and Worship* course for local preachers and worship leaders, there will be emphases such as contemporary biblical interpretation, fresh ways of looking at Christian doctrines, as well as the content and structure of the liturgy coupled with an awareness of the huge range of resources available at the present time.

Recognition will need to be given to the move towards mixed practices in worship as alternative forms continue to flourish. Alongside or even supplanting *The Methodist Worship Book* many other printed resources will increasingly be used often by downloading them from internet sources, and not only for Holy Communion but also to enrich non-Eucharistic worship.

Experimental services, such as Messy Church and Cafe Church will need to use a wide variety of resources in order to maintain momentum, retain people's interest and sustain freshness and vitality.

However in all the thinking about the nature and purpose of worship and the results to be expected from it, it is easy to become humanly centred upon what the congregation is doing and to forget that worship is intended to

focus our beings upon God's being. It is only when God is worshipped "in spirit and in truth"<sup>227</sup> purely for His/Her own sake, that genuine worship has occurred.

Jesus seems to be implying in John 4.20-24 that the physical circumstances of worship, the place, the time, the liturgy, the ritual, even its theology, may not necessarily have the importance which is often given to them, rather the spirit in which an act of worship takes place. Any 'results' may then take care of themselves, as worship becomes life and life becomes worship. The experience of Isaiah the prophet may be recalled again. His experience of the numinous, the transcendent God imminently present amidst the congregation of His people, resulted in the response to the divine call with "Here I am, send me".<sup>228</sup>

Today's Methodists, as congregations of the people of God in each local place, hopefully, will capture this kind of spirit, whatever book they use, whatever service of the Word they prefer, and whatever alternative practice they adopt. They may thus realise

...what a wonderful and entertaining adventure it is to serve the world through the worship of God.<sup>229</sup>

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227 John 4.20-24

228 Isaiah 6.1-8

229 Hauerwas S. & Willimon W. H., *Resident Aliens, A provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something is Wrong*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1989, p.143

## 8.7 WORSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

What is the purpose of worship? Indeed should it have a purpose other than focussing the human heart, mind and spirit upon God? Are other motives permitted when worship takes place? Should worship of God be for its own sake or is positive action to be expected to ensue from it?

There is a point of view which believes that the main purpose of worship is evangelistic. Martyn Atkins, the General Secretary of the Methodist Church, in a recent book, expresses his conviction that this is the case, based on the premise that the main reason for the Church's existence is mission.

Mission shaped thinking therefore considers that worship is an essential self-defining activity of church and must enable worship of God to occur in such a way that through such worship human beings become first Christian believers and then disciples.<sup>230</sup>

Martyn Atkins further explains that patterns of worship will need to change in order to make this possible, becoming more accessible by being informal and relaxed, with participation in every aspect, e.g. music, word, prayer, etc. He asserts that because God is a missionary God then worship is both for God and for the worshippers and has missionary purpose. Certainly, as we have seen, the original preaching services of the Wesleys were evangelistic in nature, being designed to win converts and then to encourage them in the faith.

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230 Atkins M. *Resourcing Renewal. Shaping Churches for the Emerging Future*, London, Epworth, 2010, p.86

However, this does not accord with the view that God is to be worshipped for His/Her own sake and for what He/She is and has done, is doing and promises to do. The impression could be given that the Church has an ulterior motive in its attitude towards its congregations, and does not accept people as they are with whatever they may bring to an act of worship. There is a need to be suspicious with regard to undue pressure to conform to any stereotypical pattern of 'conversion'. To feel accepted in the presence of God is an essential element of the worship experience.

A recent Conference report, also by Martyn Atkins, defines Methodism as "a discipleship movement shaped for mission",<sup>231</sup> a phrase which has no specific reference to worship, and is not clear about the difference between a movement and a Church. However, further explanation expands on that definition by asserting that worship and the devotional life are needed to sustain the movement, raising the question of the relationship between worship and mission, a mission patterned on that of Christ Himself, which was one of both deed and word.

The report, although mentioning perceived inadequacies in the nature of Methodist worship, does not address these in any measure, so the Methodist Conference directed

the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to consider the issues raised in the section of the report

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231 Atkins M., *General Secretary's Report to the Methodist Conference 2011*, at [www.methodist.org](http://www.methodist.org)

entitled "God's 'Worth-ship' and our Worship" and to bring recommendations to Conference as soon as proves possible.<sup>232</sup>

To date, no report or interim report has yet been presented to Conference. We can but anticipate their findings and recommendations. On past form we may predict that alternative practices will be encouraged and further experiment with different forms of worship fostered. It is likely that due emphasis will be given to the need for quality of worship at local church level, for it is through such worship that the life of the Christian community and that of the individuals who belong to it is sustained.

In an important book by one of Methodism's younger theologians concerning the future of the Church, this point is emphasised.

Worship is the offering of the whole people of God, not only of those ordained or recognised as having a specific role to play in worship. All worship is sacramental, being an outward, visible sign of an invisible act of God in transforming and renewing His people. Transformation is therefore the proper consequence of worship, and reveals the quality that is offered.<sup>233</sup>

So, God transforms His people by helping them to see the world through His eyes and maintain its distinctiveness as a community set in the world, with its unique ethic which begins from God's position. For instance if God says "Blessed are the poor"<sup>234</sup> then it is precisely because He blesses them and regards them with priority, that His people do so too.

Ethics is a way of seeing before it is a matter of doing. The ethical task is not to tell you what is right or wrong but rather to train you to

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232 Ibid. Resolution 2/5

233 Shier-Jones A. *A Work in Progress, Methodists Doing Theology*, Peterborough, Epworth, 2005, p.234

234 Luke 6.20

see. That explains why, in the church, a great deal of time and energy is spent in the act of worship. In worship we are busy looking in the right direction.<sup>235</sup>

Thus discipleship which finds expression in the service of others is empowered by the corporate worship of a community of God's people.

Dudley Coates, a member of *The Methodist Worship Book* compiling group in an article in the *Methodist Recorder* quotes a speaker, Jim Ritchie, at a conference on 'The Heart of Worship' which he attended.

In Christian worship, diverse persons gather in search of a holy, transcendent reality, a grace-filled community and a corporate intimacy with God and with one another known in the life and passion of Jesus; rehearsing together the story of faith prepares them to respond in Christ-like practice, re-entering their other realities with the goal of transforming them to more closely resemble the holy and transcendent reality sought and experienced in worship.<sup>236</sup>

Worship is therefore intended to glorify God so that the world may be served and changed, to realise what John Robinson called 'the beyond in the midst of life'<sup>237</sup> or in William Temple's phrase 'the immanence of the transcendent'<sup>238</sup>

## 8.8 CHANGING TIMES

The Methodism of the researcher's boyhood and youth was a lively affair. Mid-week fellowships, Guilds, Christian Endeavours and other gatherings flourished such as Women's Fellowships (usually held on a Monday afternoon

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235 Hauerwas S. & Willimon W. H., *Resident Aliens, A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People who Know that Something is Wrong*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1989, p.95

236 Ritchie J. quoted by Coates D. in "What is the Heart of Worship?" *Methodist Recorder*, 24.05.07, p.24

237 Robinson J.A.T. *Honest to God*, London, SCM, 1963, p.86

238 Temple W., *Nature God and Man*, London, Macmillan, 1934.

when the washing was done and hung drying on the line), men's groups and youth clubs. The latter were affiliated to the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs which organised annual national and regional celebration worship rallies and events. Women's rallies at Circuit and District level were common, as indeed were Circuit rallies which were usually inspired and even entertained by notable preachers who seasoned their addresses with humour.

Virtually all of this has now disappeared, decimated by the seismic changes in society as a whole, viz. family and community breakdown, television, car ownership, growing affluence despite recessions, the entertainment industry, ease of travel, higher expectations fuelled by the media, and so on. These and other sociological factors have had their impact upon all Church denominations.

The Methodism of former years, including its attendance at worship, depended on a fairly static society, which no longer prevails, and with its disappearance has gone all the natural seed beds and nurseries which encouraged and nurtured prospective ministers and preachers.

Moreover, Methodism has found it a struggle to appear relevant to contemporary life, appearing, to the outside world, to have become a quaintly dated, narrow and moralistic group of people, good respectable folk, well-intentioned, but out of touch, wearing their suits and neat and tidy clothes as they walk or drive to church on Sunday mornings, whereas

everyone else is dressed in leisure wear on their way to football, swimming, the sports centre, the supermarket and other attractions.

Should any of the latter find the courage to step over the threshold of a Methodist church they will usually receive a warm welcome but also encounter a culture shock as they will be expected to sing hymns and songs unfamiliar to them, hear readings from the Bible which bear little relationship to their contemporary experience, and generally struggle to understand prayers and sermons or addresses containing religious terminology. If it happens to be a communion service they will usually be expected to follow a ritual from a heavy brown book containing vocabulary and ideas which they never encounter anywhere else.

Is this a caricature? Certainly some churches seem more up-to-date with their bands and music groups and PowerPoint presentations, but the basic feeling of unreality persists.

So Methodism has a real challenge to face, how best inclusively to worship the God in whom its people believe. It wrestles with the issues of relevance and credibility alongside other factors beyond its control which influence worship patterns. There are fewer ministers, deacons, local preachers, and worship leaders. The Church as a whole, with some local exceptions, is in decline, with the number of loyal worshippers diminishing especially at Sunday services. Ageing congregations struggle to maintain expensive buildings along with their other financial pressures, Circuit, District and



Connexional assessments. Consequently there are fewer resources and less leadership potential with regard to enabling worship to take place. Congregations, more and more, have to plan their own worship.

Despite this fairly bleak prognosis, beacons of hope may be found here and there especially in large urban churches which, having grasped the nettle, hold more participatory services using state of the art technology, singing contemporary hymns and songs with instrumental accompaniment. Alternative practices, such as Messy Church and Cafe Church, as we have seen, have also taken root and give cause for encouragement. Growth seems to be happening in churches which adopt a more informal and imaginative approach and which relates to their context.

## **8.9 A CURRENT DEBATE**

Is the use of *The Methodist Worship Book* by ministers and congregations under threat? One of the compilers, Norman Wallwork, recently put pen to paper in order to encourage greater use of the book, possibly because it was suspected that is the case.<sup>239</sup>

Thirteen years after publication, *The Methodist Worship Book* is beginning to show its age. The criticisms voiced in some of our surveys (see chapter 5) whilst made by a minority at the time, are now becoming more apparent.

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<sup>239</sup> Wallwork N., "Rediscovering The Methodist Worship Book", in *Ichthus* vol. 162, Issue 2, Easter 2012, p.23. See also the letter by Revd. Alan Powers in *Ichthus* vol.162, Issue 3, Autumn 2012, p.14. The original article was written by Norman Wallwork at the request of the editor, Ros Peedle.

David Tripp, one of the original compilers who withdrew because of his move to the United States, in his review of the book, gave voice to his own criticisms of the completed work;<sup>240</sup> inadequate theological rationale; the size and format of the book (the largest ever produced by any British Methodist movement); query whether sixteen different Eucharistic prayers (Anaphora) are really necessary; general over provision with respect to all the material included. Perhaps if he had remained on the group things may have taken a different turn.

David Blackley, a local preacher in the Amersham Circuit, in an audit of worship in his own local Methodist church at Chesham, comments on the way ministers used the services in *The Methodist Worship Book*.

Most, if not all used an attenuated version of one of the plethora of services given in *The Methodist Worship Book*, usually as a 'bolt-on extra' to an essentially non-liturgical service. Notwithstanding the variety of such services now available in *MWB*, in my experience some worshippers are becoming irritated by their tedious and repetitive nature, and by their wordiness, even after attenuation.<sup>241</sup>

The audit took place between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 and December 31<sup>st</sup> 2001 and thus demonstrates early reaction to the book. There is no reason to believe that matters have changed.

Nine years later, Alan Powers recently expressed even stronger criticism in his response to the Norman Wallwork article.

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240 Tripp D. H., "The 1999 British Methodist Worship Book: A Review", In *Doxology 2000* Vol. 17, The Order of St. Luke, Akron, Ohio, pp.49-74

241 Blackley D., "An Audit of Worship at a Methodist Church", in the *Epworth Review*, October 2003, Vol. 30 No. 4, p.47

True to my calling as a minister, I dutifully bought the service book [MWB] and have taken congregations in and around all the pages mentioned by our honourable High Church cleric – plus a few more. I have even used the sung order of Holy Communion a few times. But I can well remember leading a large congregation through the service on pp.27ff and receiving the comment afterwards that (with all the either/ors marked in red) it was worse than telephoning an Insurance Company and attempting (“please press” 1,2 or 3) to get through to the right department. Even with nine communion services I must admit that my mind invariably goes blank when I read the same stuff time after time, so I feel for congregations ... it just ain't working!<sup>242</sup>

On the other hand in a more recent article<sup>243</sup> Neil Dixon expresses the view that *The Methodist Worship Book* is “wearing well” and seeks to justify its content. He regards the sale of over 200,000 copies as a measure of its success and, despite this researcher’s contacts with him, professes ignorance of any research done into its use. He expresses his conviction with regard to the book in rather loaded language.

So, while I am convinced that, in itself, MWB is wearing well, it can only fulfil its role as the authorised worship book of the Methodist Church to the extent that our ministers and members allow it to do so. If it is widely ignored or wantonly mangled or if it is combined with or replaced by inferior material, Methodist worship will be immeasurably impoverished. Our denominational reluctance to make too many rules about what happens in worship could be our undoing.<sup>244</sup>

In fact our research has unearthed criticisms of the book which Dixon does not deal with, mainly the failure to consult prior to beginning work on it; its length and wordiness; over provision of material; inattention to local church

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242 Powers A., “The Methodist Worship Book”, in *Ichthus* Vol. 162 Issue 3, Autumn 2012, p.14

243 Dixon N., “Is the Methodist Worship Book Wearing Well?” *Methodist Sacramental Fellowship Bulletin*, No.140. Epiphany 2013.

244 Dixon N., “Is The Methodist Worship Book Wearing Well?” in *The Methodist Sacramental Fellowship Bulletin*, No.140, Epiphany 2013.

needs; the unsuitable language of the public offices; and a perceived drift towards Anglicanism generally.

Far from providing the variety supposedly offered by the separate services of Holy Communion for the seasons of the Christian year, they are in fact remarkably similar in style and content and generally overlong, because of the felt need to include traditional texts and what were perceived to be essential elements.

With regard to the service for *The Baptism of Younger Children* Dixon again affirms the nature of its content, especially the fact that the promises of parents and godparents are made after the moment of baptism itself, which he regards as demonstrating the emphasis on prevenient grace. According to historic custom, however, profession of faith and commitment precede the act of baptism, whether by sprinkling or immersion, which are the response of faith to divine grace which is then sealed in baptism, so it is difficult to understand Dixon's reasoning, as it is when he deals with the criticism that the service contains 'too much theology'. It is not that this is the case but that the language of the service is not user friendly for those parents and families who are not familiar with religious jargon. Appropriate language expressing good theology need not be obscure and off-putting. If infant baptism is an evangelical sacrament then every effort needs to be made so that it may be understood by the participants.

With regard to other services in the book, we would wish, with Dixon, to affirm that content which has proved to be of value, but would reiterate that the over provision of material for some occasions diminishes the creative and extempore efforts of ministers and others, and also that there is no need to include services which are Connexional in nature or which are rarely used or for which there is no demand from local churches.

Dixon is scornful of those who devise services of their own or who take a pick and mix approach to the book. But such uses are in themselves evidence of dissatisfaction and of a desire for creativity and relevance with regard to the liturgy. Dixon's article demonstrates that he, and the compiling group for that matter were, in many ways, out of touch with local Methodist churches who desire nothing more than to simply, effectively and vitally worship God.

If there is to be another worship book in twenty or thirty years' time, congregations may prefer a shorter volume based on the needs of the local church, omitting Connexional services and those which relate to historically non-Methodist practices; less prescriptive and more adaptable; more contemporary in its use of a language; fully inclusive and gender neutral with respect to God, and accompanied by a resource book containing a variety of worship material related to the different seasons of the Christian year and other significant occasions. It is worthy of note that Methodists have never regarded service books as essential to the sustaining of their spirituality, although they may have found them helpful.

The next compiling group appointed by the Methodist Conference should:

a) be more representative and inclusive with regard to women, youth, World Church and ecumenical members;

b) consult widely across the Church as a whole before agreeing on its contents;

c) ensure that the contents of any worship book are more locally orientated and flexible;

d) ecumenically, have more liturgies and texts in common so that relations between the Churches are fostered.

(See chapter 4.6.10)

## **8.10 CONTEXTUAL WORSHIP**

The traditional preaching service, if a qualitative experience, is still appreciated by those loyal Methodist members who attend worship regularly. However the format seems to have little appeal for the 'baby boomers' of the fifties and sixties and adults of later birth whose education was based on active participation and discovery rather than the more passive rote learning of previous years. The preaching service only requires three people to stage it; minister/preacher, organist and steward, whereas the alternative practice involves many more. Using a selection of material from the wide range of resources available, combined with local initiative,

ingenuity and imagination, there is the potential for worship to be relevant and contextual.

A good example of such contextuality is that encouraged by Anthony Reddie in Birmingham during the 1990's. The Methodist church in Balsall Heath consisted at that time, and still does, of people of an Afro-Caribbean cultural and ethnic background, who, even though the majority of them were born in Britain, found themselves decidedly unhappy with the cultural expression of the Christian faith that was being expected of them, as represented for instance by the use of *The Methodist Service Book*. They became motivated to break the dominance of white Eurocentric practices, traditions and theology.

There was a growing awareness of the importance of black cultural forms and expressions that are integral components of black self-identity.<sup>245</sup>

So in order to celebrate and affirm black self-hood this desire

... gave rise to a plethora of new patterns of worship and learning of a more inclusive nature.<sup>246</sup>

People of all ages within the church were invited to be pro-active in creating services of worship which used an activity based experiential method. Under Anthony Reddie's guidance two handbooks were produced which were used to devise services of worship relating to the culture of the people.<sup>247</sup>

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245 Reddie A.G., *Nobodies to Somebodies, A Practical Theology for Education and Liberation*, Peterborough, Epworth Press, 2003, p.175

246 Ibid. p.175

This material had the declared purpose of developing a greater sense of self-esteem, self-worth and self-affirmation within black children and young people.<sup>248</sup>

Whilst arising out of a specific cultural situation there are here lessons to be learned by any church willing to understand its own historic, cultural and sociological setting so as to inform worship and affirm the life of the people. Such an exercise demands resourceful leadership and implies the training and equipping of ministers, preachers and worship leaders who need to be enablers rather than those who merely, from the front, deliver services to their assembled congregations.

### **8.11 TIMES AND PLACES**

Because of the increasingly complex nature of contemporary society more and more services will need to be held at times different from the traditional times on Sunday morning and evening, although evening services are increasingly a rarity. Earlier services on Sunday morning and also on Sunday afternoons and late evenings are being experimented with and, again, weekday worship at various times is now becoming increasingly commonplace. Interestingly, annual statistics collected by Methodism now include those for attendance at mid-week worship which have demonstrated growth in numbers.

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247 Reddie A.G., *Growing into Hope. Believing and Expecting. Christian Education in Multi-ethnic Churches. Vol.1*, Peterborough, MPH, 1998, and *Liberation and Change. Vol.2*, Peterborough, MPH, 1998.

248 Ibid. Vol.1. p2



Worship will not necessarily be held in church buildings. Services have long been held in residential homes, shop fronts, schools and open air locations such as town and city squares, parks and beaches and even on riverside boats. Some have been held in supermarkets and shopping malls such as that of the Metro Centre in Gateshead, which has a full time chaplain. As the expense of maintaining buildings for smaller congregations rises there will be a search for alternative locations such as empty shops, pubs, hotel rooms, school halls and other community buildings. The use of these kinds of locations brings greater encounter with the wider public and raises the issue of suitable worship styles in answer to the question "What does it mean to worship in the midst of a secular society?" The kind of language used, the nature of the theology to be communicated, the issues to be addressed, and the kind of music and song to be employed all need careful consideration. Certainly the use of official liturgies with their traditional language and jargon may be a non-starter, as also preaching services with customary form and vocabulary.

Worship will need to be related to the realities of life more than it appears to be at the moment, not merely concerned with the saving of individual souls and preparedness for heaven, not serving as an escape from life but as a celebration of the gift of life, affirming the value of each person and grappling with real issues whether at a personal, local, national or global level. It will be worship which encourages prophetic involvement and acted

parable concerning the great challenges of our times, such as inequality of opportunity in education, health care, housing, employment, wealth creation and distribution, food production and consumption, and so on. Internationally there are similar issues but others need to be added, war and conflict, the arms trade, fair dealing for goods and services, nuclear proliferation by rogue states, hunger and poverty, economic imbalance, etc. These issues are usually dealt with as part of the intercessions, but there is need to engage more with biblical connections.

## **8.12 FINALLY**

The worship of present-day Methodism has to be understood in its historical perspective and its development from a fairly static pattern to the more fluid situation with which we are familiar today. Even over the eight years of research involved in the writing of this thesis things have changed enormously. It is likely that future patterns of worship in Methodist churches will continue to diversify. The Prayer Book format, today in the shape of the officially authorised *Methodist Worship Book*, will continue in those churches where their ministers, being loyal to such an ethos, give the lead in its use, whereas ministers with a penchant for experiment will use other alternative liturgies. But it is good to remember that

The use of written material is in many ways no more than a tool which enables the congregation to join in. It does not preclude

individual and even extempore contributions, and it does not mean that the same written material must be used all the time.<sup>249</sup>

The preaching service will remain the staple diet of those members of congregations, led by ministers and local preachers who accept and prefer this particular format, although, it has to be said, these tend to be of the loyal and ageing variety, a slowly diminishing number.

The alterative practice, as we have described the third tradition, now fairly well established, is likely to flourish, especially in those churches blessed with a good pool of human resources and breadth of talent. Such services will continue to vary greatly in days and times, musical accompaniment, levels of participation and material input. They will hopefully draw into the churches those who feel that the patterns of former years are not for them.

Nor is this trend confined to Methodism alone. In a significant book the co-authors describe 'alternative worship' as a movement which is now permeating all Church denominations, making use of multi-media, dance, drama, liturgy – both historic and spontaneous, varied theologies – liberation, feminist, black, and contemporary biblical scholarship, thus enlivening worship in a very real way, seeking depth and shunning superficiality. Across all traditions there is a search in progress for that which is both meaningful and contemporary, underlined by the conviction that this takes place in the true spirit of the incarnation, with a Church

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249 Taylor M., *Variations on a Theme*, London, Galliard Stainer and Bell, 1973, p.45

...freed to embrace all five senses, unafraid to unearth historic worship forms and catapult them into the twenty-first century.<sup>250</sup>

Such experimentation must continue in the hope of finding expressions which meet contemporary needs. Methodists, in this matter of worship, are on a pilgrimage and the final destination is unsure. Like Abraham, who set out in faith so long ago,<sup>251</sup> Methodists may not know where they are going, but to travel hopefully, we could say, is better than to arrive. The perfect act of worship has never been and never will be created. Familiar patterns are slowly being replaced by newer expressions. Complacency is not advisable and imagination is always required, as it is so easy to become comfortable with the familiar and the routine. It is possible that an instinct for imaginative liturgy can be developed.

Once your imagination about liturgical possibilities is kindled, you will be surprised at what there is under your gaze.<sup>252</sup>

However, the liturgy must never degenerate into a matter of merely recovering and reproducing, albeit in updated form, the historic texts of the early centuries of the Church. Certainly, where appropriate, and possibly with due amendment, such texts may be used, giving a sense of the continuity of faith. But for the sake of relevance liturgies have always been shaped by external forces, the whole social and cultural ambience of the world and the community in which the Church has been living at the time.

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250 Baker J., Gay G., and Brown J., *Alternative Worship, Resources from and for the Emerging Church*, London, SPCK, 2003, p.10

251 Hebrews 11.8

252 Smith C. Hughes, "Liturgy and Imagination", in London, *The Fellowship of the Kingdom Bulletin*, Summer 1980, p.13-14

(The subject of culture, inculturation and contextualisation has been considered in Chapter 4.6.6)

Also, the creation of the liturgy must be the work of more than just a Connexional Committee of sixteen plus three people, as with *The Methodist Worship Book*. Rather does it need to become the work of the local congregation, obviously with training, encouragement and practical support. The positive participation of the people of God will help worship to become more vibrant and meaningful and hopefully attract others into the congregation.

What Methodist worship could be at its best is that which engages all involved, in prayer, song, affirmation, lament, Bible, proclamation, remembrance and communion, with all our abilities being used to sense the presence of God and our neighbour, celebrated each week to the rhythm and purpose of the year.<sup>253</sup>

We cannot but be impressed by the amount of imagination and ingenuity brought to acts of worship by ministers, preachers, worship leaders and church members, the quality of which bodes well for the future. However, there is still much to be done by way of further developments. Connexional leadership has significance, but it is what the people on the ground do with authorised liturgies and other related materials which really matters. They usually accept the lead of those 'planned' to conduct their worship, but they nevertheless do have their own preferences which should be respected and, when encouraged to do so, may be prepared to share in the creating

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253 Lyons A., "Reclaiming Liturgical Worship", in *The Epworth Review*, Vol. 32.1, January, 2005, p.63

of an act of worship for themselves. Whether it is the leading of the Holy Spirit or the pressure of circumstances, it is a fact that more participation from local folk will be asked of them in both the preparation and leading of worship, if only due to the decreasing numbers of ministers and local preachers. The important thing is that the people continue to worship God, no matter what, through favourable times or otherwise.

Certainly the future is unclear as the Methodist people venture forward in faith, but if the presence of God's glory captivates and inspires them, then real encounters with Him in worship will resonate throughout their everyday experiences of life and thus will blend together reality, time and eternity.

## APPENDIX 1

Reverend Richard Firth, B.A., M.Th.,

March 18<sup>th</sup> 2005

Dear

I trust that you will not mind my writing to you as a member of the Liturgical Sub Committee, which, at the time, was responsible for compiling the Methodist Worship Book.

I have begun a research project provisionally titled "Methodist Liturgy in Contemporary Society" with special reference to the Worship Book and the way it is regarded by its users now that it has been available for six years.

To help with the project, I wonder if you would kindly agree to complete a questionnaire which would help me to appreciate how the compilers have regarded their task both then and since. I would be immensely grateful for your assistance and, upon receipt of your agreement, I can let you have a copy of the questionnaire to complete.

May you have a meaningful Holy Week and a Blessed Easter.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Richard Firth

**(Copy of the letter sent to the compilers of *The Methodist Worship Book* in order to request their agreement to participating in the research as this predates the requirements of Ethical Review.)**

## APPENDIX 2

### THE SACRAMENTS OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

The Deed of Union of the Methodist Church specifically states:

According to Methodist usage the Sacrament of Baptism is administered to infants and regular oversight should be given by the local church and its minister to all who have been dedicated to God by this sign.<sup>254</sup>

It is the privilege and duty of members of the Methodist Church to avail themselves of the two sacraments, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>255</sup>

These statements form part of the Deed of Union agreed by the uniting Methodist Conference in 1932. With regard to infant baptism the present experience of the churches is that now there is only a small number of practising Methodist families who present their children for Baptism. The majority of people who still do so are generally from families who have only tenuous connections with the Church. In addition there are now many people in our congregations who have no Methodist background and who may ask for a service of thanksgiving and dedication for their child, or there are young people and adults, not baptised as infants who have joined the Church and wish to be baptised now that they can profess their faith for themselves. *The Methodist Worship Book* recognises these changed

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254 *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church, Vol. 2*, MPH. Peterborough, 2002 edn., p.214

255 *Ibid.* p215



circumstances with five different services of Baptism and one for an Act of Thanksgiving.<sup>256</sup>

In light of the present situation, pastorally, it makes sense that any liturgy for an infant baptism should be as user-friendly as it can be so that families may appreciate its meaning as clearly as possible, assuming that in previous interviews they have been prepared for the service itself and all that it entails.

After John Wesley, Methodism, in all its various branches, held to the practice of infant baptism largely on the grounds of God's prevenient grace. The service was and is regarded as the clearest expression of God's initiative in the 'salvation' of humankind, without our seeking or desiring or deserving of such, but to which, when we are able, we are invited to respond, thus being incorporated into the Body of Christ.

The significance and importance of baptism in both its forms is nowhere better expressed than by Hauerwas and Willimon:

Whenever a person is baptised, be that person a child or an adult, the Church accepts that person. The new Christian is engrafted into a family.<sup>257</sup>

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256 In Methodism baptism is a once for all sacrament of initiation into the family of the Church on profession of faith either potentially as an infant or actually as a mature person. On occasion, because as an infant a person was unaware of its significance, rebaptism is sought, contrary to Methodist practice. At the Methodist Conference in 2012, in order to counteract this trend, a service for 'The Re-affirmation of Baptismal Faith Including the use of Water' was approved for experimental use in the Circuits. See The Methodist Conference Agenda 2012, Vol. 2, Peterborough, MP, p525-531

257 Hauerwas S. & Willimon W.H., *Resident Aliens, Life in the Christian Colony*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1989, p.81

The liturgy for infant baptism which follows in Appendix 3 attempts to express the above truths in a contemporary way. It attempts to incorporate the findings of the researches undertaken and the comments made about the baptismal services in *The Methodist Worship Book* by the respondents to the surveys. (See especially chapter 5.1.2; 5.1.3; 5.4.4.b; 5.4.7; 5.4.7.A; 5.6) The composition of this liturgy, whilst being original to the researcher, obviously owes a debt to several influences, now hard to identify specifically, but nevertheless hereby acknowledged. It will be noted that the promises of commitment by all present at such a service are made before the actual moment of baptism itself. It is believed that the affirmation of faith should have precedence logically, despite the reversal in *The Methodist Worship Book*.

With regard to Holy Communion, likewise, the service in Appendix 4 attempts to take on board the comments and criticisms of the respondents in providing a liturgy appropriate for use in the contemporary Church. (See especially chapter 5.1.1.A; 5.1.8; 5.3.3; 5.4.7; 5.4.7.A; 5.6)

Here again, whilst being an original composition, the liturgy owes much to several sources, hereby acknowledged but difficult to identify, but which over the years, consciously and sub-consciously have been assimilated by the mind.

## APPENDIX 3

### AN ALTERNATIVE SERVICE OF INFANT BAPTISM

*(This service should ideally form part of the main act of worship of the local church. A font containing warmed water should be prepared and stand in a prominent place.)*

1. A welcome is given to the infant's family, attendant visitors and to the congregation.
2. Hymn (possibly suggested by the family).
3. Introduction by the minister: Baptism is a celebration which may be traced right back to Jesus Himself, who was baptised in the River Jordan by His cousin John. Later on Jesus urged His disciples to go and baptise people of all nations, when they had been taught His way of life and wanted to follow Him. In the days of the Early Church, whole families were baptised, including infants.

Because Jesus also welcomed and blessed children, we also believe that it is right to baptise them, especially if their parents affirm their own Christian faith. The Church, in accepting children into its family, promises to help and support parents as they nurture them in the faith, in the hope that, eventually, they will become disciples of Jesus and full members of the Church.

Water is used in baptism, because, being essential to life, it is a sign of a new quality of living which Jesus made possible. It is also a sign that, through God's forgiveness, our unworthy selves may be cleansed and our better selves emerge, so that we may become the people He calls us to be.

4. Readings (by church members): Mark 10.13-16; and Matthew 28.18-20
5. Prayer (by the minister): The following or an extempore prayer may be said: O God, you are Father and Mother to us all and you always care for us; we thank you for the gift of *a new child to this family/new children to these families*. By your Spirit bless what we do

now, so that we may grow in our experience of your love and our knowledge of your truth, we ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
**Amen.**

6. The Lord's Prayer (said together): Either the traditional version, or the contemporary version, as follows:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.  
Amen.**

7. Confession of faith (said together):

**We believe in God, creator of all things and maker of humankind.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, the human face of God, who came  
among us and gave Himself to set us free, and who lives again to be  
with us always.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and in all people,  
uniting us in the Church of Christ and inspiring us to renew the world.  
We believe that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God  
and that our destiny is to enjoy abundant life, now and forever.  
Amen.**

All stand.

8. Minister (to the parents): *A & B* we have welcomed you into this congregation today and you have confessed your faith with us. We ask you therefore, will you continue to share with us in such a way that your *child/ren* may grow in the Christian faith?

Parents: **With God's help we will.**

Minister: Will you provide your *child/ren* with a Christian home of love and faithfulness?

Parents: **With God's help we will.**

Minister: Will you help *him/her/them* by your example to follow Jesus Christ?

Parents: **With God's help we will.**

Minister: Will you encourage *him/her/them* to become (a) *full member(s)* of the Church and to serve Jesus Christ in the world?

Parents: **With God's help we will.**

Minister (to the God parents and Church sponsor): *C, D, & E*, you have come to support these parents, will you continue to help and support them in the Christian nurture of their *child/ren*?

Godparents and sponsor: **With God's help we will.**

Minister (to the congregation): Members of this church here in ..... As you welcome *this child/these children* in the name of Jesus Christ, will you continue to worship witness and serve in such a way that *he/she/they* and all other children may come to know God's love and learn to follow Jesus Christ?

Congregation: **With God's help we will.**

Minister (to the parents): *A & B*, you have heard what the Church teaches about baptism and you have confessed your faith with us, do you now present your *child/ren* for Christian Baptism?

Parents: **We do.**

Minister (receives the child): Will you please name your child.

Parents: **N.**

Minister (baptising the child with water and the sign of the cross): *N*, I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Congregation: **Amen.**

Minister (to the child): I have made the sign of the cross with water to show that you belong to our loving God, that you are welcomed into the family of the Church, and with a prayer that you may be a follower of Jesus Christ for the whole of your life.

9. (The minister may then walk around the congregation with the child before returning him/her to the parents or Godparents. A Baptismal

*Certificate together with suitable gifts may be presented e.g. a baptismal candle, a children's Bible, a posy of flowers, etc.)*

10. *(If the service stands alone a short address may be given here and/or the following poem or other suitable passage may be read.)*

Each birth is revolution  
whether it happened a thousand years ago  
or takes place today.  
With each new birth the world becomes new.

Some are born in a cottage, some in a field,  
but wherever a child is born,  
in its eyes the world is reflected,  
in its cries – Christ is present.

Christ the son of man  
was born to renew the world  
like every child in the mother's womb  
is granted by the Lord at its time.<sup>258</sup>

11. Closing prayers.

Minister: Let us pray.

Loving God, we thank you for receiving *this child/these children* into the family of your Church. We pray that *he/she/they* may become living members of the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Congregation: **Amen.**

Minister: We pray that this church may so live in the Holy Spirit that through all its activities in worship, witness and service, *this child/these children* may learn to follow Jesus Christ.

Congregation: **Amen.**

Minister: God be with the *home(s) of this child/these children*, and give wisdom, understanding and true affection to *his/her/their* parents, so that *he/she/they* may grow up in the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Congregation: **Amen.**

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258 Situmorang S., in Hilton D. ed., *Liturgy of Life*, NCEC, Redhill, 1991, p.102

Minister: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore.

Congregation: **Amen.**

Hymn.

*(The next part of worship continues from here.)*

## APPENDIX 4

### AN ALTERNATIVE SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION

*(Suitable for all age worship. Congregational responses are in bold type.)*

1. A welcome to worship: The Lord is here  
**His Spirit is with us**  
Let us worship God
2. Hymn or song
3. Let us pray. *(Either this or an extempore prayer may be offered)*

**Lord God, we praise you, we worship you, and we thank you.  
You always call us to new beginnings and new life.  
Touch us all with your love today so that we may be remade in  
the image of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.**

4. A prayer suitable for the day or the time of year, which may be pre-prepared or extempore.
5. A space for the people to share their news with one another
6. Hymn or song
7. Alternative activity for our Younger Church who may now leave us with a blessing:

God be in our minds;  
**And in our thinking.**  
God be on our lips;  
**And in our speaking.**  
God be in our hearts;  
**And in our sharing, Amen**

8. The Ministry of the Word. *We hear God speaking to us through the reading of Bible passages, other Christian literature, stories from the lives of God's people and through what the preacher or speaker has to say. Drama, choral speaking, audio-*



*visual aids, power point or any other means of communication may be used.*

9. A time for reflection (silence)

10. Let us pray: Your word is spoken,  
**And we do not hear it**  
Your Kingdom comes,  
**And we do not see it**  
Your love works,  
**And we do not share it**  
Your peace is given  
**And we do not receive it**

**Lord forgive us, as we forgive others,  
for your name's sake, Amen.**

11. Hymn or song, or a Gloria for today may be sung or said

God of glory's loving kindness,  
Gives His people peace on earth;  
He alone deserves our praises,  
And our thanks for all He's worth.

Jesus Christ who came among us,  
Maker's only Son to be,  
Lamb of God, as sign of mercy,  
Cleanse us all and set us free.

You alone, Lord, are called holy,  
Present with us day by day,  
So that by the Holy Spirit,  
Glory lights our common way.

(Suggested tune: HP 441(i) Marching. 8.7.8.7.)

12. A Confession of Faith said together:

**We believe in God**

- **Maker of the universe**
- **Giver of life to the earth**
- **Parent of the human race**
- **Whose nature is love**

**We believe in Jesus Christ**

- **The human word of God**
- **Who died as He had lived**
- **Whose grave was not the end**
- **Whose nature is love**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit**

- **Influence that works for good**  
**The force that makes for peace**
- **The power that changes the world**
- **Whose nature is love**

**We believe in the people of God**

- **Whose actions speak louder than words**
- **Whose struggle seeks justice for all**
- **Whose work is to build the new earth**
- **Whose nature is love**

13. Prayers of Intercession:

*We contemplate the needs of the world, our nation and our community. We think of those in need of whom we are aware. We pray for the unity and mission of the universal Church and of the church locally. Suitable said or sung versicles and responses may be used (e.g. From Iona or Taize). Members of the congregation may suggest items for prayer.*

14. The peace may be shared:

The peace of the Lord be with you  
**And also with you**

15. The offering:

The gifts of the people may be received.  
The bread and the wine may be brought to the table or uncovered if already there.  
A suitable prayer of dedication may be said.

16. Hymn or Song

*(the younger Church may now rejoin the congregation, and present feedback of their activities)*

17. The prayer of thanksgiving:

The Lord be with you  
**And also with you**

Let us lift up our hearts

**We lift them Lord to you**

With joy we thank our Lord and God

**We rightly give our thanks and praise**

God, we praise you as creator of the universe,  
maker of the earth, and source of all life.

As women and men you have called us, in  
freedom, to be responsible for the world and  
for each other. But our stewardship has not been a success  
and we need Your help.

Through His words and deeds in the world  
Jesus Christ came to show us your love,  
to declare that we are forgiven, and to offer us new life.  
The cross and the empty tomb are signs which show  
that these things are true.

When Jesus met with His friends on the night  
before He died, He shared supper with them.  
He took the bread, gave thanks and broke it  
saying, Take, eat, this is my body which is for you.

Then He took the cup, and said,  
This cup is God's new covenant in my blood  
which is shed for you.  
Do this as often as you will in memory of me.

Give to us afresh your Holy Spirit that these gifts of bread  
and wine may be the body and blood of Christ for us.

18. The Lord's Prayer (traditional or the common text version)

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come, your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins**

**as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power**

**and the glory are yours,  
now and forever, Amen.**

19. Jesus said, I am the bread of life

**Let us share bread together with the Lord**

Jesus said, I am the true vine

**Let us drink wine together with the Lord**

These are the gifts of God for the people of God

*20. The bread and the wine are shared appropriately, distributed by the minister or lay president or by serving another, whether at the rail or as everyone is seated. Songs may be sung, suitable words read, music played or silence kept. Those who prefer it may receive a blessing by the laying on of hands or may remain in their seats and say prayers of their own.*

21. Silence

22. Let us pray: Either:

For the bread that we have eaten,

For the wine that we have tasted,

For the life that you have given,

**Father, Son and Holy Spirit,**

**We will praise You.**

For the life of Christ within us,

Turning all our fears to freedom,

Helping us to live for others,

**Father, Son and Holy Spirit,**

**We will praise You.**

For the strength of Christ to lead us,

In our living and our dying,

In the end with all your people,

**Father, Son and Holy Spirit,**

**We will praise You.**<sup>259</sup>

Or: The Cross: **We shall take it**

The Bread: **We shall break it**

The Pain: **We shall bear it**

The Joy: **We shall share it**

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259 Micklem C. ed., *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship*, London, SCM, 1967, p.75

The Gospel: **We shall live it**  
The Love: **We shall give it**  
The Light: **We shall cherish it**  
The Darkness: **God shall perish it**  
**Amen.**<sup>260</sup>

23. Hymn or Song

24. Final Prayers

On ourselves and in our homes  
**The blessing of God**  
In our coming and in our going  
**The peace of God**  
In our life and our believing  
**The love of God**  
At our end and our departing  
**The welcome of God, Amen.**<sup>261</sup>

Or the Nunc Dimittis

Now let your servants depart in peace  
**For our eyes have seen your salvation**  
Which you have prepared for all to see  
**A light to lighten the nations**  
And for the glory of your people,  
**Amen.**

Or Go out into the world in peace  
To love and serve the Lord.  
**Thanks be to God.**

Or The Grace may be shared together.

Or An extempore blessing may be said.

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260 Wild Goose Group, *Stages on the Way, Worship Resources for Lent, Holy Week and Easter*, Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, 1998, p.72

261 Wild Goose Group, *A Wee Worship Book*, Iona Community, Glasgow, 1989, p.36  
(adapted)

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **PARTICIPATION: A METHOD OF CREATING WORSHIP SERVICES**

In view of an ever changing situation in which congregations are increasingly being compelled to rely on their own resources and involving lay participation to a greater degree than ever before, a helpful method whereby worship services may be created seems to be required. This researcher, as a Circuit minister, on occasion, used a method which proved to be effective.

If worship is the work of the people and if it is by the people and for the people as they focus their attention upon God, then it follows that the people themselves could prepare an act of worship.

As we have seen, many churches these days do face a shortage of ministers and local preachers and those they have are often overstretched. Sometimes there is the possibility that services may not be held, simply because it is thought that there is no one to lead them.

Far from being an insurmountable problem this situation may instead be seen as a challenge and as an opportunity for members of a congregation, with help and guidance, to learn the basics of worship preparation, and to have the chance to participate in a way that they may not have done before. And, who knows, they may hear the call to further things, for instance

worship leading, local preaching, a position of lay leadership or even ordained ministry.

With the oversight of ministers and local preachers, who have been trained in the necessary skills, groups from a congregation may prepare an act of worship which will perhaps be all the more meaningful because they have shared together in such preparation. The following method may be found useful.

### **APPENDIX 5.1 THE METHOD**

Initially, consult the lectionary lessons and any other special material for the day in question in order to decide on an overall theme for the service (e.g. Roots or Salt materials, Christian Aid Sunday resources, etc.). Alternatively, someone may have an imaginative idea or there may be a subject suggested by an issue which is currently in the public mind which may be of topical interest. Obviously, the church calendar may also determine the theme or whether there is a special Sunday for the local church.

Then those involved in the preparation for a particular act of worship should divide into four groups with someone acting as a co-ordinator between them. This is a key role with the final responsibility for the order of service which emerges from the process of collaboration.

The groups are as follows.

## **APPENDIX 5.2 THE LITURGY GROUP**

Decide how to arrange the room and make it helpful for worship, giving what is thought to be the best arrangement for the number of people present.

Create a worship centre consisting of objects and items which illustrate the theme. Are there any symbols or logos which do this as well?

Decide whether Holy Communion is to be included (with minister present or using pre-consecrated elements?), or the breaking of bread, or an agape or other act of sharing. Provide the elements as appropriate.

Decide when the offering shall be received and by whom. What will it be for?

Do you want to include liturgical movement or dance? If so consult the music group.

How much or how little use is to be made of published worship material available?

Do you wish to include the passing of the peace?

## **APPENDIX 5.3 THE MUSIC GROUP**

Choose a selection of hymns and songs related to the theme looking carefully at the words and the tunes.



Rehearse these as necessary. Could a song group sing an item?

Does there need to be a song or songs chosen to meet the needs of younger people and children?

Decide on the instruments to be played and the use of percussion.

Is any atmospheric or inspirational recorded music to be used?

#### **APPENDIX 5.4 THE PRAYER GROUP**

The prayers need to relate to the theme and should include the usual elements: adoration and praise; confession and absolution; thanksgiving and intercession.

Decide whether to use published prayers, prayers written by the group or extempore prayers thought out in advance.

Intercessions should bear in mind the current needs of the world, the Church, any local needs and people known to the members of the congregation.

Decide on the use of different kinds of prayer, e.g. responsive, bidding, silent, litanies, etc.

How about the use of meditation or reflection possibly with quiet background music?

Choose whether or not to use the Lord's Prayer and which version; write a prayer for the dedication of the offering; decide which benediction or form of blessing to close the service with. It is often customary, these days, to end with the Grace, said together.

#### **APPENDIX 5.5 THE WORD GROUP**

Choose two or three passages of scripture related to the theme and decide how they will be read or presented: with more than one voice, by mime, choral speaking or dramatisation; if necessary rewriting them in today's language and cultural terms.

Are there any other readings from alternative literary sources that you would wish to use?

Decide who will enlarge upon the theme by sharing a short message or address with the congregation.

Decide on any audio-visual or other communication aids and prepare thoroughly the use of any technology, power point, etc.

Are there any other ways in which the congregation may be involved in sharing the word, e.g. by dialogue or conversation including several people.

## **APPENDIX 5.6 THE ROLE OF THE WORSHIP LEADER**

The person leading worship for the occasion will need to co-ordinate the various contributions and integrate them into a cohesive whole. She/he may need to exercise a certain amount of discipline in doing so, but it is amazing what may be achieved through tactful consultation! Altogether, the exercise should prove worthwhile and result in a meaningful act of worship, all the more because of the degree of participation involved.

## **APPENDIX 6**

### **A PERSONAL JOURNEY**

As the researcher, I record a brief outline of my experience of Methodist worship from boyhood to seniority and, from memory, how the different strands of the twofold practice have been variously emphasised or otherwise during the periods mentioned. The story begins in the mid 1940's.

#### **APPENDIX 6.1 WORSHIP EXPERIENCE BEGINS (BALBY ROAD CHAPEL, DONCASTER)**

My parents were baptised Anglicans and were married in an Anglican Church, but like so many did not usually attend. They arranged for me to be baptised as an infant in the Church of England, St. James' Parish Church, Doncaster, known as the Railwaymen's Church. Then as a young boy I was encouraged to go to the nearest Sunday School, which happened to be at Balby Road Methodist Church in the Doncaster South Circuit. This is where I began my Christian experience. During my boyhood and youth I would hear the members give voice proudly to the fact that their chapel was "ex Prim". Only later was I to understand this phrase. What they meant was that the church had been part of the Primitive Methodist Connexion which, in 1932, united with the Wesleyan Methodist and the United Methodist Churches, to form the Methodist Church in Great Britain.

At the time I picked up the fact that they valued good preaching and were not keen on using a service book of any kind. The Lord's Supper was celebrated about once a month on Sunday evening following the preaching service. A short interval gave opportunity for those who did not want to share in it to leave the church. Generally, it was the more committed members who remained to take part in an informal service of Holy Communion, or as they preferred to call it, the Lord's Supper. The minister either did not use a service from a book or used the shorter alternative service from *The Book of Offices* 1936. An extempore liturgy was much preferred because, the people believed, the minister was relying on the moment by moment inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of Christ was thought to be more real than if a printed liturgy was being used. The members of the congregation were not normally given copies of a service book so that whatever the minister did would be recognised as his own effort whether from any book at all or of his own spur of the moment creation.

## **APPENDIX 6.2 SOME FORMATIVE YEARS**

Following success at advanced level G.C.E. a year's study in Nottingham (1956-57) gave opportunity to attend the Albert Hall, the Central Methodist Mission, where over a thousand people would gather each Sunday evening to hear the preacher, the minister at the time being the Revd. Kenneth Waights. The hall was very much a preaching centre and Holy Communion, observed monthly following the evening service, attracted only a small

number of participants who stayed behind to sit in the centre seats towards the front of the auditorium, the order of service being the shorter form.

National Service in the Royal Air Force (1957-59), after completion of basic training, saw stationing at two main camps. The first, at Yatesbury in Wiltshire, had a Methodist chaplain, the Revd. E. Gordon-Davies, with a high churchmanship, who observed the full order of Holy Communion monthly with a preaching service on the other Sundays. The second chaplain at Nicosia in Cyprus was a Congregationalist with low views who held a weekly preaching service, one of which, monthly, was followed by a brief informal Communion.

In order to further my vocational search I then spent two years (1959-61) at the Methodist Cliff College in Derbyshire. The Principal, the Revd. Tom Meadley, encouraged a balanced observance of the dual tradition. On Tuesday evenings there was an open testimony service with hymns, choruses and personal stories, a highly informal and sometimes emotionally charged event. On Friday evenings there was a full order of Holy Communion from *The Book of Offices*. Both could be said to be equally held under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. During this time local preacher training was completed and the subsequent process of candidature for the Methodist ministry undertaken.

### **APPENDIX 6.3 TRAINING (WESLEY COLLEGE, HEADINGLEY, LEEDS)**

Following recognition as a local preacher, I was accepted as a candidate for the Methodist Ministry, and was sent to Wesley College, Headingley,

Leeds, where I trained between 1961-65. The Principal was Revd. A. Raymond George, one of Methodism's leading liturgical experts. Holy Communion was celebrated every Friday evening without fail in the college chapel using the full order of service from *The Book of Offices* 1936. This was solemnly and seriously observed with the rubrics kept to the letter and all the right gestures and postures in the correct places. I thus encountered again the Prayer Book tradition of Methodism and came to value it equally as well as I had originally enjoyed that of the preaching service in my home chapel. It is interesting that at the same time Revd. Donald English was the assistant tutor at the college, who was a prominent member of the Methodist Revival Fellowship, which took quite a different stance with regard to the nature of worship, stressing rather the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the need for spontaneity. However, Donald English was nevertheless happy to share in the liturgical practice of the college.

#### **APPENDIX 6.4 PROBATION (OXFORD PLACE CHAPEL, LEEDS MISSION)**

Upon leaving Theological College I was stationed as a probationer minister in the Leeds Methodist Mission Circuit at Oxford Place Chapel, renowned as a preaching centre. At that time (1965-67) Holy Communion was celebrated twice monthly, once following a morning service and once following an evening service. The morning congregation was not as large as that in the evening, which still gathered about 300-400 people to hear the preaching of the word. Perhaps 80-100 people would remain behind for Communion. The liturgy used was an abridged version of the 1936 service from *The Book of*

*Offices* or the shorter form of Communion from that book. With the emphasis so much on the preaching service, the balance of the dual tradition was tilted that way and the importance of Holy Communion under stressed.

#### **APPENDIX 6.5 OVERSEAS SERVICE (KWALE CIRCUIT, KENYA)**

My next appointment (1967-71), including training for overseas service and furlough, was to the Kwale Circuit of the Methodist Church in Kenya. There were two ministers, myself with an African supernumerary, doing our best to serve over twenty villages in the coastal area south of Mombasa. Only in the handful of larger churches was it possible to observe a monthly Holy Communion, and in the smaller churches less frequently. The liturgy, always used in full, was a Swahili translation from the English of the 1936 service from *The Book of Offices* which had been introduced by missionaries from Great Britain, and was still valued by Kenyan Methodist congregations even though their Church was now autonomous. This was the only communion service available to them as the shorter form was not translated and was not included in their book.

The Kenyan service book (*Taratibu za Ibada*) also contained most of the other main services from *The Book of Offices* translated into Swahili and was well used. The services were revised, updated and supplemented in a new joint hymn and service book (*Nyimbo, Ibada na Sakramenti*) which I edited and published in 1970. The dual tradition was very much alive among the Methodist people of Kenya who appreciated their liturgical worship alongside that of the free form preaching service.



## **APPENDIX 6.6 INNER CITY (TRINITY AND BEESTON HILL, LEEDS SOUTH CIRCUIT)**

Upon returning from overseas my next appointment (1971-78) was to an inner-city section of the Leeds South Circuit with two churches. The first was Trinity Tempest Road, which being formerly a United Methodist Church, had no communion rail. The 1936 order of service of Holy Communion was used, observed monthly, alternately at morning and evening services. The Communion Stewards distributed the elements to the people in the pews. All the other acts of worship were preaching services.

The second church was Beeston Hill United Free Church formed in 1973 by a local union of Baptist, United Reformed (ex-Congregational) and two Methodist Churches. Among the first of its kind in the country, this united church used all the liturgies of the three participating denominations, including the 1936 Methodist Service of Holy Communion from *The Book of Offices*. The Communion rail could be dismantled to facilitate both methods of distribution, either to people at the rail or taken to the people in their seats. There was both a font and a baptistry, to enable both forms of baptism to take place. Here again the preaching service was the norm with Communion once a month in a morning and in an evening.

It was during my time in this appointment that *The Methodist Service Book* of 1975 was introduced. This began to encourage changes in attitude towards Holy Communion. (see chapter 3.1)

## **APPENDIX 6.7 COMMUTER TOWN (REIGATE, SURREY, REDHILL AND EAST GRINSTEAD CIRCUIT)**

In 1978, an invitation to become minister in a town centre church in Reigate, Surrey was accepted. There were over two hundred members and a fairly full church each Sunday morning, with a smaller congregation in the evening, confirming the new patterns of church going which were prevalent at the time. Holy Communion was celebrated twice monthly, once in a morning and once in an evening. The new 1975 order of service from *The Methodist Service Book* was used almost exclusively with variations as appropriate. Children were now welcome to participate by coming forward to the communion rail, at first to receive a blessing by the laying on of hands, and then eventually to receive the bread and the wine. The other services in the book (baptism, marriage, funeral, etc) were also used on the appropriate occasions. Altogether, I believe, it was felt that the Service Book helped to enrich worship with its more contemporary style, and also to keep the Methodist dual tradition alive, inasmuch as the other services in the month were preaching services. There was usually a family service on one Sunday morning that was often flexible and experimental in nature.

## **APPENDIX 6.8 URBAN APPOINTMENT (WESLEY MEMORIAL CHURCH, LOW FELL, GATESHEAD)**

The next move, in 1985, was to a town church, Wesley Memorial, Low Fell, Gateshead, again with a membership of about two hundred, and with a very conservative ethos. It took some time to engender a more adventurous

approach to worship, especially the introduction of family services. Nevertheless, after some years, progress was made. Here again there were two Communion services each month, one on a Sunday morning and one on an evening, with the 1975 service as the main liturgical diet. All age groups were welcome to participate fully, especially in the sharing of the bread and the wine. Again the other services in *The Methodist Service Book* were used as appropriate, with the exception of the Service of Infant Baptism, where, in order to help families with little or no church connection, I devised a more user-friendly service in contemporary language, based on the structure of the liturgy in *The Methodist Service Book* (See Appendix 3).

#### **APPENDIX 6.9 RURAL SITUATION (WYLAM SECTION, TYNEDALE CIRCUIT)**

My last appointment (1993-2003) was to the Hexham (now Tynedale) Circuit, and the Wylam Section, which had six villages in a rural area. The main church, Wylam, had taken the adventurous step of deciding that there should be only one service each Sunday, in the morning. As in my previous churches, Holy Communion, using the 1975 service, was monthly, the other Sundays mainly being preaching services with strategic all-age worship services (no longer called family services) arranged on significant occasions. The situation at the next largest chapel, Stocksfield, was much the same. Both had a number of willing and imaginative lay people able to share in the planning and execution of all-age worship, which made such occasions a real inspiration.

In the four smaller churches in the section, where again, there was only one service, it was a struggle to maintain the pattern of monthly communion services due to the exigencies of the Circuit plan. The 1975 service was used whenever the Lord's Supper was observed.

In 1999, when *The Methodist Worship Book* was authorised and published, all my churches purchased it except one. During its first year of use, in order to appreciate the range of material, especially the Holy Communion services, each one was used in turn at the appropriate season or festival.

It is therefore believed that the breadth of experience outlined in this appendix shows that, as a researcher of 'Methodist Worship', I am suitably qualified to undertake the task in hand.

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