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THE METHODIST CLASS MEETING: A STUDY OF ITS DEVELOPMENT,
DYNAMICS, DISTINCTIONS, DEMISE, AND DENOUEMENT

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Pastoral Ministry
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by

Jerry Sproull

July 1967

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First Reader

J. Curry Maves

Second Reader

Howard J. Shipps

by

Jerry Sproull

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions of the following people to the inspiration for and production of this paper: Dr. Curry Mavis for his initial classroom stimulation of thought in this field and his helpful suggestions as the work developed; Chaplain John Shepard of the Kentucky State Hospital in Danville, Kentucky, in whose small groups this concept gained practicality and interest for the author; Dr. Howard F. Shipps who gave worthy suggestions as second reader of the drafts; and the author's wife, Pat, without whose encouragement, patience and skill as proofreader this work would not have come to what it is.

PREFACE

Historians of many ages have had a way of interpreting the past according to what they have felt to be the contemporary need. Many historical verities have thus been obscured over the years. This is substantially true for the modern day. Though history has notoriously repeated itself, the value of some of this repetition has been lost unfortunately. The theme of modern interpretation often has been the throwing off of the old, primarily because it is that alone, and the substitution of the often untried, entirely new. Equally unfortunately, this "new" is often merely some dressed up earlier past. Such seems to have been the case with the Methodist class meeting.

It was only in the writer's last year of seminary that he, a Methodist for much of his life, heard with mental registry of the class meeting. In the course of work under Chaplain John Shepard at the Kentucky State Hospital in Danville, Kentucky, some experience in interpersonal groups there dredged up some recollections of rumors of similar groups that Wesley had utilized in his societies. Considering the interest now extant in therapeutic groups, the writer felt these earlier Wesleyan groups to be worth some investigation.

The questions in mind as the work began were roughly these: (1) Where did these groups arise? (2) What was the nature of them? (3) How did they operate? (4) Were they effective? (5) Why did they fail? and (6) Do they bear in any way on present day therapeutic groups?

The answers to these questions, when they began to appear, were more than merely surprising. They were astounding, and they were so in several respects. Hopefully the reader will share somewhat in this feeling by the time he finishes this paper.

The technique of study here was the reading of material from the entire history of Methodism up to about the time of World War I as it applied to the class meeting. Consideration of the class meeting from both its total context and the course of its development has been made. A somewhat less thorough search was made in the literature relating to modern therapy groups, and even less so in the area of sociological small group work, in an effort to find common elements in all three disciplines.

A final introductory note should be offered regarding the nature of the class meeting. What was it anyway? Essentially it was in its most common form a group of twelve Methodists who would meet once a week for the purpose of a disciplined Christian fellowship. One of the twelve was designated as the "leader" of the group. It was his (or her) responsibility to lead this subgroup of the Methodist local society or church from which it was drawn in a consideration of various personal aspects of the Christian life. This leadership consisted of the leader's sharing his spiritual and moral experience with the group early in the meeting and then questioning the individual members regarding the same aspects of their lives for week previous to the meeting. The questions were personal, direct, and close. They dealt with important aspects of the Christian life which the member was supposed to be maintaining. They were to be answered openly and without reservation.

The questions were stereotyped, prescribed by the rules of the class

meeting as they were given in the discipline of the society. They nevertheless penetrated to the heart of the individual's personal spiritual life. If he were to answer at all, he had to answer honestly and forthrightly. When a person expressed victory over sin and temptation, the others openly shared his joy. When he expressed defeat, the other members were quick to pick up this note and encourage him in the faith, support him in prayer, and give him solid advice as to the proper course to follow. Were such a member to persist in sin, he was to be turned out of the society until such time as he showed proper, scriptural repentance.

This class meeting was unlike almost anything which the church has offered her followers in her entire history. However, there have been a few attempts at small group works within the church over the years. A few of these will now be considered.

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SECTION I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLASS MEETING

CHAPTER I

INFLUENCES OF BIBLICAL EXAMPLES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLASS MEETING

Some have actually seemed to feel that the class meeting could be seen the book of Genesis. Miley named Jethro's suggestion that Moses divide the Israelites into tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands as smacking of the class meeting.¹ This may be going a bit far to make a point. The purpose of those groups was not spiritual advancement and protection but rather the settling of interpersonal struggles over property. Insofar as they did involve interpersonal workings and dynamics of men, they do bear a very far out relation to the class meetings of Wesley's day, but it is a remote one indeed. There is no indication that Wesley himself thought there to be any such relation.

A better chance for spiritual advancement in smaller groups is seen in the following passage: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it. . ." (Mal.3:16 KJV). Miley cited this as such an example.² Fitzgerald concurred.³ The picture in this passage is of a concerned people speaking to one another for purposes of encouragement. When they "spake often to one another,"

¹ John A. Miley, A Treatise on Class Meetings (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854), p. 135.

² Ibid., p. 34.

³ O. P. Fitzgerald, The Class Meeting (Nashville, Tennessee: M. E. Church, South, Publishing House, 1880), p. 18.

they seemingly engaged in activity somewhat more like that of the class meeting. There is clearly more of an interpersonal spiritual and psychological transaction taking place. Wesley seemed to feel that this was a type of the class meeting.

Fitzgerald mentions the obviously dynamic interpersonal activity of Jesus and His disciples as perfect examples of the class meeting in organization.⁴ An even closer dynamic fellowship was found among the so-called inner circle, Peter, James, and John, with Jesus as the leader. There are qualities of the class meeting seen in these "group meetings" as they are pictured in the Bible text. Jesus' frankness with the disciples at times, especially in rebuke, and the disciples' opportunities for testimony to each other at times both look like rudimentary forms of the class meeting. Dynamically they are much closer to it. An example of the atmosphere of rebuke would be Luke 9:41 where Jesus frankly rebukes the disciples for their loss of power over demons. An example of opportunity for testimony of one disciple to another would be in Matthew 16:16, where Peter in confessing Christ, confesses before his fellows.

Pentecost found the disciples together and in one accord (Acts 2:1). Miley notes this and suggests that there is a relationship between this

⁴Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁵Miley, op. cit., p. 34.

prayer meeting and the class meeting. A group of one hundred and twenty people is a long way from the twelve of the original class meeting. However it is noteworthy that in America some of the later classes did reach as high as eighty in regular membership. In some of these cases a kind of therapeutic fellowship did seem attainable. One cannot deny the therapeutic value of Pentecost. Whether or not the benefit is similar to that gained in the small Wesley fellowships remains to be seen.

Raines, too, sees a class meeting kind of fellowship in the early church.⁶ He cites the following verse of scripture: "And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers" (Acts 2:42 KJV), saying that it indicates a quality of dynamic interworking between men that was not often seen in the later church.

Paley likewise notes the similarity between Methodism and the early Christians.

After men became Christians, much of their time was spent in prayer and devotion, in religious meetings, in celebrating the Eucharist, in conferences, in exhortations, in preaching, in affectionate intercourse with other societies. Perhaps their mode of life, in its form and habit, was not very unlike the Unitas Fratrum, or the modern Methodists. Think then what it was to become such at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Antioch, or even Jerusalem. How new! How alien from their former habits, and ideas, and from those of everybody about them! What a revolution there must have been of the opinions and prejudices to bring the matter to this!⁷

⁶Robert A Raines, New Life in the Church (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), p. 70.

⁷Archdeacon Paley, A View of the Evidences of Christianity (Philadelphia: Hayes and Zell, 1856), p. 26.

The scriptures of the New Testament, written in the days of these early Christian people, reflect the need for intimacy of fellowship without spelling out the specific forms this might take. Fitzgerald cites numerous instances of of scripture point to this. Some of these are Romans 12, I Corinthians 1, I Thessalonians 5, and Titus 2. All the foregoing contain exhortations to Christians to congregate periodically. However most apropos of those mentioned in this regard is, "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching." (Heb. 10:24,25 KJV). This, says Fitzgerald, contains the important elements of the class meeting. "This was urged as a means of grace by the Biblical writer as a safeguard against being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and as an encouragement in the discharge of duty."⁸

Rosser adds to this group of pertinent passages of scriptures the following verses: Galatians 6:1,2, Hebrews 3:13, Matthew 18:20, Colossians 3:16, and Psalm 111:10.⁹ Space does not permit going into detail, but Rosser feels that there is in each some supportive indication of the Wesleyan Class Meeting Spirit.

⁸Fitzgerald, The Class Meeting, pp. 46-47.

⁹L. Rosser, Class Meetings (Richmond, Virginia: [Author], 1855), pp. 61-66.

Writings about the New Testament form of Christianity seemed to impress Wesley very much. His absorption in Cave's Primitive Christianity: or the Religion of the Antient Christians in the First Age of the Gospel (sic) shows this. Church says that Wesley studied it thoroughly in Georgia and used it to write his first society rules. "Wesley's real and continuing desire was that his societies would be formed along the lines of the first Christian societies."¹⁰

Wesley's remarks to Vincent Perronet serve to dramatize this interest.

Upon reflection, I could not but observe, This is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times those whom God had sent forth "preached the gospel to every creature." And of the οἱ ἀκροαταί, "the body of hearers," were mostly either Jews or heathens. But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth, as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these κατηχουμένοι, "catechumens" (as they were then called), apart from the great congregation that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their inward necessities.¹¹

Carter sees in this statement the basis for Wesley's subdivision of the societies into both bands (to be discussed in Chapter IV infra) and classes.¹²

Strangely in the modern day at least one psychologist of standing has looked back into the history of the church and seen the beginnings of what he terms "Christian group therapy." This, as hopefully will become clear later, includes the Methodist class meeting system. About these early

¹⁰Leslie Church, The Early Methodist People (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 156.

¹¹John Telford, The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), pp. 294-295.

¹²Henry Carter, The Methodist Heritage (London: Epworth Press, 1951), p. 197.

group sessions in the church, this psychologist finds particular interest the communal and confessional aspects. He says about these,

For roughly the first four hundred years of the Christian era, i.e., throughout "Apostolic times," personal confession was entirely or at least very commonly made public, and penance was equally open and known . . .

The Communist cell is a modern variant on the Christian "cell" or house-church. There is a striking similarity in the "underground" character of both movements. "Brainwashing" is an inversion of the primitive Christian "group therapy," involving a total ideological metamorphosis. In both instances there is a marked sense of "community" and tremendous camaraderie.¹³

Fitzgerald sums up regarding the class meeting and its relation to early Christianity.

The Methodists did not originate the class-meeting. They only revived it. It was born with the Christian Church. It was born of the instincts, necessities, and aspirations of human nature, hungering for heavenly truth and holy human fellowship. The Methodists gave it a name, but the thing itself was the inevitable revival of an apostolic institution when a mighty work of God had brought back again the essential doctrine, polity, and usages, of the uncorrupted Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was not an invention, but the normal outgrowth of a living Christianity. Its elements were in the conditions developed by the great revival, and they crystalized into the form it took by the operation of the law that New Testament Christianity will and must express itself in New Testament forms. The recovery of the primitive spirit brought with it the recovery of the primitive usages of the Church of Christ.¹⁴

¹³O. Hobart Mowrer, The New Group Therapy (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand, 1964), pp. 18,19.

¹⁴Fitzgerald, The Class Meeting, pp. 24-25.

CHAPTER II

POST-REFORMATION INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLASS MEETING

Morton holds that the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century was a revitalization of the concept of the Christian family as a unit of worship. His feeling is that the family was the original unit in worship and that the church moved away from this gradually into, first, monastic societies and then into the priesthood.¹ There is an element of truth in this. The first church groups met in homes. They were small and intimate. The church lost all this when it entered the cathedral and lost contact with the poor. Now, according to Morton, the Reformation had brought this spirit back into the church. "The Reformation would never have been anything but an ecclesiastical movement if this new emergence of the family had not given it a new area of social living in which to develop."² The Reformation at least paved the way for intimate, family-like relations in the church. This was what the Wesley class meetings achieved in large measure. It may be that Wesley was remembering the warmth of his own family relations, and desired this atmosphere for his followers as well. However, in the century prior to Wesley there were stirrings of this kind of fellowship for Christians.

¹Ralph T. Morton, Community of Faith (New York: Association Press, 1954), p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 15.

An influence arose in the seventeenth century which was to have a fairly direct influence on the Wesley Societies and particularly on the class meeting formation. This influence came from what became known as the Religious Societies. These earlier societies were the outgrowth of the state of the church of the times. In a day when the established ministry tended to be complaisant and lazy there were few to answer the religious needs of the many. Times were spiritually low in England. Many were ground down in dire poverty. Coarseness was the way of life in the countryside. Infidelity to Christian religious faith ran high and wild among the upper classes. Watson describes the days,

[The state of the times] reduced an evangelical liturgy to a dead form which was repeated without thought, or so explained as to take away its meaning. A great proportion of the clergy, whatever other learning they might possess, were grossly ignorant of theology, and contented themselves with reading short unmeaning sermons, purchased or pilfered, and formed upon the lifeless theological system of the day. A little Calvinism remained in the Church, and a little evangelical Arminianism; but the prevalent divinity was Pelagian, or what very nearly approached it. Natural religion was the great subject of study, when theology was studied at all, and was made the test and standard of revealed truth. The doctrine of the opus operatum of the Papists, as to sacraments, was the faith of the divines of the older school: and a refined system of ethics, unconnected with Christian motives, and disjoined from the vital principles of religion in the heart, was the favorite theory of the modern. The body of the clergy neither knew nor cared about systems of any kind. In a great number of instances they were negligent and immoral; often grossly so. The populace of the large towns were ignorant and profligate; and the inhabitants of the villages added to ignorance and profligacy brutish and barbarous manners. A more striking instance of the rapid deterioration of religious light and influence in a country scarcely occurs, than in our own, from the Restoration till the rise of Methodism.¹³

In this milieu Richard Baxter wrote of his success in Kidderminster. He found that by hunting up individuals, and more particularly families, to

³Richard Watson, The Life of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M. (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1831), p. 62.

talk to them about their souls' states personally, a permanent effect on their individual religious lives could be made. He spoke of sometimes having to deal with groups of them at a time. Wesley knew of this work and was impressed by it.⁴

The Religious Societies had their beginning about 1677. At this time a Dr. Horneck, a Dr. Woodward, and a Mr. Smithies, at Cornhill, saw a number of conversions among some young men. These they had met in private religious meetings. Dr. Woodward is quoted as saying,

These soon found the benefit of their conferences with one another by which (as some of them have told me with joy) that they better discovered own corruptions, the devil's temptations, and how to counter-mine his subtle devices, as to which each person communicated his experiences to the rest.⁵

These private groups were successful, especially at first. About two years after occurred a book, supposedly by Horneck, was published. It was entitled The Country Parson's Advice to His Parishioners. It dealt among other things with such groups. During this interval a group was established in London. It was likewise with young men. Its purpose was " . . . that they might apply themselves to good discourse and to things wherein they might edify one another."⁶ Having seen the rise of these groups and their effectiveness, it is no wonder that one of the leaders published a work on it. In part the book maintained,

⁴John Emory (ed.), The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M. New York: Waugh and Mason, 1835), pp. 213, 214, 223.

⁵Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 50.

⁶John Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1921), p. 10.

If the good men of the Church will unite together in the several parts of the kingdom, disposing themselves into friendly societies, and engaging each other . . . to be helpful to each other in all good Christian ways, it will be the most effectual means for restoring our decaying Christianity to its primitive life and vigor, and the supporting of our tottering and sinking church.⁷

Josiah Woodward, one of the products of this revival, published an account of these groups in 1699. The book was entitled An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London. This book was popular and was widely read.⁸ By 1744, when the Religious Societies were well on the wane, Woodward's book had gone through the sixth edition. Wesley read both it and The Country Parson's Advice. Watson suggested that it is quite likely that Wesley had even attended some of the later London society meetings.⁹

The Religious Societies were organized for their task. They met once weekly and during the meetings they did one or more of a number of things. The basic purpose of these groups was to help the young men who were seeking to lead a holy life. They might pray, read a good book or the scriptures, sing Psalms, or converse on subjects which would promote "real holiness of heart and life."¹⁰ Simon says that Horneck's sermons contain material which anticipates the doctrines which were to become conspicuous in the eighteenth century. Presumably this refers to the Wesleyan

⁷Samuel Emerick, Spiritual Renewal for Methodism (Nashville, Tennessee: The Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), p. 12.

⁸Simon, op. cit., p. 16.

⁹Watson, Life of Wesley, p. 67.

¹⁰Emerick, loc. cit.

doctrine of sanctification and others. Horneck was the one who urged this "holiness of heart and life."¹¹ There were a variety of disciplines adopted from time to time by the men who composed these groups.

Woodward's book gives directions for things for the Societies to do. A number of subjects were suggested for study. One of these was "The Duty of Self-Examination." This more or less characterized the groups. It is not surprising that the interests of these societies took this turn. The prevailing theologies, already discussed, were but covers for a failure to have any vital, useful contact with the individuals whom the theologians supposedly served. This has usually been the case with the theologians, but it seems a bit more unfortunate than the ordinary failure of theologians in church history here. One topic for discussion was suggested for each week of the year. Later in the life of the class meeting one defender of the system offered a similar list, though it did not include enough subjects for a year.¹² A topic would be chosen and then discussed at the next meeting.¹³ Such discourses were not popular or obligatory in Horneck's time, but by Woodward's publication date it was a popular element of the meetings, having been found effective in livening the spiritual lives of the members. Such discourses were liberally provided for in Woodward's book by means of the list of suggested topics.¹⁴ The discourses were in all cases supposed

¹¹Ibid., p. 19.

¹²Charles L. Goodell, The Drillmaster of Methodism (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902), pp. 207-225.

¹³Simon, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

supposed to avoid controversy and to dwell on only those things which encouraged practical holiness.¹⁵ An Anglican priest was supposed to direct the society meetings, though it was not necessary that such a minister be present every time.¹⁶

There were other things which the members often did, too. At the meetings, as time permitted, the members were permitted to relate their experiences of a spiritual nature. Beyond the meetings, however, they did their best to relieve the poor. They maintained a fund from which they gave to the poor, helped to pay prisoners' debts, attempted to educate the children of the poor, and the like.¹⁷ To this end they tried to support orphans and they managed to establish nearly 100 schools for poor and orphaned children in the vicinity of London and others in the country.¹⁸

Simon gives some of the rules of the Religious Societies as they seemed to average out over the years. All who entered the society were to resolve upon a holy and a serious life. No discourse was to be allowed on any controverted point of divinity, or of the government of the church or state. No prayers save those of the Church of England were to be used and then only as prescribed by the Church. It is difficult to imagine what it would have been like in the Wesleyan groups if this rule had been carried over to them. It was not, however. Extemporaneous prayers were a prominent

¹⁵Ibid.,

¹⁶Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁷John Telford, The Life of John Wesley (New York: Eaton and Mains, [n.d.]), pp. 145-146.

¹⁸Simon, op. cit., p. 20.

feature of the Wesley meetings. The minister for each meeting of the Religious Societies was to be chosen by the group and the practical divinity (literature) to be read was likewise picked this way. Here the term, minister, seems to mean the person who led the group that week, not necessarily the Anglican priest, who may well have stood in the background during some of the meetings. When all the reading, praying, and singing was done, then, if time permitted, the members could discourse with each other about their spiritual concerns, but this was not compulsory. This was probably the point at which the Religious societies came closest to the class meetings. One day per week was set for meeting. A sixpence was due each meeting and a fine of threepence was levied if a member were absent willfully or needlessly. Money was to be distributed to the poor one day per year after dinner and a sermon. The minister (Anglican priest) approve all applicants for membership.

Certain other rules were put to the members on the basis of recommendation. These were as follows:

1. The members should love one another.
2. The members should not revile again, when reviled at.
3. The members were to wrong no man.
4. The members were to pray, if possible, seven times a day.
5. The members were to keep close to the Church of England.
6. The members were to transact all things peacefully and gently.
7. The members were to be helpful to each other.
8. The members were to use themselves on holy thoughts coming and going.

9. The members were to examine themselves every night.
10. The members were to give everyone their due.
11. The members were to obey superiors, both spiritual and temporal.¹⁹

The similarities and disparities between these rules and those of the Wesleyan class meeting are significant at some points. Those differences will be seen more clearly in Chapter VII where the rules of the class meeting are discussed.

The course of the Religious Societies seemed to have run up and down before the turn of the century. They were quite successful at first and then in King James II's reign they came under a cloud of suspicion. James viewed them as some kind of revolutionary underground, probably because their meetings were closed to all but members.²⁰ On the other hand the clergy of the established church watched them carefully to see that they did not become some kind of Papal tool for the regaining of Roman ascendancy in England.²¹ In response to these two attitudes the meetings were opened to the public to a degree with the result that they became more popular.²² This was in the period 1685 to 1688. After the king was forced out, the pressure seems to have eased. After this an effort was made to have each member get another, or others, and it worked. The Religious Soci-

¹⁹Telford, Life of Wesley, p. 145. ²⁰Ibid.

²¹Simon, Wesley and Religious Societies, pp. 18,19. ²²Telford, loc. cit.

eties grew rapidly. However, during this growth care was taken to keep the unworthy out lest the religious tone of the groups be lowered. This was likewise a means utilized by Wesley and his classes.²³

Objections were raised to the Religious Societies during their course of existence. One of these likely came from the established church itself. This concerned the danger of split and dissention arising from the regular society meetings. Another was that reproof and admonishment amounted to an invasion of the ministerial task, as did the visitation of the sick and praying with people. This, of course, was not only recognized for the class meeting, but also, it was welcomed by the ministry of Methodism as an indispensable aid. Of course, an itinerant ministry such as the Wesleyan societies had needed something like this. However, the Anglican church with its settled ministers and priests took this as a very definite intrusion on the profession of the ministry, even though that same ministry may not have been performing that function at all. A final objection was that this tended to tell church it needed reform which was rather an affront to the church. Woodward tried to reply to these in his book by saying that (1) Bible reading and prayer never hurt anyone, and (2) the intention of the societies was not the reformation of the church.²⁴

Simon points up the success of the Religious Societies by showing some of the groups which grew out of them. One of these was the Society

²³Ibid.

²⁴Simon, loc. cit.

for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, formed in 1699. Its aim was to erect catechetical schools around London and to promote religion on the plantations in the colonies. It got together lending libraries for America and saw to the distribution of books to the army and navy in 1701. In 1705 it made money available to buy Bibles and prayer books for the poor in England's countryside.²⁵

Out of this group came another, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Likewise, the Society for the Reformation of Manners was formed in 1692 out of the Religious Societies.²⁶ This last group seem to have brought rather popular enmity upon the societies in general.

After the revolution of 1688 and the accession of William and Mary to the throne, the Societies, having returned to favor with the throne, looked around to see what they might do. They decided that national morals needed uplifting. Telford says that the group undertook to check the scandalous vice of the times. Sunday markets were closed, houses of ill-fame were shut up, and other similar activities were halted. Through abuses in the area of detective work which gradually increased as time went on, the Religious Societies lost their popularity.²⁷ However, the detecting was done by members of the Society for the Reformation of

²⁵Ibid., p. 21.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Telford, Life of Wesley, p. 146.

Manners mostly and yet the stigma from the excesses in this carried over to the Religious Societies themselves.

Thereafter, though the Society for the Reformation of Manners was not to be considered actually as one of the Religious Societies, still the public mind confused them. The onus of the former became the stigma of the latter for many people. Some of this onus seems to have passed on to the early Wesley societies as well. Watson says that beginning about 1710 or so the Religious Societies declined in London, and remained so unto Wesley's time. In fact the sixth edition of Woodward's account of these societies appeared in 1744 (two years after the formation of the first Class Meeting), and after then no more editions are to be found mentioned in the literature. The supposition was that they either further decayed or were simply absorbed into the Wesleyan societies.

Watson characterizes the rise and decline of the Religious Societies in this way:

When Dr. Woodward wrote his account, there were about forty of these societies in activity, within the bills of mortality, a few in the country, and nine in Ireland. Out of these societies about twenty associations arose, in London, for the prosecution and suppression of vice; and both these, and the private societies for religious edification, had for a time much encouragement from several bishops, and from the queen herself . . . These societies certainly opened a favorable prospect for the revival of religion in the Church of England: but, whether they were cramped by clerical jealousy lest layment should become too active in spiritual concerns; or that from their being bound by their orders to prosecute vice by call in the aid of the magistrate, their moral influence among the populace was counteracted; they appear to have declined from about 1710; and although several societies still remained in London, Bristol, and a few other places, at the time when Mr. Wesley commenced his labours, they were not in a state of growth and activity . . . They had, however, been the means of keeping the

spark of piety from entire extinction.²⁸

In Wesley's day of beginning ministry (the 1720's and the 1730's) the Religious Societies were an emaciated shadow of their former selves. Telford characterizes them in the midst of their decline.

The Religious Societies had so settled down into lifelessness, that the majority of their members were altogether slumbering or dead souls, who cared for nothing but their comfort in this world, and as they had once joined this connection, they were willing to continue in this respectable pastime on Sunday evenings, by which, at small expense, they could enjoy the pleasure, and fancy themselves better than the rest of the world who did not do the like.²⁹

The Religious Societies spread beyond the shores of England itself. It has been shown that there were some nine of them in Ireland by 1710. Beyond this, however, through Woodward's book some were formed on the continent. In 1712, which was the year of the fourth edition, this volume came into circulation in Europe with effective results. Similar societies were formed in Halle, Nuremburg, Ratisborn, Schaffhausen, Altdorf, and Frankfort.³⁰ Simon offers this explanation for the spread and popularity of these groups:

No one acquainted with the history of Christian fellowship from the days of the apostles will have any difficulty in understanding the formation of these unrelated societies in different parts of the country. Dr. Woodward was the son and nephew of ministers who were ejected from the Church of England in 1662. He would be familiar with the stories of the Nonconformist fellowship meetings held, often in secret, when Christian people craved for spiritual communion with each other, and would not be surprised at his discovery that the Old Puritan practice still persisted among members of the Church of England in country towns and villages. In this connexion it is impor-

²⁸Watson, Life of Wesley, p. 67.

²⁹Telford, Life of Wesley, p. 146.

³⁰Simon, Wesley and Religious Societies, p. 26.

tant to note that among the places in which the revived spirit of fellowship was being revealed were the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.³¹

This, then, seems to have been where the Wesleys came in. Did this system of group meetings for spiritual uplift have an impact upon, a hand in, the shaping of the class meetings? The answer is affirmative, as far as many are concerned. Carter says that Wesley had a heritage in the Religious Societies because they were within his own church. He could not have escaped hearing of them and being somewhat familiar at least in part.³² His father is known to have preached a sermon in favor of the Society for the Reformation of Manners in 1698. Thus his attitude toward the societies seems to have been at least tolerant, if not friendly, owing to his father's inclination toward them.³³ Emerick says that at least in one since the Wesleyan societies were simply continuations of the Religious Societies begun earlier.³⁴

The Oxford Club, which John Wesley joined in 1729, seems to have been familiar with The Country Parson's Advice since it is said to have carefully read this book.³⁵ Wesley's inspiration for the little spiritual life groups that so characterized his ministry came earliest from this book apparently.

About thirty years since I met with a book written in King William's time, called The Country Parson's Advice to His Parishioners. I read

³¹Ibid., p. 25.

³²Henry Carter, The Methodist Heritage (London: Epworth Press, 1951), p. 98.

³³Telford, loc. cit. ³⁴Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 13.

³⁵Simon, op. cit., p. 9.

these words: "If good men of the Church will unite together in the several parts of the kingdom, disposing themselves into friendly societies, and engaging each other, in their respective combinations, to be helpful to each other in all good Christian ways, it will be the most effectual means for restoring our decaying Christianity to its primitive life and vigour, and the supporting of our tottering and shrinking Church." A few young gentlemen, then at Oxford, approved and followed the advice. They were all zealous Churchmen, and both orthodox and regular to the highest degree. For their regularity they were soon nicknamed Methodists.³⁶

The purpose of the Oxford Club originally was the encouragement of study, but it quickly developed into a spiritual life group. At this time Wesley joined it. In groping for this spiritual life and discipline the group became familiar with The Country Parson's Advice. Wesley's reference to it above errs in his understanding of the date of publication. Simon says that Wesley was likely referring to the second edition, which was printed in the time that Wesley named. The first edition came out in 1680 during the reign of Charles II.³⁷ Emerick notes that the original intent of the Oxford Club was that of the Religious Societies actually. Its members followed the work of the Religious Societies in social welfare in the prisons, workhouses, poor areas, and in schooling for neglected children.³⁸ Moreover, Rosser insists that some of the members' spiritual talents and intents foreshadowed the work of the later Methodist bands and the classes.³⁹

In 1732 Wesley visited London and met several pious persons.⁴⁰ Watson describes these.

³⁶Ibid. ³⁷Ibid. ³⁸Emerick, op. cit., p. 12.

³⁹Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 38. ⁴⁰Watson, Life of Wesley, p. 26.

Mr. Wesley had doubtless heard, in his visit to London, of the religious societies described by Dr. Woodward, which were encouraged by the more serious clergy, and held weekly private meetings for religious edification. It is probably that he even attended such meetings in the metropolis.⁴¹

It should come as no surprise that, when Wesley went to Georgia, he should organize Religious Societies among the people there. Interestingly, these were broken down into smaller groups with local leaders. Whitehead, in his biography of Wesley, notes that this clearly is a rudimentary form of the future bands and classes.⁴²

Thus it was that Wesley almost from the beginning of his career as a religious leader, before he came to know the saving grace of God, before God had showed him his life's work in the form it would take, was groping, trying for the tools with which he would build his following. The times were right for the class meeting system. All they needed was a master hand at the tiller to guide the sentiments of the people in the way they should go. That master hand appeared in the form of John Wesley, who saw the past history of his own church, and recognized almost instinctively, or more properly in an inspired fashion, what the organizational need was for this sentiment to have its fullest expression.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 38.

⁴²Ibid.

CHAPTER III

MORAVIAN INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CLASS MEETING

By 1727 some Moravian refugees had been living on the estate of Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf by his permission for some time. He was induced to take the leadership of that group himself at this time.¹ He organized the Society of Moravians that year into groups. Towlson cites the following from Spangenberg's biography of Zinzendorf.

The Societies called bands consist of a few individuals met together in the name of Jesus, amongst whom Jesus is; who converse together in a particularly cordial and childlike manner, on the whole state of their hearts and conceal nothing from each other, but who have wholly committed themselves to each other's care in the Lord. Cordiality, secrecy, and daily intercourse is of great service to such individuals, and ought never to be neglected, but whenever slothfulness creeps in, the individuals ought to feel ashamed . . . and amend.²

Langton says that the purpose of the formation of these bands in 1727 was to provide for more intimate inquiry into the spiritual well-being of souls committed to Zinzendorf's care.

Their characteristic form was for two or three persons to meet together to converse on their spiritual state, and to exhort and pray for each other. In these, and in all other meetings, the two sexes were kept apart. The members of the various bands were often interchanged, with the result that the Brethren acquired an intimate knowledge of each other. The Church of the United Brethren thus became a real fellowship.³

¹Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 451.

²Clifford Towlson, Moravian and Methodist: Relations and Influence in the Eighteenth Century (London: Epworth Press, 1957), p. 185.

³Edward Langton, The History of the Moravian Church (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), p. 74.

This system led to a great revival of religious feeling and interest that began August 5, 1727. Out of this was to come the missionary concern of the Moravians whom John Wesley was to meet.

The community of Moravians was divided into what were called choirs. The emphasis of the community upon singing likely led to this nomenclature. Other groups, the bands, were subjuncts of these choirs. There were ten choirs which included the married, the single men, the single women, the widowers, the children, and any others that there might be. Each choir consisted of bands of five to seven persons each. The function of the choir was instruction. That of the band was more one of mutual help and satisfaction. These bands were not unlike the English Religious Societies.⁴ It may be seen from the previous chapter that Woodward's book, somehow in its great impact upon Germany, likely found its way to the Zinzendorf estate.

The meetings of the bands occurred, according to Sessler, three times daily, beginning with the first at 5:00 A.M.⁵ (Sessler, though writing about the American Moravians of that day, nevertheless seems to be reflecting some aspect of the discipline of the German home group.) Towlson pictures them as meeting once a week under their president to exchange their religious

⁴Towlson, op. cit., p. 32.

⁵Jacob Sessler, Communal Pietism among the Early American Moravians (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1933), p. 120.

experiences and to encourage one another in the faith.⁶ It is likely that this sort of combined meeting, perhaps, included more than one band in a given choir. Prayer and song were on the agenda for each band meeting. Their daily meetings more than likely took on the aspect of a devotional with the weekly meetings emphasizing the testimonials regarding spiritual experience.

In addition to these meetings just mentioned, there were certain celebrations during which the individual members of choirs had interviews with the superintendent of the member's choir. He made inquiries about the state of the member's soul and gave admonition. These interviews were called "speaking." These were held at least once monthly and also usually before every communion service.⁷

The agape, or love feast, was a Moravian copy or imitation of the usage of early Christianity. This was the observance of a rather informal Lord's Supper, perhaps more with the intent of duplicating the original fellowship of the Lord's Supper as it was first experienced.⁸ It was a time of sharing a simple repast of bread and wine together with testimony and fellowship. Wesley adopted this practice wholesale after his visit to Germany in 1738. Wesley substituted water for the wine so that there would be certain to be no onus cast upon his Methodist Societies. Once per quarter became the general frequency for the love feast in Methodism. Wesley be-

⁶Towlson, loc. cit. ⁷Sessler, op. cit., p. 99

⁸James Henry, Sketches of Moravian Life and Character (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1859), p. 151.

lieved firmly that a closer fellowship derived from this practice and that this fellowship was necessary to the Methodist societies.⁹ A possible reason for his so-thinking can be seen in the following account of an early love feast in the Fetter Lane Society.

Mon. Jan. 1, 1739--Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchins, and my brother, Charles, were present at our love-feast in Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his Majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord."¹⁰

These love feasts were very popular in English Methodism. As can be seen from the above, they sometimes had wonderful results. Simon cites words of an old author on a typical love feast, which did not always have the drama of the one in Fetter Lane Society, but which nevertheless had its rewards.

The Love Feast is both begun and ended by singing and prayers, a traveling preacher presiding. The time is chiefly taken up in relating Christian experience. Any person may speak who chooses. They are generally agreeable, edifying, and refreshing seasons. They tend to promote piety, mutual affection, and zeal. A collection is made, the first object of which is to pay for the bread used on the occasion; and the surplus is divided among the poor members of the Society.¹¹

Even before he went to Herrnhut Wesley had opportunity to become acquainted with the peculiar fellowship practices of the Moravians through the work of Peter Bohler. This man was a Moravian emigré who founded the

⁹Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 15.

¹⁰John Emory (ed.), The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., III (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1835), p. 117.

¹¹Simon, Wesley and Religious Societies, p. 25.

Fetter Lane Society in 1738, the year of Wesley's conversion. This society patterned itself after the Moravian and earlier Religious Society modes. In 1738 Bohler established a band at Oxford, one of the members of which he listed as the "older Wesley."¹² This should not be confused with the earlier Oxford Club, established before Moravian influences came into Wesley's life.

That John Wesley was taken with the idea of bands as divisions of the general society is clear. Writing in his journal while visiting Herrnhut in 1738, he wrote,

The people of Herrnhut are divided . . . into about ninety bands, each of which meets at least twice per week, but most of them three times per week, to "confess their faults one to another, and pray for one another that they may be healed. . . "

The church is so divided that first the husbands, then the wives, then the maids, then young men, then the boys, then the girls, and lastly the little children, are in so many distinct classes; each of which is daily visited, the married men by a married man, the wives by a wife, and so of the rest. These larger are also (now) divided into near ninety smaller classes or bands, over each of which presides one who is of the greatest experience. All these leaders meet the Senior every week, and lay open to him and to the Lord whatsoever hinders or furthers the work of God in the souls committed to their charge.¹³

Obviously Wesley was impressed with these groupings to record them in such detail in his diary. Moreover, when he had returned to England, he wrote a letter to the Moravians, approving of their band system. He never sent it, but it does seem to express his feelings regarding the sys-

¹²Towlson, Moravian and Methodist, p. 186.

¹³Enory, op. cit., pp. 99-101.

tem. "I greatly approve of your conferences and bands; of your method of instructing of children; and in general, of your great care of the souls committed to your charge."¹⁴

It is not surprising that Wesley seems to have utilized much Moravian innovation in his own societies. However, there is a step which lies between these meetings of the Moravians and the Methodist class meetings: the bands of Methodism. They will be discussed next.

¹⁴Towison, op. cit., p. 183.

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCES OF THE EARLY METHODIST BANDS .

ON THE CLASS MEETING

As has been suggested, there was a definite influence of the Moravian bands on John Wesley. Wesley returned from Herrnhut enamored of these bands. His mind had already seemingly been prepared for this by the contacts with the Religious Societies and with the Oxford Club. It is natural to expect then that this should become a factor in his ministry. He was a member of Fetter Lane Society, a group which was Moravian in origin and destined to remain Moravian when Wesley came to split with in June of 1740.

After his return from Germany Wesley immediately began to go about preaching where he could in church (and presumably any societies which would permit him to speak). In a letter dated October 14, 1738, Wesley reported to the church at Herrnhut,

We are endeavouring here also, by the grace which is given us, to be followers of you, as ye are of Christ. Fourteen were added to us, since our return, so that we have now eight bands of men, consisting of fifty-six persons; all of whom seek for salvation only in but blood of Christ. As yet we have only two small bands of women; the one of three, the other of five persons. But here are many others who only wait till we have leisure to instruct them, how they may most effectually build up one another in the faith and love of Him who gave himself for them.¹

¹John Emory (ed.), The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., VI (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1835), p. 621.

Apparently these first bands in London were groups of people who came from the Religious Societies to which Wesley spoke.² He was full of fire and enthusiasm when he returned from Germany and it would seem easy to believe that numbers were brought under conviction as he addressed these societies. There may have been some from the Moravian society as well. In any event it is plain that Wesley saw little bands gathering for some kind of self-help in the closing months of 1738.

The idea of the bands was spreading before the idea of a Methodist society (separate from the Moravian ones) came along. Whitefield wrote Wesley from Bristol in February of 1739 saying that many were "ripe for bands."³ In April of the same year Wesley wrote in his diary of the formation of a band there.

Wed. 4.--. . . In the evening three women agreed to meet together weekly, with the same intention as those in London, viz. "to confess their faults one to another, and pray for one another, that they may be healed." At eight four young men agreed to meet, in pursuance of the same design. How dare any man deny this to be (as to the substance of it) a means of grace, ordained by God? Unless he will affirm (with Luther in the fury of his Solifidianism) that St. James's Epistle is an epistle of straw.⁴

Thus bands had appeared in Bristol and London by mid-1739.

As Methodism spread the need for a band-like association increased within the societies of which it was composed. The sense of family which

²Emory, Works, III, pp. 109-111.

³Sidney G. Dimond, The Psychology of the Methodist Revival (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 108.

⁴Emory, Works, III, p. 127.

began to arise in Methodism as it began to take form in 1738-39 demanded some kind of organization which would allow for the kind of sharing which seemed to be required by seekers who were identified with it.

Whitefield saw this quickly as did Wesley. After the successes in Bristol Whitefield went to America for a time. On the ship he composed a letter to the new societies in England and Wales. Among other things he told them this:

Content not yourselves with reading, singing, and praying together, but set some time apart to confess your faults and communicate your experience one to another. For want of this, which I take to be one chief design of private meetings, most of the old Societies in London, I fear, are sunk into a dead formality, and have only a name to live."⁵

Wesley was back in London in December of 1739, having been in and out of the city several times that year in his preaching tours. Wednesday, December 19, found him facing a crisis in backsliding among those to whom he had preached earlier. It was at this time that the organization of a uniquely Wesleyan society system began to take form. Wesley tells of the rise of the first Methodist society in his letter to the Reverend Vincent Perronet.

About ten years ago (1738) my brother and I were desired to preach in many parts of London. We had no view therein but, so far as we were able (and we knew God could work by whomsoever it pleased him), to convince those who would hear what true Christianity was and to persuade them to embrace it. . . .

One another and another came to us, asking what they should do, being distressed on every side; as every one strove to weaken and none to strengthen their hands in God. We advised them: "Strengthen you one

⁵Benjamin Gregory, A Handbook of Wesleyan Methodist Polity and History (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1888), p. 23.

another. Talk together as often as you can. And pray with and for one another, that you may 'endure to the end and be saved.'" Against this advice we presumed there could be no objection; as being grounded on the plainest reason, and on so many scriptures, both of the Old Testament and New, that it would be tedious to recite them.

They said, "But we want you likewise to talk with us often, to direct and quicken us in our way, to give us the advices which you well know we need, and to pray with us as well as for us." I asked, Which of you desire this? Let me know your names and places of abode. They did so. But I soon found they were too many for me to talk with severally so often as they wanted it. So I told them, "If you will all of you come together every Thursday in the evening, I will gladly spend some time with you in prayer and give you the best advice I can."

Thus arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterwards called a Society.⁶

So began the Methodist societies in earnest. Though their precursors were clearly to be seen in the vestigial Religious Societies of the day and in the Moravian groups, it was around the nucleus of the people having the kind of concern shown above which the Methodist societies formed and gained their identity. It was the beginning of a much deeper fellowship system.

The bands started the next year in Bristol. Once the general societies began to be formed, wherein seekers were permitted, there came a desire on the part of some for some deeper fellowship and experience. As seen on page 30 of this paper, it would be hard to tell the difference between the first societies and a band since both seemed to be formed originally for the same purpose, deeper Christian fellowship for Christians. However, it was not long

⁶Thomas Jackson (ed.), The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., VIII (London:John Mason, 1830), pp. 249-250.

before even the unsaved were allowed to attend the society meetings which became more like preaching services. Thus, as has been said, the necessity arose for fellowship groups of a more restricted nature within the society. There were two kinds of bands at least. There was one kind for those Christians who wanted to know something of deeper, more intimate fellowship and mutual spiritual uplift. This became the main kind of band in the long run. Also, however, at first there were also bands for the backslidden who desired restoration and deepening. Wesley noted that often when these were restored, they moved into deeper spiritual waters than were inhabited by those who had not experienced such backsliding. Wesley held that these needed special instruction. He saw that they got it, too, in the earliest days of Methodism.

Whereas the requirement for admission to the society was that the applicant desire to "flee from the wrath to come," the requirement for admission to the bands was the applicant's concern to confess his faults in the presence of his fellows after the manner of James 5:16. About the bands Wesley says,

These, therefore, wanted some means of closer union; they wanted to pour out their hearts without reserve, particularly with regard to the sin which did still easily beset them and the temptations which were most apt to prevail over them. And they were the more desirous of this when they observed it was the express advice of an inspired writer: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed."

In compliance with their desire, I divided them into smaller companies; putting the married or single men and married or single women together. The chief rules of these bands (that is; little companies; so that old English word signifies) runs [sic] thus:

"In order to 'confess our faults one to another,' and pray for one another that we may be healed, we intend (1) to meet once a week at the least. (2) To come punctually at the hour appointed. (3) To begin with singing or prayer. (4) To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our soul, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting. (5) To desire some person among us (thence called a leader) to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.⁷

Those who were backslidden and wished recognition and special attention from Wesley were allotted Saturday nights for a time of meeting with him.

Some fell from the faith, either all at once, by falling into known willful sin, or gradually, and almost insensibly, by giving way in what they called little things, by sins of omission, by yielding to heart-sins, or by not watching unto prayer . . . I separated them from the rest and desired them to meet me apart on Saturday evenings . . .

By applying both the threats and promises of God to these real, not nominal, penitents, and by crying to God in their behalf, we endeavoured to bring them back to the great "Shepard and Bishop of their souls"; not by any of the fopperies of the Roman Church, although in some measure countenanced by antiquity. . .

Many of these soon recovered the ground they had lost. Yea, they rose higher than before; being more watchful than ever, and more meek and lowly, as well as stronger in the faith that worketh by love. They now outran the greater part of their brethren.⁸

These meetings did not loom large in the overall economy of Methodism and it is the other kind of meeting, the band meeting for the deeper ones, which became more important as time went on.

The characteristics of the two meetings were very similar in one important aspect, that of the nature of what went on during the meetings.

⁷Jackson, Works, VIII, pp. 258-259.

⁸Ibid., pp. 259-260.

Both of these meetings involved largely the confession of the faults of the participants openly and freely. This was to be the lesson of the band meetings, which shortly became clear to Wesley. This open confession was a prominent part of the class meeting later on. The Religious Societies had taught the value of using such groups for religious instruction and worship. The Moravian groups had taught the value of seeking deeper life and discipline through small groups. The bands confirmed the utility of open confession in such groups. There were, however, a few more items which needed clarification before the class meeting could effectively come into existence.

There is a point of clarification needed here. Wesley spoke in his letter to Vincent Perronet of the band meetings as though they developed after the class meetings. In that letter Wesley speaks of the class meeting development before he mentions the bands, further he speaks of those members having temptations which they did not feel free to mention in the class meetings. These wished for some closer, more intimate fellowship where they might be free to speak these problems out. However, in his journal Wesley clearly speaks of bands prior to the inception of the class meeting. For example, he writes in his journal on September 5, 1740, "I met the bands at Kingswood, and warned them, with all authority, to beware of being wise above that is written and to desire to know nothing but Christ crucified."⁹ Again, on November 9 of the same year, he

⁹Emory, Works, .III, .p. 194.

writes, "I had the comfort of finding all our brethren that are in band, of one heart and of one mind."¹⁰ This was in London. Likewise, the band system was existant early in Bristol. The entry for February 24, 1741, reads, "The bands meeting in Bristol, I read over the names of the United Society, being determined that no disorderly walker should remain therein."¹¹ It would seem that Wesley then had bands functioning well before the class meeting got underway, but that these earlier ones were not exactly in the form that the band meeting was to finally take on after the class meeting system came into its own by late 1742.

An adjunct arose to the band meeting. This was a system of "select" bands or societies. These groups were deeper life in their emphasis, too. They purported to go even deeper in their stretchings after spiritual life of a high caliber. The purpose of these select bands was outlined by Wesley.

My design was, not only to direct them [the members of the select bands] how to press after perfection, to exercise their every grace, and to improve every talent they had received, and to incite them to love one another more and to watch more carefully over each other, but also to have select company, to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions without reserve, and whom I could propose to all their brethren as a pattern of love, of holiness, and of good works.¹²

The key to the rise of this group, which never did achieve the significance which both the band and the class gained, was seemingly the need of Wesley to unbosom himself. One may read into the life of Wesley considerable reason for loneliness. His wife, his unique insight capacity,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 197. ¹¹Ibid., p. 203.

¹²Church, Early Methodist People, pp. 151-152.

and his considerable travels which kept him from becoming too settled surely left him feeling alone, misunderstood, and homeless. One can well imagine his occasional concern for someone or some people with sympathetic ears to whom he might speak for relief of inner, personal burdens. His regard for this kind of meeting is seen in his report of such a meeting which he attended on May 8 of 1780. Wesley had been delayed in departing from the Isle of Man because of a storm. As a result he had opportunity to attend a meeting of a Select Society. Of it he said,

I was pleased to find, that none of them have lost the pure love of God, since they received it first. I was particularly pleased with a poor negro. She seemed to be fuller of love than any of the rest. And not only her voice had an unusual sweetness, but her words were chosen and uttered with a peculiar propriety. I never heard, either in England or America, such a negro speaker (man or woman) before.¹³

For the bands there developed a number of rules, which were transferred later almost en masse to the class meeting either actually or by implication. They were quite strict. Wesley seemed to feel that, if any should be a band member, he ought to do so with sincerity. That sincerity would be expressed in the acceptance of the more rigorous discipline. Church says that the practices of the band meeting (given in first paragraph, page 34 above) grew out of the impossibility of the Wesley brothers' traveling over the length and breadth of England and still giving adequate

¹³John Emory (ed.), The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., IV (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1835), p. 527.

oversight as the societies (and the bands) increased. The result was a set of questions, some of which were to be asked each member at every session and others which were to be asked of each new applicant. The basic rules for the bands were hardly changed at all in Wesley's lifetime. They were in the American Discipline of 1791 essentially as they had been originally propounded in 1738. These are penetrating questions, a testimony to the determination of those submitting to them to do business with God and with their fellows on a spiritual plane, nothing withholding. Following are questions to be asked of membership applicants (bands):

1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?
2. Have you peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit, that you are a child of God?
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told all of your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that everyone of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you?
10. Do you desire that, in doing this, we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be on this, and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak every thing that is in your heart without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as the occasion offers.¹⁴

¹⁴John Emory (ed.), The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., V (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1835), pp. 192-193; and Robert Emory, A History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), pp. 200-201.

In addition to the above which were asked at least of each incoming applicant and then as the leader felt the need thereafter, there were some other questions which were to be asked each meeting of each member.

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?¹⁵

To this last question set Emerick adds a fifth: "Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?"¹⁶ This one was added later to the original set and in America was dropped in the late 1830's.

Tyerman says that this is an indication of the "unhealthy" tone of Wesley's piety. He seems to liken it to the nature of Wesley which manifested itself in his near death fasting experiences in Oxford earlier.¹⁷ Church says, "It was certainly an attempt to create a circle of "inner fellowship", but if nothing beyond this had emerged, the future of Methodism would have been gloomy indeed."¹⁸ The class meeting did emerge, as well, and, as will be seen, it combined the happiest elements of the several disciplines already discussed to produce a system of great spiritual power.

The minutes of the first general conference of the Methodist Societies, held in June of 1744, named four general groups of people within Methodism. The largest were the united societies. These consisted of all awakened per-

¹⁵Ibid. ¹⁶Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 15.

¹⁷Church, Early Methodist People, p. 150.

¹⁸Ibid.

sons. The next, a less inclusive grouping, was those who had remission of sins; i.e., the saved. They were indicated to be more closely united with the bands. Those in the bands who seemed faithful the light of God and more successfully walking in it composed the select societies. Finally, those who had backslidden and were trying to return met apart as penitents.¹⁹ These last two categories, the select societies and the group of penitents, never flourished, though the select societies continued to exist in parts of the land until Wesley's death. This nomenclature seems to have overlooked the class meeting, by this time in existence for more than two years. However, this system included all of the members of the Methodist societies, persons from every segment of the afore-mentioned groupings, and thus it could not be classed as another compartment within the societies.

Wesley's appreciation of the band meeting idea was obvious from the beginning. As far as he was concerned, they filled a definite place in the economy of the Methodist groups.

Great and many are the advantages which have ever since [their beginning] flowed from this closer union of the believers which each other. They prayed for one another, that they might be healed of the faults they had confessed; and it was so. The chains were broken, the bands were burst in sunder, bands here meaning the fetters of sin upon the believers, and sin had no more dominion over them. Many were delivered from the temptations out of which till then they found no way to escape. They were built up in our most holy faith. They rejoiced in the Lord more abundantly. They were strengthened in love and more effectually provoked to abound in every good work.²⁰

¹⁹Towlson, Moravian and Methodist, pp. 90-91.

²⁰Jackson, Works, VIII, p. 259.

By that general conference in 1744 the bands were developed enough that further directions of a general nature could be set down for them. These directions further illustrate the demanding quality of life in the bands upon the individual member.

You are supposed to have the faith that "overcometh the world." To you, therefore, it is not grievous,--

I Carefully abstain from doing evil; in particular,--

1. Neither to buy nor sell any thing at all on the Lord's day.
2. To taste no spiritous liquor, no dram, of any kind, unless prescribed by a physician.
3. To be at word both in buying and selling.
4. To pawn nothing, no, not to save life.
5. Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop those short that do.
6. To wear no needless ornaments, such as rings, ear-rings, necklaces, lace, ruffles.
7. To use no needless self-indulgence, such as taking of snuff or tobacco, unless prescribed by a physician.

II. Zealously to maintain good works; in particular,--

1. To give alms of such things as you possess, and that to the uttermost of your power.
2. Reprove all that is sin in your sight, and that in love and meekness of wisdom.
3. To be patterns of diligence and frugality, of self-denial, and taking up the cross daily.

III. Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God; in particular,--

1. To be at church and at the Lord's table every week, and at every public meeting of the bands.
 2. To attend the ministry of the word every morning, unless distance, business, or sickness prevent.
 3. To use private prayer every day; and family prayer, if you are at the head of a family.
 4. To read the Scriptures, and meditate therein, at every vacant hour.
- And,--
5. To observe, as days of fasting or abstinence, all Fridays in the year.²¹

²¹John Emory, Works, V, pp. 193-194.; and Robert Emory, History, p. 201.

It is small wonder that the band system never gained the acceptance of the majority of early (or later) Methodists. It was brought to America but received scant attention from Methodists here. It was never required for membership in the societies and the churches later, as was class meeting attendance. This is undoubtedly a large factor in the fall of the band meetings from use, as it was as well for class meetings once attendance in those groups was no longer required. The rules and procedures of the band meeting, many of them, were used in the class meetings. There were important modifications, however, and these were the secret of the success of the class meeting, at least in part. Bands were lamented in their passing from the American scene by the same men who were loudly at mid-nineteenth century warning of the threatening demise of the class meeting. Wise observed ruefully,

The band meeting is almost obsolete in America 1856 . . . it is designed only for persons who, having attained a high degree of spirituality, desire a closer spiritual fellowship than is provided for in the class meeting, but it was never general or obligatory in Methodism. It presupposes such a degree of sincerity, simplicity, integrity, and spirituality as, I fear, will never be universal in any sect.²²

Rosser likewise bewailed their passing while he mourned the sad state of attitude toward the class meetings in mid-nineteenth century America. After the "bands with everything on the subject of them was expunged from the discipline" in 1854, Rosser editorially wagged his head and wrote, "May God revive our church as to cause their restoration."²³

The band meetings did have their cumbersome qualities. They tend to divide the weak from the strong. They tended to make the strong too intro-

²²Daniel Wise, Popular Objections to Methodism (Boston: J. J. Magee, 1856), pp. 71-72.

²³Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 200.

spective, and likely weak therefore. Their lack of compulsion; that is, the requirement of attendance of them for maintenance of membership in the church is another factor. Human nature being what it is, few would be expected, after the first generation of Methodists, to follow such a rigorous, demanding spiritual discipline that was not deemed necessary by the church.

However, their influence on the classes as successful groups of confessing Christians is undeniable. Wesley was not far from success when he formed the bands. Two things were still needful. One was a definite goal for deeper life strivings. The other was an enforcement of the joining together of the weak and the strong, the shallow and the deep, to the end of attainment of a common goal: a group of Christians truly being fitted for the Master's use. One of these, the enforcement, was to grow out of the original class meeting exercises; the other, a goal in the deeper life, was formulating itself contemporaneously in Wesley's understanding. It would shortly begin bearing its own fruit - the Wesleyan doctrine of "entire sanctification." This will be discussed next, in terms of its development in the earliest years of Wesley's ministry and its influence on the formation of class meetings.

CHAPTER V

THE INFLUENCE OF THE DEVELOPING DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION ON THE CLASS MEETING

Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection developed. It did not appear full-blown overnight. Thus it is difficult to give a definition of this experience and life as Wesley finally conceived it to be and this definition still have bearing on his earlier feelings. Let the reader therefore think of this doctrine and experience in very general terms as simply a deep, pure life, as Wesley, especially before his conversion experience was thinking.

Wesley's attention was drawn to the deeper life almost certainly in his reading of Woodward's book mentioned in Chapter II above. Additionally he was struck by a challenge in Thomas A Kempis' Christian's Pattern. Two years later Wesley obtained William Law's Serious Call and Christian Perfection. These encouraged Wesley to begin a quest which was to carry him over the rest of his life.¹ Wesley began seriously to study the possibility of a life perfectly pleasing to God in his Bible in 1729.²

In May of 1738 he received assurance of salvation. On his subsequent visit to Herrnhut in Germany that summer he met one of the saintly Moravian brethren, probably one of the first people he had ever heard speak

¹John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (London: Epworth Press, 1952), pp. 5 and 6.

²John Emory (ed.), The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., VI (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1835), p. 533.

of a definite experience and life of perfect love. He wrote in his treatise concerning the interview,

In August following I had a long conversation with Arvid Gradin, In Germany. After he had given me an account, I desired him to give me, in writing, a definition of the "full assurance of faith," which he did in the following words. . .

"Repose in the blood of Christ; a firm confidence in God, and persuasion of His favour; the highest tranquility, serenity, and peace of mind; with a deliverance from every fleshly desire, and a cessation all, even inward sins."

This was the first account I ever heard from any living man of what I had before learned myself from the oracles of God, and had been praying for (with the little company of friends), and expecting for several years.³

By 1739 then Wesley was preaching this doctrine in something its final form. It does not seem that he had himself experienced it, nor had any of his followers done so. He had developed a good personal sense of deep repose on God, and of inner peace and purity, however. He told a "serious clergyman,"

They other clergy in the Church of England speak of sanctification (or holiness) as if it were an outward thing, as if it consisted chiefly, if not wholly, in those two points, 1. The doing no harm; 1. The doing good, (as it is called,) that is, the using means of grace, and helping our neighbor.

I believe it to be an inward thing, namely, the life of God in the soul of man; a participation of the Divine nature; the mind that was in Christ; or, the renewal of our heart, after the image of him that created us.⁴

In 1740 Wesley had responded to a conversation with Bishop Bibson by preparing a sermon on Christian Perfection. Having told the Bishop what he meant by perfection, Wesley was in turn encouraged by the Bishop to

³Wesley, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴Emory, op. cit., p. 154.

"publish it to the world."⁵

Having begun to preach it as the result of his studies and his interview with Gradin, Wesley was nevertheless somewhat surprised when members of his own society began to profess the instantaneous experience of that which Wesley was urging every member to obtain. Because of, in part, his characteristic incredulity and, in part, his deep interest, Wesley carefully interrogated those who first came. The first such appears in his journal under a notation for December 2, 1744. Two claimants came to testify of the experience.

I was with two persons who believe they are saved from all sin. Be it so, or not, why should we not rejoice in the work of God, so far as it is unquestionably wrought in them. For instance, I ask John C., "Do you pray always? Do you rejoice in God every moment? Do you in everything give thanks? In loss? In pain? In sickness, weariness, disappointments? Do you desire nothing? Do you fear nothing? Do you feel the love of God continually in your heart? Have you a witness in whatever you speak or do, that it is pleasing to God?" If he can solemnly and deliberately answer in the affirmative, why do I not rejoice and praise God on his behalf? Perhaps, because I have an exceeding complex idea of sanctification, or a sanctified man. And so for fear he should not have attained all I include in that idea, I cannot rejoice in what he has attained to.⁶

Thus, while inwardly questioning the validity of the experience of these men, he nevertheless tried his best to give them the benefit of the doubt. Wesley found strong testimony in the nature of the changes wrought in those who professed this change. One such was a Thomas Williams who, after strongly opposing Wesley for some time, wrote to him,

⁵Wesley, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

⁶Emory, Works, III, p. 323.

Though I doubt not you can forgive me, yet I can hardly forgive myself; I have been so ungrateful and disobedient to the tenderest of friends, who, through the power of God, were my succor in all my temptations. I intreat your prayers in my behalf, that God may restore, strengthen, and stablish and settle me in the grace to which I have been called: that God may bless you, and your dear brother, and that we may be all united again in one fellowship, is the prayer of him who, for the future hopes to be,

Your obedient son and servant, for Christ's sake,

THOMAS WILLIAMS.⁷

Perhaps crucial in Wesley's development of this doctrine and experience and in its impact upon the class meeting was Wesley's own attainment at this point. It is not certain when it occurred. That it did so is nearly universally recognized among scholars of Wesley's life and writings. It may have occurred at this time. Church is correct when he says that there is no public proclamation by Wesley that he ever attained the sanctification experience he sought and taught. It is almost redundant to say, however, that Wesley would have to be a great hypocrite to have taught what he never experienced. The question, then is, "When?" and not, "If. . ."

There are several points chosen by the experts during his life where there seems to be an indication of Wesley achieving his sanctification. It would seem that the most likely is just about 1744 when he began finding members of his own societies who obtained, such as Thomas Williams above. In December of that year after Wesley met with the two in London who professed to have been "saved from all sin" he discussed in his journal his

⁷Ibid.

feelings as they developed by the latter part of the month. There is no connection between the following journal entries and that involving the interview with the two men on December 2. However, one might understand that a man with Wesley's sense of responsibility toward his people would diligently inquire about his own experience being up to date with the best of his member's lives. Furthermore, the language of the entry below is rather unique in his remarks about his own feelings since the entries of circa May, 1738. He seems to discuss his own sense of sinfulness for the first time since then. This is a characteristic of many Christians as they approach the experience of sanctification in the Wesleyan sense. Sin grows prominent as a part of themselves, particularly in the feelings of inward unrighteousness. Wesley recounts his circumstances of December 23 and following.

Sun. 23.--I was unusually lifeless and heavy, till the love-feast in the evening . . . Yet the next day I was again as a dead man; but in the evening, while I was reading prayers at Snowsfields, I found such light and strength as I never remember to have had before. I saw every thought, as well as action or word, just as it was rising in my heart; and whether it was right before God, or tainted with pride or selfishness. I never knew before (I mean at this time) what it was "to be still before God."

Tues. 25.--I waked, by the grace of God, in the same spirit; and about eight, being with two or three that believed in Jesus, I felt such an awe and tender sense of the presence of God, as greatly confirmed me therein: so that God was before me all the day long. I sought and found Him in every place; and could truly say, when I lay down at night, "Now I have lived a day."⁸

By this Wesley seems to have testified to the very thing which he had

⁸Ibid., pp. 323-324.

questioned the two regarding in London. His own testimony was that this seemed to have been a grand new life, preceded by his sense of heaviness, distance from God. This was to become the testimony of multitudes who later sought and found the same experience. It is not the purpose of this paper to prove or disprove a definite date for Wesley's sanctification experience, however. It does appear that this may well have come at this crucial time in the development of the class meeting. By 1744 it was just beginning to emerge in its final form and was spreading rapidly in the movement. It would not seem to be happenstance that these two, so much interdependent, as will be seen in Chapter XIV below.

Once he had experienced it himself, his doctrine was nearly settled. One factor in that doctrine, that of the belief that the possessor of the experience could not be lost by the believer, had yet to be changed. By 1760 Wesley was not preaching that it was a thing, once achieved, forever retained. That retention was dependent in part upon the believer's willingness to retain it.

That finally developed doctrine probably was best expressed by Dean Cannon.

Christian perfection, for Wesley, means . . . only one thing, and that is purity of motive: the love of God, freed entirely from all the corruptions of natural desire and emancipated completely from any interest in self or in any other person or thing apart from God, guides unhindered every thought and every action of a man's life. In body and mind the perfect Christian is still infinite; he makes mistakes in judgment as long as he lives; these mistakes in judgment occasion mistakes in practice, and mistakes in practice often have bad moral consequences. Thus perfection in the sense of infallibility does not exist on the face of the earth.⁹

⁹William R. Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1946), p. 241.

Whatever the significance of the event described above in Wesley's life and ministry, others in the societies began to catch the fire after this time. Both class meeting and sanctification experience began to spread more and more rapidly. Wesley was surprised and pleased by a development in the societies in Bristol and Kingswood.

Every day we found more and more cause to praise God, and to give him thanks for his still increasing benefits. I found peculiar reason to praise God, for the state of the society both in Bristol and Kingswood. They seemed at last clearly delivered from all the vain jangling, from idle controversies and strife of words, and determined not to know anything, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."¹⁰

The conferences of 1744 and 1745 included some discussion of what was meant by Christian perfection, showing the increasing importance of this doctrine and experience in the minds of Wesley's followers.¹⁰ In a short time, a matter of a "few years", there were a number of people in the Foundry (Methodism's oldest church in London) who were professing deliverance from all sin. Wesley asked them to come together in order that he might question them regarding their experiences. He wanted to satisfy himself as to the validity of what they claimed for themselves. Wesley and an assistant preacher, named Walsh, undertook the questioning of these. The questioning was thorough. As to the results, Wesley said,

They answered everyone without hesitation and with the utmost simplicity, so that we were fully persuaded they did not deceive themselves. In the years 1759 to 1762 they multiplied exceedingly in London, Bristol, and elsewhere. In London alone I found 652 members of our society who were exceeding clear in their experience, and of whose testimony I could see no reason of doubt. I believe no year has passed since then wherein God has not wrought the same work in many others; and every one of these (without a single exception)

¹⁰ Wesley, Plain Account, pp. 33-39.

declared that his deliverance from sin was instantaneous--that the change was wrought in a moment.¹¹

That Wesley esteemed the doctrine of Christian perfection all his life after 1744 cannot be doubted. His journal abounds with references to it. His attitudes toward this belief and experience are best summed up in his letter to Robert Brackenbury in 1790 a short while before he died:

I am glad brother D-- has more light with regard to full sanctification. This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists [sic]; for the sake of propogating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up.¹²

And at the same time He seems to have raised up the vehicle of the class meeting to be the means of carrying people to this "great deposit" of Methodism.

The impact of this doctrine and its strong propogation upon the members of the class meeting groups will be discussed in Chapter XIV below. There can be no doubt, however, that this incubating belief in the mind of Wesley helped to shape his thinking regarding the organization of the class meeting and some of its rules. The desire for the deepest life had been rising in Wesley since 1725, by his own testimony. The experience in organizing for the attainment was likewise accruing to him. By 1742 the fruit was nearly ripe.

None of the foregoing organizations were of themselves suited to the needs of the Wesleyan revival which was to come. The Religious societies had not caught the essential requirement of interpersonal exchange of spiritual experience. They had lapsed into stereotype and formalism, losing what

¹¹George Stevenson, City Road Chapel, London, and Its Associations (London: author, 1872), p. 39.

¹²John Emory, Works, VII, pp. 153-154.

little inter-personal life they had. The band meetings were too exclusive. They failed to feed those that needed it and they failed to challenge the weak to go on and seek deeper things. There was also too much subjectivity in the constant searching of one's self to find little things wrong. Most improper of all, however, was the lack of enforcement means for the carrying out of this introspection, which was a necessity for any kind of discipline. As soldiers have to be forced into the army most of the time, so the Christian soldiers needed to be forced to undergo the exercises which would render them fit for spiritual battle. While there was danger in too much introversion in the bands, they appear to have had little chance to over-indulge because they never were as widespread as the classes.

The actual need was for a small group situation in which the weak and the strong could spiritually intermingle on an interpersonal, honest, open basis. Preaching was fine, it helped to bring about the great revivals. But it took personal followup work in groups to conserve and feed the resultant converts. After years of preparation and unwitting research in doctrine and practice, 1742 suddenly found Wesley ready to organize and propagate in the manner which God seemingly intended. The class meeting just seemed to arise like so many of man's "achievement and discoveries", accidentally. In a few moments it was innocuously born. How that happened will be discussed next.

CHAPTER VI

THE BIRTH OF THE CLASS MEETING

Morton says that the missionary task of the Church has in the past depended upon the creation within the Church of new forms of social living.¹ Wesley's day was one which demanded something new in spiritual as well as social living. Watson describes the state of the times in England when Wesley began his ministry.

At this period the religious and moral state of the nation was such as to give the most serious concern to the few remaining faithful. There is no need to draw a picture darker than the truth . . .

A great majority of . . . [the] lower classes at the time of the rise of Methodism were even ignorant of the art of reading; in many places were semi-barbarous in their manners; and had been rescued from the superstitions of popery, only to be left ignorant of every thing beyond a few vague and general notions of religion . . . Infidelity began its ravages upon the principles of the higher and middle classes; the mass of people remained uneducated, and were Christians but in name, and by virtue of their baptism; whilst many of the great doctrines of the Reformation were banished both from the universities and from the pulpits. Archbishop Leighton complains that his "Church was a fair carcass without a spirit;" and Burnet observes, that in his time "the clergy had less authority, and were under more contempt, than those of any Church in Europe; for they were much the most remiss in their labors, and the least severe in their lives . . ." A great proportion of the clergy, whatever other learning they might possess, were grossly ignorant of theology, and contented themselves with reading short, unmeaning sermons, purchased or pilfered, and formed upon a lifeless theological system of the day . . . Natural religion was the great subject of study, when theology was studied at all, and was made the test and standard of revealed truth . . . The body of the clergy neither knew nor cared about systems of any kind. In a great number of stances they were negligent and immoral; often grossly so. The populace of the large towns were ignorant and

¹Morton, Community of Faith, p. 91.

and profligate; and the inhabitants of villages added to ignorance and profligacy brutish and barbarous manners. A more striking instance of the rapid deterioration of religious light and influence in a country scarcely occurs, than in our own, from the Restoration till the rise of Methodism.²

Taylor observed that Wesleyanism came into this scene

With its itinerant ministry, its local preachers, its classes, its bands, its trusteeships, its fiscal organization--it came in, not to supplant any existing system of actual discipline, or of church training, but to establish a culture of some sort, upon the vast, howling wilderness of popular irreligion.³

John Wesley came into a society poised on the verge of a new era of human history, an era which is still going on and which will perhaps find its culmination only in the interference of God finally in the affairs of men. It was to become a day of impersonalization. It would seem to have been the Lord's intention to see that men had at least a chance at the spiritual armor necessary to meet its peculiar challenges. The England Wesley found in 1738 was not capable of withstanding, any more than any other country in Europe, the terrible force for change accompanying the coming Industrial Revolution. The new age would require more of social living than men had experienced for many hundreds of years. Yet even while drawing men together, it would tend to emotionally isolate them from each other as never before. The intensity of slum life was going to mount in the next hundred years. Injustice in the development of industry would give rise to much impulse to violence on the part of

²Watson, Life of Wesley, pp. 59-62.

³Isaac Taylor, Wesley and Methodism (New York: Harper and Bros., 1852), p. 217.

the victims. Only men of spiritual stamina would be able to absorb it all and come through it without destroying their civilization. By the time of Wesley's death the basic inventions of Watt, Arkwright, and Hargreaves would have begun to change the face of England and her place in the world. Something would have to be provided which would be new and would meet the challenges ahead.

Wesley did not see the panorama of history which lay in front of him with absolute clarity, but he did realize that men were unfit for life as they were and that they must change. He bent his life to the needed change and seeing that it took place. Typical of what he found in his early ministry, and so dismaying to him, was the old man on his death-bed on a lonely farm. Wesley asked after the state of his soul and the man responded with surprise and perplexity, not knowing what a soul was.⁴

In addition to the ignorance and moral depravity which he found externally to his societies, Wesley discovered a serious problem within them. This one developed rather quickly as the societies began to take the shape of their uniquely Methodist character. It was the problem of what Wesley called "disorderly walkers", or those whose daily lives were morally inconsistent with the profession of the societies. Wesley described this problem in his letter to Vincent Perronet.

But as much as we endeavoured to watch over each other, we soon found some who did not live the gospel. I do not know that any hypocrites crept in; for, indeed, there was no temptation: but several grew cold and gave way to the sins which had long easily beset them. We quickly perceived there were many ill consequences of suffering these to remain among us. It was dangerous to others; inasmuch as all sin is of an infection nature. It brought such a scandal on

⁴Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 30.

their brethren as it exposed them to what was not properly the reproach of Christ. It laid a stumbling block in the way of others, and caused the truth to be evil spoken of.

We groaned under these inconveniences long before a remedy could be found. The people were scattered so wide in all parts of the town, from Wapping to Westminster, that I could not easily see what the behaviour of each person in his own neighbourhood was: so that several disorderly walkers did much hurt before I was apprised of it.⁵

The answer came quite unexpectedly when it was not being sought.

There had been a problem in Bristol over the meeting house for the society. Wesley had personally undertaken the indebtedness for the place since the membership of the society were seemingly too poor to handle it themselves. There arose, nevertheless, a desire on the part of some to relieve Wesley of this excessive burden, though he had never asked them to consider it. His journal briefly records the discussion of the problem and its results.

Mon. 15.--Many met together to consult on a proper method for discharging the public debt; and it was at length agreed, 1. That every member of the society, who was able, should contribute a penny a week. 2. That the whole society should be divided into little companies or classes, --about twelve in each class. And, 3. That one person in each class should receive the contribution of the rest, and bring it to the steward, weekly.⁶

A certain Captain Foy had proposed this idea and offered to pay the contributions of those who could not afford to pay.⁷ The plan worked, it seems because, the decision having been made in February of 1742, the debt was paid off in October of 1743, according to Wesley.⁸

There arose, however, side benefits which were to far outshine this financial facility. Those "leaders", who did the calling from house to

⁵John Telford (ed.), The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley, M. A., II (London: Epworth Press, 1931), p. 296.

⁶Emory, Works, III, p. 242. ⁷Emory, Works, VII, p. 316. ⁸Emory, III, p. 295.

house to collect the penny a week from the class members, were soon reporting home situations which were not consistent with the pure testimony of the society. Wesley put it this way:

Not long after [the institution of this system], one of these [leaders] informed Mr. Wesley that, calling on such a one in his house, he found him quarreling with his wife. Another was found in drink.⁹

Wesley commented to Perronet, "Some of these informed me that such and such a one did not live as he ought."¹⁰

It did not take much for Wesley to realize that this embodied the very answer to the problem of backsliding which he had been trying to solve.

It immediately struck Mr. Wesley's mind, "This was the very thing we wanted. The leaders are the persons who may not only receive the contributions, but also watch over the souls of their brethren."¹¹

I called together the leaders of the classes (so we used to term them and their companies), and desired that each would make a particular inquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly. They did so.¹²

Did it work? Wesley found quickly that it did, and well, too.

Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some were turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence . . .

Evil men were detected and reprov'd. They were borne with for a season. If they forsook their sins, we received them gladly; if they obstinately persisted therein, it was openly declared that they were not of us. The rest of us mourned and prayed for them, and yet rejoiced that as far as in us lay the scandal was rolled away from the Society.¹³

⁹Emory, Works, VII, p. 316. ¹⁰Telford, Letters, II, p. 296.

¹¹Emory, loc. cit. ¹²Telford, loc. cit. ¹³Ibid., pp. 296-297.

A little over one month later Wesley was suggesting this same plan to the London societies.

Thur. March 25.--I appointed several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found of knowing the people who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed, there could be no better way to come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person, than to divide them into classes, like those at Bristol, under the inspection of those in whom I could most confide.¹⁴

In the earliest days of the classes the leaders went from house to house. They collected their penny and then inquired into the spiritual and moral life of each member. It was soon found that this was not easily done since often the leader worked long hours and had to do his calling when he could. Simon says that the house-to-house visitation was changed to a weekly gathering of the group for five reasons, which were essentially as follows:

1. Visiting homes soon became too time-consuming.
2. Many members lived with employers, as servants, and could not conveniently be interviewed because of time considerations or, often, the antipathy of the employer.
3. At wealthier homes there was often little opportunity for the leader to speak to the individual alone.
4. Members differed with each other at times, "affirming what others denied." Facing each member with his accuser would cut this practice down.

¹⁴Emory, Works, III, pp. 246-247.

5. Quarrels between members could best be resolved in confrontation.¹⁵

And so the classes came to meet weekly sometimes at the society meeting houses, often in the homes of the class members.

Wesley said that there was resistance to this form of meeting at its inception. Indeed there was always resistance to it. His attitude, however, was very independent once he saw the benefits of these groups. Some considered it a restraint, not a privilege. Others claimed to be ashamed to speak in public. Some argued that it had not been used before and should not then be used either. Still others held that there was no scriptural provision for it and that it was a human invention.¹⁶ To all these Wesley tried to be specific but his best reply, and his most hostile, came later on when he said, "How dare any man deny this to be a means of grace, ordained by God?"¹⁷

The use of the class meeting system spread rapidly throughout the the Methodist societies. Wesley noted that it spread quickly even to America. Women's and children's classes were instituted soon.¹⁸ By 1746 the classes permeated Methodism.¹⁹

Thus began the class meeting. Its birth was final by 1746, though

¹⁵John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1952), pp. 311-312.

¹⁶Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 17. ¹⁷Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 127.

¹⁸Emory, Works, III, p. 482. ¹⁹Simon, loc cit.

its gestation period in Wesley's mind was twenty years long. Here really began the ministry of the elder Wesley. His societies had come to their final form. His message had come near its completion as far as doctrine was concerned. Methodism in England was now on the march. Wesley's journal and letters resound with victorious shouts as again and again the growing movement sweeps along. And in the wake of revival and victories lay the class meetings conserving the results of revival and preparing the next generation of preachers and leaders. Fitzgerald says that such a discipline had not been seen since the Apostolic age. It might be added that there had not been a revival since that time when the average believer or adherent was as knowledgeable and self-aware as those in the Methodist revival.

Richard Cameron tells of the triumph of the class meeting in the societies over the bands, the select societies, and other such groups.

The members of a class often stayed together for years. Under such circumstances hypocrisy and evasion were not possible. Whereas the bands consisted of Christians who had made some progress in the Christian life, the class, ideally at least, consisted of all ages and stages of experience. [Originally there was division by ages. Cameron is speaking primarily of early nineteenth century classes in America.] The class gradually superseded the bands in spite of Wesley's insistence on maintaining the latter.²⁰

Church tells the secret of the class meeting's drawing power.

The class meeting was essentially a gathering of the friends of Jesus, who, because of that friendship shared a common life as surely as the several branches of one vine. What could be a finer testimony of such a relationship than the simple description of a humble member in

²⁰Richard Cameron, The Rise of Methodism (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 300.

Frome?

"Mrs. Seagram never lost a friend but by death." . . . The Widow Seagram had known what it was to endure fierce persecution for her faith. She had borne the indignity of her imprisonment, had been stripped of all her household goods to pay an iniquitous fine, but, strengthened by Christian fellowship, she had so maintained her faith and her friendliness that "even the openly wicked and profane respected her and were constrained to admire the excellence which they were unwilling to imitate."²¹

Having come into existence, the class meeting functioned effectively in Methodism for over one hundred years. The dynamic aspects of its functioning will be considered next; its mode of operation, its spread, and its impact on the believers.

SECTION II

THE DYNAMICS OF THE CLASS MEETING

CHAPTER VII

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CLASS MEETING

The class meeting came to have rules of government, much as any other group within Methodism. The Religious Societies had these as did the Methodists. This system of rules came to be quite important and controversial in the society which Wesley developed. The reason for this was the insistence by Wesley upon rigid enforcement of these rules. However, before these rules can be considered an understanding of the purposes which they tended to promote should be given.

I. THE PURPOSES OF THE CLASS MEETING

Goodell, writing shortly after the demise of the class meeting as an effective function of Methodism, said that the meeting was three-fold in purpose. One of these purposes was the raising of funds. This aspect never was lost as long as the meeting of the classes continued. Another was the discipline of the membership in the sense of its being used to determine who would be permitted to become members of the society. The third was the spiritual purpose. This was, according to Goodell, the provision of an atmosphere where Christians could speak freely without fear of reprisal.¹ Goodell's view was considerably simpler than that of Wesley, perhaps because of Goodell's failure to see the class meeting system

¹Charles Goodell, The Drillmaster of Methodism (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902), pp. 12-13.

as important to the life of Methodism as Wesley did. The latter's statement of purpose, given below, serves to emphasize this difference in attitude.

The particular design of the Classes is,-- to know who continue members of the Society; to inspect their outward walking; to inquire into their inward state; to learn what are their trials; and how they fall by or conquer them; to instruct the ignorant in the principles of religion; if need be, to repeat, to explain, or enforce, what has been said in public preaching.

To stir them up to believe, love, obey; and to check the first spark of offense or discord.

To inquire whether they now believe; now enjoy the life of God. Whether they grow therein, or decay; if they decay, what is the cause; and what the cure.

Whether they aim at being wholly devoted to God; or would keep something back.

Whether they take up their cross daily; resist the bent of nature; oppose self-love in all its hidden forms, and discover it, through all its disguises.

Whether they humble themselves in everything. Are willing to be blamed and despised for well-doing. Account it the greatest honor, that Christ appoints them to walk with himself, in the paths that are his own. To examine closely whether they are willing to drink of his cup, and to be baptized with his baptism.

How they conquer self-will, in its spiritual forms; see through all its disguises of themselves; consciousness of their own vileness and nothingness.

How they improve their talents. What zeal they have for doing good, in all they do, or suffer, or to receive from God. Whether they live above it; making Christ their all, and offering up to God nothing for acceptance, but his life and death.

Whether they have a clear, full, abiding conviction, that without inward, complete, universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord. That Christ was sacrificed for us; that we might be a whole burnt sacrifice to God; and that the having received the Lord Jesus Christ, will profit us nothing, unless we steadily walk in him.

I earnestly exhort all leaders of classes and bands, seriously to consider the preceding observations, and put them in execution with all the understanding and courage that God has given them.

J. WESLEY²

²Article in [Boston] Zion's Herald, III (November 30, 1825), p. 1. [Designated as a reprint from an earlier issue of The Arminian Magazine]

II. THE RULES OF THE CLASS MEETING

With this view Wesley did what had to be done with the class meeting in order to see the fulfillment of these purposes. He made attendance compulsory. He made answering the questions a compulsory thing. He made treatment of those who did not wish to submit to this system direct and forceful, as shall be seen. It can be seen that any probe which is as deep as this system became would be resisted and would require a number of enforced rules to keep it from developing into a judgmental system on the one hand and a palid, stereotyped testimony session with only superficial work on the other.

Rules of the class meeting began to appear soon after the inception of the classes themselves. By 1744, the date of the first general conference, those rules were pretty well laid down. They were adopted from the band rules to a large extent.

That it may more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each Society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about 12 persons in every class, one of whom is styled the Leader. It is his business

I. To see each person in his class once a week, at the least, in order

To receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor;

To inquire how their souls prosper;

To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require.

II. To meet the Minister and the Stewards of the Society once a week, in order

To pay in to the Stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding;

To show their account of what each person has contributed; and

To inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reprov'd.³

A notation on the flyleaf of the book of rules of the Bristol society in Charles Wesley's handwriting, dated September 10, 1765, noted a rule which was much used in the societies and eventually incorporated into the general discipline.

That no persons shall be admitted [into the society] without the recommendation of some member of the society who is acquainted with their character, having first met in the class (at least three times), read over and considered the Rules of the Society . . . As we have often seen the bad consequences of too hastily admitting persons into the Society, it is requested of the resident preacher to observe these rules.⁴

III. ATTENDANCE OF THE CLASS MEETING

Of all the rules which Wesley was careful to see that were followed, his rule of attendance was probably the most strictly enforced, at least personally by him. He was deeply concerned that attendance be regular and punctual. Among other things in this regard Wesley said, in writing to the Bristol society in October of 1764,

Whoever misses his class thrice together thereby excludes himself, and the preacher that comes next ought to put that by his name. I wish you would consider this. Halt not between the two. Meet the brethren or leave them.⁵

In December of 1782 he wrote to one of his preachers, "Those who will not meet in the class cannot stay with us."⁶

³John Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p. 101.

⁴John Simon, John Wesley, the Master Builder (London: Epworth Press, 1927), p. 183.

⁵Telford, Letters, IV, p. 273.

⁶Telford, Letters, VII, p. 154.

He said to John Mason in November of 1784, "Be exact in every part of the discipline, and give no ticket [of admission] to any that does not meet his class weekly."⁷

In February of 1788 he said to William Holmes, "Do right and fear nothing. Exclude every person that will not promise to meet his or her class, the steward in particular I require you to do this. You have no choice. Leave the consequences to God."⁸

In a letter to Edward Jackson in October of 1788 Wesley said, "I commend you for denying [admittance] tickets to all that have neglected meeting their classes, unless they seriously promise to meet them for the time to come."⁹

This is not to say that Wesley was not willing to excuse any kind of absence. There was an element of reasonability in his attendance upon the regularity of members at the class meeting. To John Valton in January of 1789 he suggested, "You should . . . rigorously insist that everyone meet his class weekly without some very peculiar hindrance."¹⁰

His leniency can be seen most clearly, however, in an urgent letter to Joseph Benson in Newcastle in 1776.

We must threaten no longer but perform. In November last I told the London Society, "Our rule is to meet in a class once a week, not once in two or three. I now give you warning: I will give tickets to none in February but those that have done this." I have stood my word. Go you and do likewise wherever you visit the classes. Begin, if need be, at Newcastle, and go on to Sunderland. Promises to meet

⁷Emory, Works, VII, p. 98.

⁸Telford, Letters, VIII, p. 36.

⁹Ibid., pp. 98, 99.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 198.

are now out of date. Those that have not met seven times in the quarter exclude. Read their names in the Society, and inform them all you will next quarter exclude all that have not met twelve times--that is, unless they were hindered by distance, sickness, or by some unavoidable business.¹¹

Part of the preacher's job was to make rounds of the circuit and make sure that the class meetings were being held weekly, were properly conducted, and were sustained in their effectiveness. This practice continued for long after Wesley's death. Throughout the western border region of early nineteenth century America the circuit riders rode to visit the classes which eventually in many communities were to result in churches. Wesley himself, as can be seen from the above, made this work his own. He often met the classes and by them ascertained the spiritual state of his societies. His concern for attendance of the class meeting sessions after his many years of ministry certainly remained undiminished. Following is a letter written to a Miss Bolton in November of 1790 in which he expressed in unrepressed fashion his concern for the class.

My Dear Sister,--The more I consider your case, the more I am convinced that you are in the school of God, and that the Lord loveth whom he chasteneth. From the time you omitted meeting your class or band, you grieved the Holy Spirit of God, and he gave a commission to Satan to buffet you: nor will that commission ever be revoked, till you meet again. Why were you not a mother in Israel?--a repairer of the waste places?--a guide to the blind?--a healer of the sick?--a lifter up of the hands which hung down? Wherever you came, God was with you, and shone upon your path. Many daughters had done virtuously: but thou excellest them all. Woman, remember the faith! In the name of God, set out again, and do the first works! I exhort you, for my sake, (who tenderly love you,) for God's sake, for the sake of your own soul, begin again without delay. The day after you receive this, go and meet a class or a band. Sick or well, go! If you cannot speak a word, go;

¹¹Telford, Letters, VI, p. 208.

and God will go with you. You sink under the sin of omission! My friend, my sister, go! Go, whether you can or not. Break through! Take up your cross. I say again, do the first works, and God will restore your first love! and you will be a comfort, not a grief, to

Yours most affectionately.¹²

The book which the steward kept as an account of the giving of the penny weekly by the class members eventually became a kind of class roll book which was used to record the regularity of attendance of the members.¹³ The class roll was still being used in the declining years of the class meeting. This is seen in Atkinson's references to it. However, since he treats it as something of a novel idea, it may have lapsed for a time.¹⁴ Rosser, writing about twenty years earlier in 1855 suggested that the class paper (which was the older name for the class roll) be taken by the leader into his prayer closet and made the subject of prayer occasionally.¹⁵ By the middle part of the nineteenth century large segments of the denomination had virtually abandoned the class meeting in America and were paying it only lip service.

After Wesley's death attendance at the class meeting began to fall off more and more rapidly. As early as 1824 a Methodist conference in America was taking note of the increasing neglect of the class meeting by

¹²Emory, Works, VII, p. 120.

¹³Leslie Church, The Early Methodist People (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 170.

¹⁴John Atkinson, The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1874), p. 218.

¹⁵L. Rosser, Class Meetings: Embracing Their Origin, Nature, Obligation, and Benefits (Richmond, Virginia: [Author], 1855), p. 288.

the membership of Methodism.¹⁶ This tendency was given even more impetus when in 1840 the general conference modified the rules to allow persons into the membership of the church without first fulfilling the initial requirements of class meeting attendance for the stated period and recommendation by a class leader. This new rule allowed satisfactory evidence of a correctness of doctrine and faith and willingness to abide by the church rules to be the only criteria for membership for those wishing to transfer from another denomination. This may seem rather inconsequential, as it undoubtedly did for the conferees who made the decision, but it had permanent effect on the pressure to attend the classes.¹⁷ The camel's nose was under the tent. The 1836 conference had also indicated a certain relaxation in its provision for a letter for those excluded because of non-attendance which said that their exclusion was not for a moral cause. This helped to remove some of the stigma from lax attendance at class. Revolt against class meeting attendance, and hence against the class meeting itself, was culminate for the southern Methodists when in 1866 they dropped the requirement of attendance in the class as a condition of membership altogether.¹⁸ It became instead volitional. It was still being nominally required in the northern portion of Methodism as late as 1872 and likely a little later. However, by 1900 the northerners, too, had ceased re-

¹⁶David Sherman, The History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1874), p. 38.

¹⁷Robert Emory, A History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), pp. 197-199.

¹⁸Samuel Emerick, Spiritual Renewal for Methodism (Nashville, Tennessee: The Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), p. 18.

quiring its membership to attend class.¹⁹ British Methodism stopped this requirement late, in 1912.²⁰ Thus about one hundred years after the death of Wesley, one of the great rules for which he had argued so strongly was set aside as no longer desirable. Suffice it to say here that, when the class attendance was made a matter of personal volition, it soon suffered death, very soon. The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church at present still carries the instructions and encouragements for members of the church who would have classes. Now, however, there is no requirement of attendance. Thus like some ghost of a forgotten past it is carried as a respected memory in the discipline of the organization which many, including its founder felt it to have built, enshrined thus in a self-constructed tomb.

IV. THE CLASS TICKETS

Wesley saw early the need for a system whereby those undesirable to the societies could be checked. As early as 1741, before the class meeting itself had come into existence, Wesley decided to use what came to be called class tickets. "The ticket," said Fitzgerald, "was practically his [the member's] certificate of membership in the early society, and answered all the purposes, in cases of removal, of commendatory letters mentioned by the Apostle Paul."²¹

¹⁹Sherman, op. cit., p. 123.

²⁰Emerick, loc. cit.

²¹O. P. Fitzgerald, The Class Meeting (Nashville, Tennessee: M. E. Church, South, Publishing House, 1880), p. 35.

In his journal for February 24, 1741, Wesley made this entry:

The bands meeting at Bristol, I read over the names of the United Society, being determined that no disorderly walker should remain therein. Accordingly I took account of every person (1) to whom any reasonable objection was made; (2) who was not known to and recommended by some on whose veracity I could depend. To those who were sufficiently recommended, tickets were given on the following days. Most of the rest I had face to face with their accusers; and such as either appeared to innocent, or confessed their faults and promised better behaviour, were received into the society. The others were put upon trial again, unless they voluntarily expelled themselves. About forty were by this means separated from us; I trust only for a season.²²

In his letter to Perronet Wesley explains this approach and his feelings regarding it.

As the society increased, I found it required still greater care to separate the precious from the vile. In order to do this I determined, at least once in three months, to talk with every member, myself, and to inquire at their own mouths, as well as of their leaders and neighbors, whether they grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. At these seasons I likewise particularly inquire whether there be any misunderstanding or difference among them, that every hindrance of peace and brotherly love may be taken out of the way.

To each of those whose seriousness and good conversation I found no reason to doubt I gave a testimony under my own hand by writing their name of a ticket prepared for that purpose, every ticket implying a strong recommendation of the person to whom it was given as if I had wrote [sic] at length, "I believe the bearer hereof to be one that fears God and works righteousness."

Those who bore these tickets (these *εἰμβόλα* or tessare, as the ancients termed them, being of just the same force with the *ἐπιστολαὶ συστατικά*, "commendatory letters," mentioned by the apostle), wherever they came, were acknowledged by their brethren and received with all cheerfulness. These were likewise of use in other respects. By these it was easily distinguished, when the Society were to meet

²² Emory, Works, III, p. 35.

apart, who were members of it and who were not. These also supplied us with a quiet and inoffensive method of removing any disorderly member. He has no new ticket at the quarterly visitation (for so often the tickets are changed), and hereby it is immediately known that he is no longer of the community.²³

Some descriptions of these tickets are extant. Fitzgerald says they were in the shape of small cards bearing pointed texts of scripture. They had on them the name of the bearer and the date. They often bore some kind of symbolical engraving such as a Bible encircled by a halo, a guardian angel, and the like.²⁴ Some were made from wood engravings; others, from coppertones. The emblems included a vase of flowers, an angel flying above the clouds blowing a trumpet, a dove, a crown, and other such things. Before 1750 usually more elaborate pictures appeared on the cards; such as Christ in the clouds having a crown in his right hand and a cross in the left, the Saviour washing the feet of a disciple, and (one which was much criticized) a picture of the crucifixion. In 1750 scripture texts began to appear, replacing the emblems, which did not finally disappear until about 1764.²⁵ Several examples of these appear in facsimile in Appendix I. It should be noted that one printed in 1765 still bears a kind of emblem. Church says, however, that a conference in 1765 agreed to standardize the form. This form is not too much unlike those printed for British Methodism as late as 1955.

After the standardization the ticket simply bore a scripture text, the member's name, and the preacher's initial of signature. In addition,

²³Telford, Letters, II, p. 300.

²⁴Fitzgerald, Class Meeting, p. 35.

²⁵Church, Early Methodist People, pp. 170-171.

there appeared a large letter of the alphabet. See Figure 4, Appendix I. This was supposed to make it easy for the gatekeepers of love feasts, covenant services, and society meetings to check the currency of the ticket at a glance.²⁶ Tickets continued in popularity in the Methodist societies for many years. They came to America with Asbury and enjoyed no small usage here.²⁷

It has been suggested that Wesley got the idea of the tickets from the Moravians. They seemed to have used paper membership certificates. It is not clear that this is so. In England the Moravians seem to have used for a short time metal tokens.²⁸ Interestingly, there is in existence a metal token which is dated 1787 and has the words "Wesleyan Methodist Church" stamped on it. This kind of thing seems to have been used among Methodists, particularly in Scotland, for admission to holy communion.²⁹

Wesley was very quick to use these tickets, too. His letter to Joseph Benson (see page 67 above) bears this out. However, his exclusions were not merely for non attendance. Private life was strongly a concern of Wesley. When he encountered moral problems, he reacted accordingly. In another letter to Joseph Benson, dated November 7, 1776, he wrote,

Not only the Assistant but every preacher is concerned to see all our Rules observed. I desire Brother Rhodes will give no tickets to those who have not constantly met their classes or to any that do not solemnly promise to deal in stolen goods no more. He and you together may put a stop to this crying sin.³⁰

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 18.

²⁸Church, loc. cit.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Telford, Letters, VI, p. 238.

Wesley declared to Thomas Carlill in May of 1777, "You cannot give a ticket to any who robs the King by selling or buying uncustomed smuggled goods."³¹

The same year he asserted in writing to Benson,

The matter is short. I require you to meet the societies of Sunderland and shields next quarter, and to give no tickets to any person who will not promise neither to buy nor sell uncustomed goods any more. I am sorry --- did not save you the trouble; I thought he had been another man.³²

Still another use of the tickets was the prevention of unworthy persons from entering the society. The "Large Minutes" reflect this practice.

Question 14. How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating into the society?

1. Give tickets to none till they are recommended by a leader, with whom they have net at least two months on trial.
2. Give notes to none but those who are recommended by one you know, or till they have met three or four times in a class.
3. Give the rules to them the first time they meet.³³

V. GENERAL DISCIPLINE

Wesley was jealous over the purity of his societies and saw the classes as the means of keeping them so. Therefore, as can be seen from the above, he urged a careful scrutiny and limitation of those who wished to enter the society. He welcomed them all, but he took them only on his conditions. At times this approach created problems. Wesley was asked once why the Methodists could not content themselves with preaching and letting God look after the converts,

³¹Ibid. ³²Emory, Works, VII, p. 78. ³³Emory, Works, V, p. 217.

instead of forming them into societies. He replied, "We have made the trial in various places; . . . but in all the seed has fallen by the highway side. There is scarce any fruit remaining."³⁴

In his letter to Nancy Bolton (pages 68 and 69 above) he made clear his attitude toward the value of the class meeting in this end. Thus he was not afraid to discipline members for varied disorders "in order to provide a clear, pure atmosphere in which the converts could be brought along without impediment and the saints could be sanctified." Another example was Wesley's concern over smugglers in the society, as has been mentioned, and those dealing in stolen goods.

On December 9, 1741, even before the class meeting had come into existence, Wesley clearly saw what he felt his responsibility was as disciplinary master of the societies. In fact this is one of the astounding aspects of his ministry: his ability to deal with people as sternly as he did and get away with it. On the day in question Wesley noted in his journal,

God humbled us in the evening by the loss of more than thirty of our little company, whom I was obliged to exclude, as no longer adorning the gospel of Christ. I believed it best to openly declare both their names and the reasons why they were excluded. We all cried unto God that this might be for their edification, and not for destruction.³⁵

December 26, 1741:

After diligent inquiry was made, I removed all those from the congregation of the faithful whose behaviour or spirit was not agreeable to the gospel of Christ; openly declaring the objections I had to each that others might fear, and cry to God for them.³⁶

³⁴Benjamin Gregory, A Handbook of Wesleyan Methodist Polity and History (London: Wesleyan Methodist Bookroom, 1888), p. 21.

³⁵Emory, Works, III, p. 236.

³⁶Ibid., p. 237.

This occurred before the inception of the class meeting. After it came into being as an institution, the same rigorous discipline of the membership was made, perhaps even more carefully. In 1743 Wesley grew dissatisfied with the way the societies were progressing in the London area. He consequently decided to begin visiting each person to speak to him personally. This did not prove feasible and so he and his brother set out together to visit the classes, not only in the London area but elsewhere as well. He told in his journal of one visit to a place called Chowden in March of 1743.

The number of those who were expelled from the society was sixty-four: two for cursing and swearing. Two for habitual Sabbath breaking. Seventeen for drunkenness. Two for retailing spiritous liquors. Three for quarrelling and brawling. One for beating his wife. Three for habitual and wilful lying. Four for railing and evil speaking. One for idleness and laziness. And, nine-and-twenty for lightness and carelessness.³⁷

More exclusions followed elsewhere.

February 20, 1743 at Newcastle:

In the following week I diligently inquired who they were that did not walk according to the gospel. In consequence of which I was obliged to put away above fifty persons. There remained above 800 in the society.³⁸

June 18, 1744 in London:

The next week, we endeavoured to purge the society of all that did not walk according to the gospel. By this means we reduced the number of members to less than nineteen hundred. But number is an inconsiderable circumstance. May God increase them in faith and love.³⁹

³⁷Ibid., p. 282

³⁸Ibid., p. p. 280.

³⁹Ibid., p. 317.

April 21, 1746:

I came to Nottingham. I had long doubted what it was which hindered the work of God here. But upon inquiry the case was plain. So many of the society were either triflers or disorderly walkers, that the blessing of God could not rest upon them; so I made short work, cutting off all such at a stroke, and leaving only that little handful who (as far as could be judged) were really in earnest to save their souls.⁴⁰

March 8 to 12 of 1747 saw Wesley cutting a swath through the Gates-head congregation.

I examined the classes . . . The society, which in the first year consisted of above 800 members, is now reduced to 400, but, according to an old proverb, the half is more than the whole. We shall not be ashamed of any of these, when we speak with our enemies in gate.⁴¹

October 1, 1748:

I preached at Waywick about one and rode quietly to Bristol. I examined the society the following week, leaving out every careless person, and everyone who willfully and obstinately refused to meet his brethren weekly. By this means their number was reduced from nine hundred to about seven hundred and thirty.⁴²

October 9, 1748:

I began examining the classes in Kingswood; and was never before so fully convinced of the device of Satan, which has often made our hands hang down, and our minds evil affected to our brethren. Now as ten times before, a cry was gone forth, "What a scandal do these people bring upon the gospel! What a society is this! With all these drunkards and tale bearers and evil speakers in it!" I expected therefore, that I should find a heavy task upon my hands; and that none of these scandalous people might be concealed, I first met all the leaders, and inquired particularly of each person in every class. I repeated this inquiry when the classes themselves met. And what was the ground of all this outcry? Why, two persons had relapsed into drunkenness within three months' time; and one woman was proved to have made, or at least related, an idle story concerning another. I should rather have expected two and twenty instances of the former, and one hundred of the latter kind.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 366.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 392.

⁴²Ibid., p. 440.

⁴³Ibid.

July 25, 1753 (near Cornwall):

I began examining the Society; but soon was obliged to stop short. I found an accursed thing among them; well nigh one and all bought or sold uncustomed goods. I therefore delayed speaking to any more till I had met them altogether. This I did in the evening, and told them plain, either they must put this abomination away, or they would see my face no more. Fri.²⁷.--They severally promised so to do. I trust this plague is stayed.⁴⁴

June 16, 1757 (Sunderland):

In the evening I preached at Sunderland. I then met the society, and told them plain, none could stay with us, unless he would part with all sin; particularly robbing the king, stealing or buying run goods; which I could no more suffer, than robbing on the highway. This I enforced on every member the next day. A few would not promise to refrain: so these I was forced to cut off. About two hundred and fifty were of a better mind.⁴⁵

October 3, 1759 (Norwich):

I met the society at five, and explained the nature and use of meeting in a class. Upon inquiry, I found, that we have now about five hundred members. But a hundred and fifty of those do not pretend to meet at all in class. Of those, therefore, I made no account; they hang on a single thread.⁴⁶

April 28, 1760 :

I began visiting the classes in London, and that with more exactness than ever before. After going through them, I found the society now contained about three-and-twenty hundred and fifty members; few of whom we could discern to be triflers, and none, we hope, live in any wilful sin.⁴⁷

April 24, 1761:

I retired to Lewisham, and transcribed a list of the society. About a hundred and sixty I left out, to whom I can do no good at present.⁴⁸

July 29, 1761 (York):

I met the classes and found many therein who were much alive to God, but many others who were utterly dead, which sufficiently accounts for the society's not increasing.⁴⁹

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 558-559.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 634-635.

⁴⁶Emory, Works, IV, p. 44.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 91.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 104.

November 17, 1774:

In the evening I returned to Norwich. Never was a poor society so neglected, as this has been for the year past. The morning preaching was at an end; the bands suffered to fall in pieces; and no care at all taken of the classes, so that whether they met or not, it was all one; going to church and sacrament were forgotten; and the people rambled hither and thither as they listed.

On Friday evening I met the society, and told them plain, I was resolved to have a regular society or none. I then read the rules, and desired everyone to consider whether he was willing to walk by these rules or no. Those in particular, of meeting their class every week, unless hindered by distance or sickness, (the only reasons for not meeting which I could allow,) and being constant at church and sacrament. I desired those who were so minded to meet the next night, and the rest to stay away. The next night we had far the greater part; on whom I strongly enforced the same thing. Sunday, 20.-- I spoke to every leader, concerning every one under his care; and put out every person whom they could not recommend. After this was done, out of two hundred and four members, one hundred and seventy-four remained. And these points shall be carried, if only fifty remain in the society.⁵⁰

A testimony to the godliness of this same man, John Wesley, who stirred up the whirlwinds and the resultant tenderness of the people after they had been so treated is seen in the remark entered in the journal for November 22, the day he left Norwich, "Tuesday, 22.--I took a solemn and affectionate leave of the society at Norwich."⁵¹

The membership came in for discipline, but also the leaders were not exempt. See this excerpt from a Wesley letter to John Valton, 1782.

I cannot allow J. S. to be any longer a leader; and if he will lead the class, whether I will or no, I require you to put him out of our society. If twenty of his class will leave the society, too, they must. The first lost is the best. Better forty members should be lost than our discipline lost. They are no Methodists that will bear no restraints.⁵²

⁵⁰ibid., p. 427. ⁵¹Ibid., pp. 427-428. ⁵²Emory, Works, VII, p. 241.

Wesley's dealings with the Dublin society regarding this problem shows that it sometimes recurred. On June 22, 1787, Wesley wrote,

I began visiting classes [in Dublin], which employed me [from Friday] to the Thursday morning. We found it necessary to exclude one hundred and twelve members. There remained eleven hundred and thirty-six.⁵³

A little over a year and a half later, this society had a "new room." Wesley commented after having preached there on March 29, 1789,

I really took knowledge of the change which God has wrought in this congregation within a few years. A great part of them were light and airy; now almost all appear as serious as death . . . I think there is a greater number of those that are now clearly perfected in love, than I now find even in London itself.⁵⁴

In spite of these good reports which Wesley had uncovered and the good thoughts of Dublin, he had another report to give when he visited a few months later in June of the same year. "On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, I visited the classes; now containing a little above a thousand members, after I had excluded about a hundred."⁵⁵

From the foregoing it will be seen that Wesley, both personally and through his preachers and assistants, did maintain a grip of still on the societies. At the same time it can be seen that there was that influence which tended to "creep in" and destroy the moral lives of the members. Wesley's belief that this needed firm dealing stands out in the history of the church of the last few hundred years. It reflects incredible courage on his part which has little or no parallel in other similar church leaders. Reducing societies by excluding members for not maintaining the

⁵³Emory, IV, op. cit., p. 670. ⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 714-715.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 725.

standards of the society is positively frightening for the average pastor or denominational leader today. The onus of having one's area of responsibility diminish, which seemed to fail in bothering Wesley much, is well nigh unbearable to most leaders in the present day. Elaborate measures are taken by today's leadership to avoid disciplinary situations into the likes of which in his day Wesley seemed to plunge with abandon.

This disciplinary power did not die with Wesley, nor did it stay in England. The discipline of the societies in this fashion did disappear after a while but it was not an overnight process after Wesley's death. It went away slowly. One report shows that this close discipline was very much alive in early America. Thousands on the borders were moved by preaching in the revivals that followed the American Revolution, but these were not immediately received into the fellowship of church membership. Rather they were usually started in a class, led by the most spiritual of the new converts. Such was the experience of James Finley.

In a short time [after his conversion and rudimentary preaching experiences] a circuit preacher came into our neighborhood, and formed us [Finley and some of his family and friends] into a class or society, and appointed me leader. This was an entirely new thing to us all. . . . Of those who composed the class, none but myself and my wife had ever been in one (this was just one); and, hence, class meeting to them was an entirely novel thing. I appointed a class meeting, the next sabbath, at my house.⁵⁶

Such was the growth of the church in America. It was a loose and difficultly controllable thing.

⁵⁶ James Finley, Autobiography of Reverend James B. Finley (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1854), p. 181.

The church grew marvelously in all the new States, to be sure. The Western Annual Conference, which included everything west of the mountains until it was divided up in 1812, had a total membership of only two thousand eight hundred at the beginning of the century; but in 1811 it had grown to more than thirty thousand! Yet this did not include a quarter of all those who had professed conversion in the camp meetings.⁵⁷

The Methodist leadership did not let this phenomenal growth possibility go to their heads and act unwisely to grow too speedily.

Membership in the Methodist Church was still a prize to be sought; it was still offered only to those who gave lasting evidence of a change of life, who entered a class and continued in attendance there, and who, after a most searching examination by local leaders and the traveling preacher, were formally recommended for the great honor. The Methodist Discipline in those days was not a little black book filled with curious admonitions of interest mainly as remnants of a past history; it was a way of conduct in which Methodists walked with meticulous care. And if they departed from it, they were acknowledged to be backsliders, and as such were cast out. Even the great McKendree . . . was twice a member of a Methodist class, and twice allowed to go his own way, before he was finally admitted to the membership of the Methodist Church.⁵⁸

The purpose of the preacher was in large part supposed to be circulation from class to class and to purge out those who were not living up to the disciplinary requirements of the church.

The Methodism of that day expected that conversion and admission into the church would have a recognizable effect; that it would lead to a different kind of living than had been the case previously. Otherwise, what good was it? That would seem a grotesque notion to the people who join the church today just because it seems the proper thing to do, but it was not so considered in the days of our great-grandfathers. And the result was a church of high religious voltage. . . . The core of every Methodist church was the class meeting. In fact there were hundreds of class meetings on the frontier where there were no churches.⁵⁹

The sturdiness of the disciplinary functions of the church and the classes can be seen through the anguished eyes of a doctor of the western

⁵⁷Halford E. Luckock, Paul Hutchinson, and Robert Goodloe, The Story of Methodism (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1949), p. 271.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 271-272.

border, whose wife was brought under the discipline of the church for wearing some simple jewelry, which the rules of the society were interpreted to forbid (see Appendix II for a copy of a letter in which the doctor complained about his wife's and his treatment). While this affair may seem extreme, it nevertheless reflects the seriousness with which the early Methodist leadership took the disciplinary admonitions.

Methodism of Wesley's day and later needed to have high standards. Drinking and smuggling were only two of the moral problems of that day. To allow them to stand would have discredited all that Methodism stood for. To hold the doctrine of entire sanctification on the one hand and to permit moral laxity on the other by the claimants of that experience would have been interolerably inconsistent for the leaders of Methodism.

On the need of this strict attitude an article appeared in one of the Methodist journals in 1835. It reflects the fear of the times (Wesley's and later) of the pain of the discipline together with its necessity.

What would Methodism have been without its vigorous system of discipline? None can read our early records, without perceiving the value of Mr. Wesley and the first preachers set upon this only means of purifying and invigorating the Christian Church. It is no proof that discipline is now less required, or ought not to be relaxed, that it is so clamourously resisted. There will always be those who object to be its subjects, and others to be its administrators. Some, in their anxiety about numerical strength, are, perhaps, in danger of undervaluing religious purity. Some have natural timidity, and will not endure the trouble. Some have not the perspective view of the tendencies of evil and do not, therefore, anticipate the results of its full development, and perhaps, some are tempted to act eventually on the costly principle of a miserable expediency instead of walking by rule; and trust the providence of God to prevent, or overrule, or mitigate those consequences which they cannot expect soon will result.

There are societies which have suffered excisions of the prining knife, and whose present healthy, thriving, vigorous character and hearty engagement in every department of Methodism, may satisfy us that a temporary inconvenience may see the lasting blessing.⁶⁰

Isaac Taylor, a critic of Methodism, had the advantage of looking back over the years of Methodism from 1852, when he wrote. He did some "Monday morning quarterback" observation of the Methodist movement and came up with some real misgivings about Wesley's disciplinary approach, despite its apparent success.

Wesley's soul glowed with the truest philanthropy: but he . . . was a theorizer. It was in love that he struck the heart with the sledge-hammer of his theoretical logic; and he brake the flint in pieces. As he dealt with the boys at Kingswood, so with the adults in his societies, that is to say, with an iron intensity of purpose; and human affections, in passing under his hand, were much damaged, or were forced into half their volume.⁶¹

Wesley answered those who said that this kind of discipline required a special, God-given ability, whose implication in saying so was that he did not have that divine gift. On the occasion of his excision of the society at Gateshead (see page 78 supra) he wrote in his journal,

I had been often told, it was impossible for me to distinguish the precious from the vile, without the miraculous discernment of spirits. But now saw, more clearly than ever, that this might be done, and without much difficulty, supposing only two things: First, Courage and steadiness in the examiner. Secondly, Common sense and common honesty in the leader of each class. I visit; for instance, the class in the close, of which Robert Peacock is leader. I ask, "Does this and this person in your class live in drunkenness or any outward sin? Does he go to church, and use the other means of grace?"

⁶⁰Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 433.

⁶¹Isaac Taylor, Wesley and Methodism (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852, pp. 85-86.

Does he meet you as often, as he has opportunity?" Now, if Robert Peacock has common sense, he can answer these question truly; and if he has common honesty, he will. And if not, some other in the class has both, and can and will answer for him. Where is the difficulty then of finding out if there be any disorderly walker in this class, and, consequently in any other? The question is not concerning the heart; but the life. And the general tenor of this, I do not say cannot be known, but cannot be hid without a miracle.⁶²

So the struggle raged during Wesley's day and after. The discipline met with resistance. Was Wesley wrong? Should he have been so rigid and demanding of his classes and societies? The best answer is obtained when one compares the results of his dealing with the societies and classes to that of more permissive superintendents. A critique of this latter group appears in Section IV infra.

One thing is certain. Wesley used discipline and either because of it or in spite of it Methodism worked and grew as a system. Considering the evangelical success of early Methodism and the lack of it in its latter day heirs one cannot help but feel Wesley's discipline system, now lacking its compulsion, was what made Methodism. No group has the compulsion which so characterized Wesley's earlier societies. No church today has the influence, comparatively speaking, that Wesley's societies had. At least a part of the success of these societies was due then to the rather rigid discipline system which Wesley gave them.

⁶²Emory, Works, III, pp. 391-392.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPREAD OF THE CLASS MEETING

The class meeting spread widely and surprisingly into fields where it would not have been expected to go. Two of these will be discussed in this chapter. One is the spread of the class meeting in the expanding Methodist Church; the other is the expansion of the class meeting into the field of politics.

I. IN THE FIELD OF RELIGION

At Home in England

As has been pointed out already, the class meeting was generally accepted by 1746 in English Methodism. Stevenson's statistics show that City Road Chapel (The Foundry - the first purely Methodist society) grew from 426 members (plus 201 on trial) in April of 1742, the year of the inception of the class meeting to a total membership of 2200 in December of 1743. A listing of the class statistics for 1742 is given in Appendix III.

It is interesting to compare the numbers in the bands with those in the classes. In 1744 there were 77 in the select societies of the Foundry, most of whom were band leaders, which would indicate the presence of 77 bands at that time. In 1745 those in the bands including leaders and members on trial, of which the latter were about 300, was 639. Even allowing for the "on trial" members this points to a relatively small percentage in the bands out of the total membership of 2200.¹

¹George Stevenson, City Road Chapel, London, and Its Associations London: [Author], 1872, p. 33.

In the classes there were a total of 66 leaders, men and women. Stevenson lists 65 classes. Church says that originally the classes had six or seven members (1742).² However, Wesley speaks from the beginning of intending to have 10-12 in the classes. It is likely that the number increased to ten or twelve after the class leaders stopped traveling to individual homes. Since this happened quite early in the history of the class meeting, it can be assumed that the class membership quickly assumed the larger membership. Therefore in comparing the total membership of the classes with that of the bands on the basis of 10 members in each class by 1745, it can be seen that even this conservative member estimate for the classes reveals a very rapid growth and that they were already exceeding the membership of the bands.

Since Wesley was so careful about pruning out those who would not attend class, and since class meeting was generally accepted by 1746, it is safe to guess that by that year there were at least 2200 class members in the Foundry if not more. It is not likely that the bands grew proportionately because they were not so rigidly required. This general lag in the bands is seen through Wesley's ministry. Though he promoted them fervently, he lamented the fact that they were not popular. They persisted for some time, after his death, but died well before the class in both England and America.

No men led women's classes, though they did so later in the Foundry and in other churches. Most of the classes had evening hours because of

²Church, Early Methodist People, p. 157.

long work days for the men. Afternoon classes always seemed a rarity even in the beginning, according to Church.³ Apparently he considered 4:00 and 4:30 P. M. to belong to the evening hours. The near absence of Sunday classes is to be explained by Wesley's concern not to conflict with the schedule of the Anglican Church.⁴

There was a popularity factor about the classes which cannot long be overlooked by the student of the classes. One indicator of this is the list of social, or perhaps professional, members of the classes at Bingley. This place is first mentioned in Wesley's journal as visited by him for preaching purposes in July of 1761. A listing of the trades found in the class book of one of the classes shows these different professions: two farmers, one plasterer, two husbandmen, two corwainers, one old man, four spinners, five stuff makers, two tailors, six weavers, one gentleman, one glazier, one laborer, one woolcomber, one servant, one yeoman, and one shopkeeper.⁵

About the classes qualities of social and professional integration, Church says,

There is a complete absence of class distinction in these lists. They represent a "family" whose spiritual kinship was recognized by each member. They came together in an intimacy that could not recognize social barriers, and the names of the people who met on perfect equality each appear side by side, whether they are described as gentlemen or labourers, yeomen or apothecaries. Those who could enter a Methodist Society must first abandon all idea of caste.⁶

³Ibid. ⁴Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 51.

⁵Leslie Church, More about the Early Methodist People (London: Epworth Press, 1949), pp. 2-3.

⁶Ibid.

Outside of England

Not only did the class meeting acceptance spread through social strata across England, but also, it went literally around the world. Carter says,

Again and again John Wesley found societies in being where he had not preached--a convert had testified to his neighbors, their faith in the Saviour had been kindled, and a "class" or a society was ready for incorporation into the Methodist plan.⁷

By 1770 the total number of Methodist preachers was one hundred and the total number of members was 29,406. By 1834 the total number of preachers was 3770 and the total membership in the different parts of the world was 1,558,000.⁸

Methodism naturally moved to Scotland. When it did, difficulties were encountered in getting the Scots to submit to the discipline of the class meeting. Church suggests that this was probably an innovation which the Scots thought unnecessary.⁹ Too, it likely was true that not a little suspicion and natural rivalry was directed toward English preachers and the English practices of the south.

Nathaniel Gilbert, a resident of Antigua in the West Indies got hold of some literature by the Wesleys and was converted. Apparently this

⁷Henry Carter, The Methodist Heritage (London: Epworth Press, 1951), p. 133.

⁸B. Carvosso, A Memoir of Mr. William Carvosso (New York: Lane and Scott, 1849). p. 17.

⁹Church, Early Methodist People, pp. 179-180.

happened while he was visiting England. He went back to Antigua and began Bible studies among his slaves. Eventually, he started class meetings among them. Simon observes that considerable good was done by this.¹⁰ Gilbert and two negro female slaves which he had brought with him to England together began a work which was eventually to reach into Africa from the West Indies with missionary zeal for Methodism.¹¹ Part of the outcome of this work was seen by Coke in 1786. He left England with some missionaries bound for Nova Scotia. A storm drove the ship to seek shelter to the south in Antigua. When he embarked from the ship there, Coke ran into a man, who had been a class leader in England. This man was a ship carpenter. He was on his way to Christmas services. This man now had in his care a Methodist society composed of 1569 souls, all of which were black save ten. When Gilbert had died some time earlier, the society had been held together by the two negro slavewomen.¹²

On the island of Dominica, Coke found that two Methodist soldiers in the barracks had joined with two Moravian negroes to form a class there. That was in 1786. In 1895 there was a society of eight hundred members which had sprung from this class.¹³

Coke discovered a warm reception on an island which had formerly had "no means of grace." The negroes on the island informed him of the visit

¹⁰John Simon, John Wesley, the Master Builder (London: Epworth Press, 1927), p. 44.

¹¹Abel Stephens, The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century Called Methodism, II (New York, Eaton and Mains, 1895), p. 355.

¹²Ibid., pp. 353-355.

¹³Ibid., p. 356.

to the island of a slave from the United States. His name was Harry. He had been a member of a Methodist class there. He found himself left without a religious associate on the island and so he began to preach the name of Christ. Opposition arose as he gained wide acceptance. Coke arrived the day Harry was officially ordered silent and he preached to the waiting congregation with good results. Eventually Harry was taken from the island, but classes had been formed and the leaders and exhorters had arisen. Soon an underground kind of society existed of about 200 members.¹⁴ Similar stories accompany the spread of Methodism throughout the islands.

When Methodist missionaries finally came to represent Methodism in Africa, class were formed as usual. All the first and second group of missionaries to go to the western equatorial regions in the 1820's died of disease. However, because the classes had been formed among the converts the work survived.¹⁵ A young missionary named John Dunwell landed at a place called Cape Coast Castle in 1835. In six months he was dead. Some natives however had been converted and had been formed into a class. Stephens tells the rest.

After burying him [Dunwell], the infant Church met to consult on what they should do now. They held a class-meeting, and at its conclusion inserted in their Minute book a single but significant sentence: "We will remain in the new profession, for, though the missionary is dead, God lives." They knelt down together and consecrated the vow in prayer. They remained steadfast, and became the nucleus of the whole system of the Gold Coast Wesleyan Missions.¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 358-362.

¹⁵Stephens, History of Methodism, III, pp. 354-355.

¹⁶Ibid.

The class meeting came to Australia in 1812. Between 1788 and 1813, the population of Sidney rose to 20,000. There were only four established church chaplains there in these years. Two teachers, Thomas Bowden and John Hosking, sometime in this interim introduced Wesleyanism into the continent. They organized a class, consisting of themselves, their wives, two schoolgirls, two soldiers from the garrison at Sidney, and four others. The first class meeting met on March 6, 1812, and the message of it was finally received in London in March 1814.¹⁷

North of there in the Fiji Islands an extraordinary work of class meeting activity was to be accomplished. Missionaries first appeared there in 1835 and in 1845-46 a great spiritual awakening occurred. By 1860 there were 60,000 professed Christians in the islands. In 1875 an epidemic swept through the islands and measles killed 150 catechists, 200 local preachers, 700 class leaders, and 8000 church members, all natives. In spite of this set back there were in 1876, just one year later, 10 missionaries, One English schoolmaster, 54 native ministers, 764 catechists, 2941 day-school teachers, 3107 Sunday school teachers, 810 local preachers, 2406 class leaders, 5436 persons on trial, 1178 Sunday schools with 39,783 scholars, and 89, 532 hearers.¹⁸ It is likely that the last two groups may have included interested but as yet uncommitted persons; hence the names. The idea of

¹⁷William D. Lawson, Wesleyan Local Preachers (Newcastle-on-Tyne, England: [Author], 1874), pp. 305-306.

¹⁸Matthew Simpson, Cyclopedia of Methodism (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1882), p. 359.

native islanders being their own classleaders is exciting. It shows the degree and effectiveness of the revivals which went on there and how the work was sustained in the classes. Even today the Fiji Islands are noted for their Methodist religious outlook and their general religious-moral concern.

A contrast is seen in the remarks by Simpson regarding the work of Methodist missionaries in China and Ceylon. No classleaders are listed among the Chinese mission figures though most of the others noted in the Fiji Islands list are so noted. The China work began in 1847. Likewise in Ceylon no classleader figures are given, indicating that the work there, begun in 1813, did not include classes. Neither of these works in the same period of time flourished in the proportion that the mission work in the islands area did. Of course, the lack of classes may not necessarily be entirely to blame but this undoubtedly had no little effect.¹⁹

In North America

Methodism and the class found its way to Canada where all was not always immediate and full acceptance. An example of such a community response was that of the town of St. Johns, deserted finally by Methodist preachers as hopeless for Methodism. James Caughey, a Methodist preacher, decided to undertake the storming of this place for Christ. When preaching in private homes availed nothing, he turned to soul-searching and prayer which was followed by reformation of himself. He eventually found the local

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 258, 189.

tannery building available to him. Two cleaning women helped him get it ready. Interest arose from these activities and a good congregation turned up the first night. "A few pointed appeals brought some of them to tears . . . sinners were awakened and converted to God. A class was formed of fifty-three members."²⁰ Thus the class meeting often penetrated difficult places.

To the south in what was to become the United States Methodism had great success. For the first seventy years after arriving here the class meeting sustained much of the vigor which Wesley had tried to enforce into it in England. This was especially true on the frontier in the western part of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and southward in Kentucky and Tennessee. Revival spawned class meetings and classes gave birth to Societies of Methodists. The circuit-riding preacher was the examiner of the classes and the evangelist. He was an awesome figure in those rough mountain days. He saw to it that the classes kept up and that the members stayed in line. About the institution of the class meeting Coke and Asbury said, "We praise the Lord that they have been made a blessing to scores of thousands . . . In short, we can truly say that, through the grace of God, our classes form the pillars of our work."²¹

Thus the class meeting appeared with the first preachers of Wesley-

²⁰James Caughey, Methodism in Earnest, A History of a Great Revival in England in which Twenty Thousand Souls Professed Faith in Christ and Ten Thousand Professed Sanctification (Louisville, Kentucky: John Early, 1852), p. 55.

²¹John Atkinson, The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1874), p. 167.

anism and grew with the church. Back in the east after the American Revolution and the establishment of the nation, the churches in the cities expectably were the first to begin to relax their grip on the membership through the classes. This will be noted in more detail in a later chapter. On the frontiers, however, the class meeting was often the core of the church. There were literally hundreds of such meetings in those days.

The circuit riding preachers, sometimes with circuits stretching hundreds of miles, always made it a point (ideally) to visit the classes at each place on the circuit. Often where an awakening would take place, the preacher would leave a class behind him where none had been before. The next time through he would organize it into a church. In this way the Methodists grew on the border and elsewhere in America from 2800 in 1800 to 30,000 in 1811.²²

Bishop Whatcoat, an early circuit rider, in his journal tells commonly of the class meetings.²³ He was converted by 1770 and led a class for six years in those early days. Sweet refers to the classes as the local unit of the church.

Peter Cartwright tells of living in Kentucky as a fourteen-year-old when the Cane Ridge Revival struck. In the years before this time, after the family had moved to Logan County, Cartwright's mother walked four miles regularly every Sunday to class meeting. The little class had been formed by Jacob Lurton, a traveling Methodist preacher in that area. There were thirteen members and a local preacher. One could well guess that others

²²Luckock, Hutchinson, and Goodloe, Story of Methodism, p. 271.

²³William Warren Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, IV, "The Methodists" (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 119.

came to it from some distance, too.²⁴ When young Peter let it be known in 1802 that he was under conviction, it was the class leader and the local preacher who were sent for. He was not converted then but was a short time later at a "sacramental meeting." This was a kind of large gathering of the people from the countryside for the observing of the sacrament. It was a precursor of the camp meeting. In fact the original Cane Ridge meeting was a sacramental meeting.²⁵

When Cartwright was assigned his first circuit as a young preacher, just about a year later, his concern was to "form some kind of circuit, and gather up the scattered members, and organize classes."²⁶ His autobiography speaks often of creating, meeting with, or just plain praising classes.²⁷

James Finley likewise refers to the class meeting as a good influence. He, like Cartwright, makes frequent mention of the class meetings which it seems to have been common for him to be a part of. He also mentions some leaders of distinction.²⁸

This probably was repeated as a ministerial experience by numbers of other preachers who walked and rode those borders before the class meeting died out. This was their job. Of the impact of these class meetings upon American Methodists, Sweet says,

²⁴Peter Cartwright, Autobiography of Peter Cartwright (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), p. 29.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 36-37. ²⁶Ibid., p. 53. ²⁷Ibid., pp. 51, 55, 63, 118, 336-337.

²⁸Finley, Autobiography, pp. 182, 203, 230, 246, 259, 264.

Frontier Methodism had a very large social influence. Once a week the class leaders called their classes together, and there the New Englander and the Southerner, the "Yorker", and the eastern shore man, The Teuton, and the Celt mingled on a platform of exact equality. The class leader was the neighbor and friend, and freely and frankly they discussed their religious convictions, their fears and hopes together. They spoke and sang and prayed, and thus sectional prejudices passed and there was born a distinct Western spirit and feeling. These class meetings were the smallest of the Methodist gatherings.²⁹

Methodism was filled with class meetings in early America. The biographers of the first half of the century seem to recognize this because in their books they mention the class meeting not as a strange phenomenon, but as an old friend whom everybody knew and understood . . . and one which they expected to be around for a long time. As has been mentioned it was not to remain alive at the end of the century. However, even as late as 1874 there were estimated to be 50,000 class leaders in service in the Methodist Church in America.³⁰ In 1902 there were 1500 people meeting in classes in West End, London.³¹ More than this, and strangely enough, there seemed to be considerable interest in the class meeting among the Methodists on the continent of Europe. An American bishop who had just returned from Europe and conventions of Methodists there told Goodell of the interest in the class meeting.

More than a thousand of these conventions were held, and many thousands of the laity took part in them. The subject of class meetings was the first of four topics named for discussion. Bishop Vincent says, "One is glad to know that the class meeting in Continental Methodism is still a most important factor, and that in English Methodism, thanks largely to the wisdom and breadth and vigor of ex-President of English Methodism Hugh Price Hughes and the Methodist Times, it is experiencing a genuine and we trust permanent revival. For we may be sure

²⁹Sweet, Religion, p. 67. ³⁰Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 276

³¹Goodell, Drillmaster of Methodism, p. 29.

that Methodism of the true type goes up or down with the growth or deterioration of the class meeting."³²

However, despite high hopes contrariwise, these men saw Methodism's cherished means of grace go down in the dust. It has not risen from where it has fallen even to this day. However, in its day the class meeting had enough dynamic power to spread not only throughout world Methodism, but also, it affected another field of human interest and endeavor, the political field. Look then for a few moments at its impact on England's struggles for labor reform and recognize the practical importance of the class meeting outside of the purely spiritual realm.

II. INTO THE POLITICAL FIELD

As the Industrial Revolution got underway in the latter part of the eighteenth century, there developed gross social injustices. Men were exploited. Not only men but women and children also found themselves in the grindstones of the mills, the factories, and mines of those days. Circumstances and deliberate political action forced more and more of the farm classes to migrate to the cities and mining areas to give themselves over to a life of poverty, hard work, and early death. Their sense of self-worth fell precipitously. Wesley reported again and again of visiting the poor districts and finding squalor, ignorance, and filth.

As the Methodist revival wore on through the century, men came to sense anew their own worth. There arose quite naturally considerable feeling against the injustice and the exploitation by aristocratic landlords and factory owners. Trouble brewed in England as it did all over Europe.

³²Ibid., p. 47

There portended serious times of difficulty. The end of the century in Europe saw the beginning of this trouble in the French Revolution. Godless philosophy was making headway, in part a reaction to the centuries of extremity in the Church and in part a response to the cry of materialism at it would arise in the future. Men were tending to become more and more cynical on the Continent about the inability of religion to provide an answer to their dilemma. Had this condition remained in effect, England would have surely suffered the fate of other European powers. However, in England the shift from farming society to industrial complex was made with surprising facility, considering the agonies that same change caused over the rest of Europe. One reason for the ease of adjustment, though it was still quite difficult, was the Methodist revival, and particularly its class meetings.

Methodism, and especially its class meeting, seemed to have an attraction for working class people. "The weekly meeting," says Wearmouth "was somewhat like a family gathering. There was usually a freed and easy atmosphere about the place . . . These class meetings provided the life-blood of the Methodist Connexion."¹

One of the good effects of the class meeting in this area was the preparation of men who could lead a sanely operated labor movement without destruction of the economy. Much of the influence in this direction came from a group which divided out of Methodism in the earliest years of the nineteenth century. The struggle had been over the camp meeting style of

¹Robert F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England, 1800-1850 (London: Epworth Press, 1937), pp. 8-9.

services. The main body of Methodism had held that this was very un-British. A small group of energetic dissidents left the church and formed what came to be known as the Primitive Methodist Connexion. The main body in the conference minutes of 1807 asserted, "Even supposing such meetings might be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and are likely to be productive of considerable mischief. We disclaim all connection with them."²

It was to be through the camp meeting, too, in part that the Primitive Methodists were to exert further political influences. There developed out of this work and that of the class meeting a system of purely labor-political camp meetings and classes. It was out of these that the labor movement of England received much of its peaceful change pressure for about fifteen critical years. The indirect influence lasted much longer, as will be seen.

The first major movement to record a class meeting for political (union) practice was the Society of Political Protestants. This group was formed in 1818 and announced its intention of having classes and leaders who would not number over 20. Non-violence and openness were to characterize the meetings of the classes. Each class was to ardently promote the formation of other classes.³

Another society formed in the same year along the same lines. It was to have classes of 12 with leaders elected by the classes, dues of one penny per week, and even periodic leaders' meetings were provided for. This had been a feature of the Methodist classes. Also, visitation of the

²Ibid., p. 2

³Ibid., pp. 64-66.

classes by members of the central committee were to be made. In the same town where this was done a group of women workers organized along similar lines.⁴

The declaration of the Political Protestants of Newcastle-on-Tyne (one of Wesley's frequent preaching places) reads in part as follows:

Deeply lamenting the condition of our plundered and insulted country, we have resolved to unite ourselves under this denomination of Political Protestants for the purposes of protesting against infringement of our indisputable right to real representation . . .

We do therefore resolve to meet once a week in small classes not exceeding twenty in a class, and to subscribe a penny each for the purpose of purchasing such means of information as may be required. . . . Leaders of each class shall hold a meeting once a month, and to do away with suspicion we will not permit any secret transaction whatever.⁵

The first public avowal of the paternity of the Methodist class meetings to the political groups came later, in 1831, at a meeting of the National Union of Working Classes. It was here that Daniel O'Connell suggested this Wesleyan expedient, noting that it had worked so well for Methodists, it might be good "sauce for the gander" as well. William Benbow approved of this and remarked that one had only to look at the Methodists to see the success of the plan.⁶

After this the class meeting system was used for some time. Wearmouth says that the peak of this practice in the National Union saw about

⁴Ibid., pp. 70-72.

⁵Maldwyn Edwards, After Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1938), pp. 45-46.

⁶Wearmouth, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

one hundred and seven classes meeting. A decline began in 1833, and this peak was never again achieved.⁷ None were reported after November 16, 1834. The political camp meetings were not quite as closely oriented to politics as were the classes, some of these even having Bible expositions in addition to hymns, prayers, and political speeches.⁸

The operation of the classes in unionism is thus described by Wearmouth:

The Newcastle Union may be taken as an example of other unions in the North. In the weekly class the class leader was expected to "read or cause to be read, interesting extracts from papers and political publications." He had to "encourage the members to make remarks" and to "repress any violent and improper expression." It was also ordained that the class leaders shall determine what papers and books shall be purchased . . . Useful cheap tracts, when sent to a classleader's meeting, are to be distributed to his class as soon as possible; and each member to exert himself in circulating papers friendly to the public cause.⁹

The effects of these meetings were several. In discussing the meeting plan for one such group Davies mentions one of the effects of the class kind of political group.

So in a large number of places the early trade unions were organized as "Chapels" (and the name still lingers), often with small groups under a leader for the payment of subscriptions, in the manner of the Methodist Class Meetings. Meetings often began with extempore prayer, and very often the organizer and the leaders spoke in very much the same way as they did from the pulpit on Sundays, urging a firm reliance on God, a strict moral control of oneself, and a dauntless opposition to wrong. When the situation seemed to many to call for violence, they favoured peaceful negotiations; when the members were inclined to rest on the results already achieved, they called for ceaseless vigilance.¹⁰

Another contribution of the political classes was educational, however, and this may have been the better result in the long run.

⁷Ibid., p. 107. ⁸Ibid., p. 175. ⁹Ibid., p. 84

¹⁰Ruppert E. Davies, Methodism (London: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 153-154.

Untutored working men in those days knew very little about the secrets of collective action and still less about the intricacies of class-made laws . . . Hence they came together in small groups, not only to pay their weekly subscriptions, but also to get useful information concerning political questions . . . It was in reality a school of political education.¹¹

Thus the Methodist class meetings became a kind of training ground which prepared people for action in other areas of life; namely, that of politics. What better ground to prepare labor reformers, politicians, and those who would someday run the government could there be?

The seed was sown by open-air meetings, the harvest was gathered by class meetings, in which members shared their experience and enjoyed Christian fellowship. The class meeting formed the nucleus of the local society. Southey said the organization of Methodism familiarized the lower classes with the idea of combining in associations, making rules for their own government, raising funds, and communicating from one part of the kingdom to another.¹²

The movement to adopt the class meeting system into the labor reform tide developed quickly and, perhaps strangely, subsided just as quickly. The National Union adopted the system or at least openly espoused it in 1831, but, as has been seen, it had fallen into disfavor by late 1834 in that group. The Chartists picked it up in 1839 during a reorganization effort. They decided that their organization should extend to the whole country. It should be divided into districts and the system pursued by the Methodists adopted in every district. These were then divided into classes. The organization even included "local preachers" and class leaders. Yawned the Manchester Guardian of that day, this new organization

¹¹Wearmouth, Methodism and Working Classes, p. 175.

¹²Edwards, After Wesley, p. 45.

was of "no general interest."¹³

The Primitive Methodist Connexion was important in all this work, because a long list of names of active trade unionists of the nineteenth century includes great numbers of local preachers from this organization. A typical example was one John Bell of Durham County. He is reported in the records of his organization to have been a miner sixty-seven years, a class leader for fifty-two years, a local preacher for forty-six years, and assistant manager of the Murton Colliery. He was chosen secretary of the Murton Lodge of the Durham Miners' Union and was thereupon dismissed from the company's service.¹⁴

The Chartists continued the practice of class meetings until about 1850. Their camp meetings never failed to have strong biblical and religious overtones with hymns, Bible studies, and sermons much in evidence in addition to their political aspects.¹⁵

The Methodists looked upon all this with some concern. A correspondent from northern England wrote to Jabez Bunting, one of great Methodist lights of the early years of the century, that agitators had widely adopted the Methodist system.¹⁶ Men were finding it easy to step from class leadership in the church to political class leadership and from local preaching to leading open air meetings for unionism.

Bunting himself viewed this with alarm.

¹³Wearmouth, op. cit., pp. 174-175.

¹⁴Davies, Methodism, p. 154.

¹⁵Wearmouth, op. cit., p. 175.

¹⁶Edwards, op. cit., p. 46.

The radicals have adopted almost the whole Methodist economy, the terms, "class leader", "district meetings", &c. &c, being perfectly current among them . . . If men are to be drilled at missionary and Bible meetings to face a multitude with recollection, and acquired facility of address, and begin to employ the mighty moral weapon thus gained to the endangering of the very existence of the Government of the country, we may certainly begin to tremble for the consequences.¹⁷

Nor was Jabez Bunting the only person so concerned and neither was the society of the concerned limited to those in the Methodist Church. The government, too, had taken interest in this. The Chartists, unlike some of the other groups, used identification cards and secret meetings in response to governmental disapproval. The government declared several times with brief respites between declarations that class meetings for the labor movement were illegal. In 1848 a final statement to this effect by the attorney general seems to have persuaded the Chartists to drop this as a method officially, but in practice it hung on for two more years.¹⁸

It is not unreasonable to expect that this influence might even be felt as far as the Communist movement of today. Karl Marx was living in England during the time of the labor unrest there. He spent his time going over reports in the British Museum. Many of these reports were written by factory supervisors and inspectors who told of the grossness of the victimizing of workers. Some were written perhaps by men like John Bell, mentioned above. He could not have failed to notice the reports of the class meeting system as it was put to use by the union groups. He would certainly have noticed the tremendous growth of Methodism and its influence in England and especially in London. He was clearly on the spot and

¹⁷Wearmouth, op. cit., p. 177.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 113.

in the way of information leading him to the class meeting concept.¹⁹

Mowrer notes how small groups gathered for the purpose of confession were the characteristic means of congregation of the earliest church and, further, how this concept is now part of the Communist cell system. (See page 7 supra). Additionally, he says,

How strange and ironic that contemporary Christianity's worst enemy (and indeed, the most serious threat to Western Civilization as a whole) is employing techniques and dynamics of the Early Church and has put them to work in a perhaps perverted but astonishingly powerful way!²⁰

Considering all the nefarious influences at work in the days of the British labor movement, much harm could have come but for the Methodist class meetings, together with their direct and indirect impacts upon the leadership and the rank and file. The direct effect was to provide Christ-centered leadership who made the transition more peaceful when many were demanding violence. The indirect effect was to show forms through which the labor movement could work to achieve its goals. Thompson tells the contribution thus given the English labor movement by Methodism.

Methodism in all its branches, has done more for the conversion and reconciliation of certain of the industrial classes to religion than any other English Church . . . We simply note that it is the local preacher rather than the secularist lecturer who has . . . really formed the mind of the miner and laborer, and who now so largely represents the ideas he seeks in his dim and inarticulate way. to see applied to national policy and legislation.²¹

¹⁹William Miller, Henry L. Roberts, and Marshall D. Schulman, The Meaning of Communism (Morristown, N. J.: The Silver Burdett Co., 1963), p. 19.

²⁰O. Hobart Mowrer, The New Group Therapy (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964), p. 19.

²¹D. D. Thompson, John Wesley as a Social Reformer (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1898), pp. 103-104.

Another writer said,

Those whom his [Wesley's] appeal reached became changed characters, and the changed character soon expressed itself in changed surroundings; the homes of the Methodists were cleaner than those of their neighbors, their children were care for and clad, they set about improving their social condition in many ways; they were thrifty, and the training gained in managing their religious societies, and the development of their character which resulted, enabled them to take a leading part in their self-help associations--Friendly Societies, Trade Unions, and Cooperative Societies--which have done so much to elevate and improve the wage-earning classes.²²

The fall of the political class meetings must have given the Methodists, who hung back, as much relief as the rise of the same had given fear. However, though the time of the appropriation of the class meeting system was comparatively short, the longer term contributions of the class meeting in terms of good men is undeniable. This alone is enough to recommend it.

²²
Ibid.

CHAPTER IX

THE CONDUCT OF THE CLASS MEETING

What actually did go on in the class sessions? As much as this question is in the reader's mind, it seemed to be even more compulsively with many of those who were contemporaries of the class meeting but not part of the Methodist work. That the class meeting secrecy, such as it was, was viewed with some dread by outsiders is seen from the examples given in Chapter XI (See page 157 infra). However, seen through the eyes of the participant, the class meeting sessions were far from something to be feared. They were indeed a time to be anticipated with joy and expectancy, though not unmixed with apprehension over things which might be revealed to the group, personal things. However, all knew that there was no harm done, and often much good was accomplished, or so it seemed to them.

I. THE PRELIMINARIES

The people would gather at the time appointed. This had been agreed upon by the leader and the class. It was a time convenient for all. As has been mentioned, Wesley tried to plan his class meetings so as not to coincide with the regular meetings of the Anglican Church; thus in the first century of Methodism few classes were scheduled during church hours or even on Sunday. However, later, after the Methodists began to call themselves

a church, Sunday was often the time for the meeting of the classes.

The meeting place, especially in the earliest days, was often the local home of a member. Wesley judged this usage a good idea. More often later on, however, the meetings were held in the church building. In England especially the churches seem to have been erected with the classes in mind. Caughey tells of visiting the ruins of an old Wesley chapel in Limerick, Ireland.

It is nearly unroofed. The front is supported by four pillars of the Tuscan order, resting upon neat pedestals, and finished with plain capitals. The recess is well flagged, protected by a substantial balustrade. To the left are the stairs to the lobby, entirely above the chapel. These we ascended, but durst not proceed, as the floors were bad. We could see the long range of class-rooms, and chambers for the preachers, according to the custom of early Methodism.¹

The meetings were ideally to begin promptly on the hour designated. This seemed to be something of a bone of contention throughout the time of class meeting usage. From all the different years of class meeting life there come complaints about late comers who caused the meetings to fail to begin on time. Wesley urged this strongly. The rules called for it (see page 34 supra). James Field insisted that the class meeting should begin exactly at the hour appointed.² Those writing in the latter days of the class meeting said the same thing. In giving cynical advice on how to make the class meeting fail, Finley said, "Keep your class . waiting fifteen or twenty minutes."³

¹Caughey, Methodism, p. 162. ²Church, Early Methodist, p. 168.

³Atkinson, The Class Leader, p. 184.

Another problem often arose in the early moments of the class meeting sessions. This was what to do with the frequent visitors. These were not allowed to attend more than once twice before they had to make a decision whether or not to become a member of the society or church, as it later became. If they chose not to apply for membership they were thereafter excluded from attendance of any sessions. In addition to this restriction it was required that every other class session be held with closed doors oftentimes. Later strangers were permitted to attend three times prior to deciding what to do about membership.⁴ This permitted the desirable features of having private meetings for personal soul-searching intimacy, and the inclusion of strangers for the purposes of whetting their appetites.

Even this practice was thought by many to be an unnecessary concession to the public at large. It was felt that the presence of "evil people" might hinder the work of the Spirit in helping people to speak their "true feelings." One correspondent wrote to the Nashville Christian Advocate observing that in 1847 the practice tended to make the class meeting "too common a thing . . . and to show the world that we do not put that estimate upon them, which the importance and utility of them demands."⁵

It was not always easy to get the visitors to leave when, after the service of worship, it came time for the class, or when the visitors had

⁴Sherman, History of the Revisions, p. 123.

⁵Letter to the editor, Nashville [Tennessee] Christian Advocate, XI (May 7, 1847), p. 1.

decided that they did not wish to join the church or society. Finley tells of his problem with this in his preaching experiences in New England churches.

The people had another practice which I greatly disliked; namely, that of keeping open the doors at love-feasts and class meetings. I took strong ground against this practice, and found that among the New England Methodists there was much opposition, as they desired to have all their neighbors, good and bad, enjoy all the advantages connected with their select meetings.⁶

Peter Cartwright, also, had trouble with this closed door rule.. He tells of one instance of a spectacular solution to it.

At Mount Zion Meeting-house there was a good class of poor, simple-hearted Methodists that desired to hold class-meetings according to rule with closed doors, admitting persons not members of the Church only two or three times, unless they intended to join. There was an old lady in the settlement, a New Light by profession, who hated the Methodists and despised the class-meetings with closed doors, but would stay in spite of the leader. She would take her seat near the door, and open it while the leader was speaking to the class. They had tried to stop her many ways, but did not succeed. When I came round the leader complained to me, alleging that they were greatly annoyed by her disorderly conduct. I preached, then read the rules, then requested all to retire but the class, or such as desired to join the Church, and then closed the door, and proceeded to examine the class. I knew this lady was in, and sat near the door as usual. I asked the leader if there were any in but members. He answered, "Yes, there are three that are not members." I told him to take me to them first. He did so. The first was a man. I asked his intention in staying in class-meeting. He told me he wanted very much to serve God, and join the Church. "Very well," said I. The next was a woman, whom I questioned, and who answered the same way. While I was talking to her my New Light got up and opened the door, and took her seat close by it. I approached her, and asked her what her motive was for staying in class-meeting.

She said she wanted to be with the people of God.

"Do you wish to join our Church?"

⁶Finley, Autobiography, p. 287.

"No, I don't like Methodists."

"Madam, you ought not to violate our rules."

"Indeed, I do not care a fig for your rules; I have stayed in class-meeting many times, and will stay when I please."

"You must go out."

"I will not, sir."

"Then I will put you out."

"You can't do that," she replied; and sprang to her feet, and began to shout and clap her hands; and as she faced the door, I took hold of her arms behind her shoulders, and moved her toward the door. She threw up her hands against the cheek of the door, and prevented me from putting her out. I saw a scuffle was to take place, and stooped down and gathered her in my right arm, and with my left hand jerked her hand from the cheek of the door, and lifted her up, and stepped out and set her on her feet. The moment I set her down she began to jump and shout, saying, "You can't shut me out of heaven." I sternly ordered her to quit shouting, for, said I, you are not happy at all, you only shout because you are mad and the devil is in you. When she quit shouting, I said, "I knew you were not happy, for if God had made you happy I could not have stopped it; but as it was the devil in you, I have soon stopped your shouting." I then stepped back and shut the door, and met my class standing against it; and we had a very good time, and effectually foiled our old New Light tormentor,⁷ and she never troubled me any more during my two years on this circuit.⁷

After the problems of visitors were solved, the meeting would begin. Usually it would start with singing. The rule was that only one hymn should be sung. Some complaint was offered on this in the mid-1800's. In some groups a great deal of time-consuming singing was being done. Some of the individual meetings even had singing as background music for the examination period. Charles Hanover raised a substantial complaint about this.

Some months ago the preacher in charge requested me to assist him in examining a large class, and very soon after we commenced some brother started a song. I waited a little, hoping it would cease after a verse

⁷Cartwright, Autobiography, pp. 130-131.

or two should be sung. But it was kept up until the brethren were sung down, and then a good old sister raised another and had to sing alone.⁸

This leader tried during the time to hear a lady who was being examined, but could not hear well for the singing. He exhorted to be faithful when she already was pretty well along in the faith. The result was that she suffered hurt feelings at being treated as something of a backslider. The leader makes his chagrin clear.

Doubtless some leaders think they cannot examine a class to any advantage without singing, but it is certain they cannot do it to much advantage with it; and I could wish that the practice were numbered with the things that have been.⁹

Wesley advised that there be singing and laid down some definite rules for its performance in the class. He insisted that everyone in the group should sing. Singing was to be done somewhat lustily. The member of the society was to beware of singing as if he were half-dead or asleep. However, one was to sing moderately at the same time. The singer should not bawl and be heard distinctly from others, destroying harmony thereby. Singing was to be in time with the others, neither "going before" them nor "following after" them. Finally singing was to be done spiritually, with "an eye to every word you sing."¹⁰ Wesley loved what he called "swift singing," which was spirited, confident, and happy.¹¹

Later, when singing became more prolonged, numbers of hymns were sung which shortened the time for examination. This was as detrimental as the

⁸Letter to the editor, Nashville [Tennessee] Christian Advocate, XI (April 16, 1847), p. 1.

⁹Ibid. ¹⁰Emory, Works, IV, p. 609. ¹¹Goodell, Drillmaster, p. 67.

background work mentioned just above and contributed to the eventual failure of the class meeting system. One Methodist writer suggested that the ideal was probably four verses or two double verses before the meeting began would be "quite enough."¹² This was apparently the practice when the class meeting system was at its zenith.

After the hymn the leader would have prayer. Often he would pray himself for the group. Always the prayer was extemporaneous. Sometimes he would call on one or more others to pray. Many times evidence of God's blessing would appear even this early. Good reports on a meeting of his father's class, remembered from Goodell's boyhood, are mentioned below. This one likely took place about 1875.

They sing "Come Thou Fount of Every Belssing!" and then prayer follows. And what prayers they are! There is no giving of the Lord general information and advice. They are after something. They believe it is to be had, for they have had it before, and they will not quit asking now until they get it. I do not deny that there was some noise. They were so near heaven it was entirely unnecessary, but it seemed as if they had read somewhere, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." I do not at all justify the man who brought his chair down with such violence that the legs spread out and every rung dropped out, but it was worth the price of all the chairs in the kitchen [where they were meeting] to see what happened that night.¹³

Thus shouting and intense emotions often prevailed at such meetings.¹⁴ The prayer usually took the form of asking God to be present, to expose the inmost thoughts and imaginings, and to inspire new heights of living.¹⁵

¹²Church, Early Methodist, p. 168. ¹³Goodell, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁴Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 25. ¹⁵Luckock et al, Story, p. 169.

The scriptures were read after the prayer time. Often there would be a running commentary with it.¹⁶ Later there came to be something of a devotional presentation as a preliminary to the examination. Near the end of the class meeting days many class leaders were merely lectured on some subject, Biblical or non-Biblical, which was related to life.

This having been finished, the leader would begin often by giving his own testimony for the week. He would tell of his trials, his victories, and even his own defeats in the week before. The purpose was to encourage the timid into realizing that they need not fear to speak up when their turn came. However, not all recommended this. James Field, speaking in the century after Wesley, said that the leader ought to avoid calling attention to himself in this way. "Except in rare instances, speak your own experience, but be short and comprehensive; and exhort others to speak similarly."¹⁷ Nevertheless, said Porter, the leader began generally with an account of himself.¹⁸

Having bared himself in this way the leader would then turn to the others and sometimes give general counsel. Emerick suggests that this time was used for voluntary testimonies, too, but this seems not to have been common practice.¹⁹ It may have been later on in the last century, however.

¹⁶Simpson, Cyclopedia, p. 229.

¹⁷Church, op. cit., p. 168.

¹⁸James Porter, Compendium of Methodism (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875), p. 30.

¹⁹Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, pp. 22-23.

II. THE EXAMINATION TIME

Once finished with his general remarks, the leader would then begin his examination of the class, taking each member in turn. Unfortunately, no stenographic records of the sessions are available; there are no verbatim transcripts of a few sessions. These few are the generally idealized, once or twice in a lifetime meaningful sessions that each author has recalled. Even if such transcripts were available, they would fail to graphically convey the subtlety of feeling which occurred in the classes. A few of these preserved conversations will be considered a bit later in this chapter.

From the few rules of the meetings much can be understood about the conduct of the class meeting, as well as from the few conversations which are available. The various editions of the Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church have all carried pretty nearly the same questions to be asked of each member of the class. They are taken from the "Long Minutes." "Let each leader carefully inquire how every soul in his class prospers; not only how each person observes the outward rules, but how he grows in the knowledge and love of God."²⁰ Elsewhere Wesley said that the leader was to "see each person in his class, once a week at the least in order to inquire how their souls prosper, to advise, to reprove, to comfort, or exhort, as the occasion may require."²¹

²⁰Robert Emory, History of the Discipline. p. 29; John Emory, Works V, p. 213.

²¹Telford, Letters, II, p. 297.

"Wesley was not interested," says Emerick, "in bright, cheery little groups whose members encourage one another in well-doing. Judgment and grace are inseparable in the Wesleyan emphasis and in the class meeting."²² He recognized that there was great value indeed in the classes and he exerted every effort to see that the system was not only maintained, but also, that it was kept at peak efficiency.

The questions seem to have been considered hackneyed after a while by some. One critic suggested that the question, "How does your soul prosper?" was rather ambiguous to nineteenth century Americans who needed other, more concrete questions. In the 1850's, though the discipline required the basic ones, the questions were now often being interpreted in the light of the needs and understanding of the day. Thus such questions as, "Do you pray in secret?", "How often?", and the like were more in vogue in addition to the basic prescribed inquiries.²³ There seems to have been no limit on the questions the leader could ask as long as the basic ones were put to each member, especially later on. It seems certain that some of the band meeting questions were also put to class members. The bands were dropped early in America, being taken out of the Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church by 1855.

Miley suggested some other questions which might be useful in 1854. It is likely that these were not particularly new at this time, but were rather the product of his experience in visiting class meetings in his lifetime.

²²Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 54. ²³Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 200.

What is the measure of your faith?

Does it rest on God, through Christ, giving you victory over sin and the world?

What is your love to God and his children?

Does it reach, or is it approximating, the measure of the divine command?

What is your communion with God?

Is it intimate and uninterrupted?

What is your assurance of present acceptance with God?

Have you the joint witness of the Spirit of God, and of your own spirit, that you are his child?

What is your power in resisting temptation?

What is the measure of your religious enjoyment?

What are your tempers?

What is your earnestness, what your efforts for continued growth in grace?

What is your zeal for the salvation of souls, for the prosperity of the church, and the promotion of the glory of God?²⁴

That these questions hit their mark is undeniable. One person wrote to one of the Christian Advocate's (of which several were published in different places),

At a late class-meeting, held on . . . Circuit, New York Conference, I was much pleased and profited by the course pursued by our preacher in charge. The course was as follows: After previous notice had been given to the class that a close examination would be made on the day appointed, the Society being convened, questions, plain and pointed, were asked, such as these: Do you pray in secret?" "How often?" "Do you uniformly read a portion of Holy Writ when you attend family worship?"

²⁴John Miley, A Treatise on Class Meetings (Cincinnati: Swormstadt and Poe, 1854), p. 201.

I must acknowledge that I was much surprised to find there that day who neglected these duties.

As the questions varied, so apparently did the physical aspects of the operation of the class meetings. The fragmentary reports of individual meetings indicate that they often met in churches in England and America. However, sometimes they met in private homes, either of the members of the leader, or both. Sometimes the leader would have each come and stand before him for the questioning as he sat at a small table with perhaps a Bible on it. Other leaders preferred to go where the members sat. R. W. Dale recalled as a child that he used to sit in on his grandfather's class meeting, which was conducted (early nineteenth century England) in the former way.²⁶ Sometimes when addressed by the leader, the member would remain seated.²⁷ Several preferred to walk the aisles of the church and confer with each person at his pew. This latter system would certainly have to have been used in meeting larger classes which became so common later on.²⁸

Finley's inexperience with the class meeting system of discipline is revealed in his relation of his first leading venture in a class meeting. It was held at his own house. He sang, prayed fervently, sang again (with the group each time), and then began the questioning with his father. Next came his mother. Finally everyone in the house was questioned. However, by that time Finley could not stop. In a sea of apparent blessing he went out of the house and talked in classroom terms with all who were about

²⁵Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 201. ²⁶Church, Early Methodist, p. 156.

²⁷Porter, Compendium, p. 30.

²⁸Letter to the editor, Nashville [Tennessee] Christian Advocate, XI (April 16. 1847). p.1.

the house but who for reasons of their own had not come in to the class meeting. Many were left weeping over fences in his wake.²⁹ Needless to say most class meetings did not finish with leader running outside and tracking down sinners in this way.

III. AN ECLECTIC EXAMPLE OF A CLASS MEETING

In an effort to set down the rather universal spirit of the class meeting through its history the following description is given. The incidents portrayed below, though presented as occurring in a single meeting are actually fragments gleaned from reports of class meetings from the very beginning of the system. Footnotes indicate their sources. They are joined with a view to giving the reader a sense of what it might be to sit in a class meeting session, run according to the rules, in just about any age.

Now let the reader imagine himself a boy whose father is a class leader. Tonight's meeting is at Uncle Henry's farmhouse in New England in the 1830's. Uncle Henry, like the reader's father, is a great man of prayer, so much so in fact that his prayer place, a grove of birches near the barn, is all broken up. In fact the preacher on seeing it one day asked if Uncle Henry tied his cattle there.

The leader is there first and waiting with Uncle Henry. A fire

²⁹Finley, Autobiography, pp. 181-182.

has been set in the kitchen fireplace and chestnut planks have been laid between the chairs to make room for more. Men and women begin to assemble. Uncle Henry rejoices, "Glory to God, see the troops gather!"³⁰ The leader gives a good word to everyone. "The Lord bless you, brother." "Thank the Lord you could come, sister!" "How's the sick girl, Mrs. Stow?" "How's the lamb that broken leg, Danny?" They nod to one another as they seat themselves on the chestnut planks and the chairs. They are glad to feel the warmth of the winter fire and the friendship and common aspiration.³¹ The class crowds the room.

Note that the meeting here involves a mixture of sexes. By the 1830's they were at least beginning to appear more commonly. Doubling up due to a shortage of class leaders together with very large influxes of members because of rapid growth were the chief causes. It remains to be seen whether or not this was a good sign for the classes.

The meeting finally begins with song. The leader takes up a hymn, simple and yet full of promise and spiritual power. All join in. After this is prayer time, which has previously been described (see page 115 supra).

After prayers are offered, the scriptures are read. Then the leader begins by telling what God has done for him in the week; how God helped

³⁰Goodell, Drillmaster, pp. 140-142.

³¹Albert Edward Bailey, The Gospel in Hymns (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons: 1950), pp. 85-86.

him over temptation, how he found this or that precious truth in the Bible, or how he just lived in the sense of well-being that comes when there is nothing between his soul and the Saviour.

Then his attention turns to others in the group. There if, first of all, James Finley, an area ruffian, troublemaker, unsaved, and (unknown to any there) under deep conviction of his sinfulness. Finley is unfamiliar with what happens at class meetings, having come at the suggestion of a friend. The leader approaches Finley who is surprised at his courteousness and begins to inquire into his spiritual condition. To this handling Finley can only to the amazement and joy of all respond with sighs and tears. He is feeling as if his heart will burst with its wretchedness. The group is awakened to sympathy and some tell him of their similar experiences and how they found their way through. Then all turn to and pray for this miserable fellow.³² Within twenty-four hours of this experience Finley will be rejoicing in the knowledge of his salvation.

Seeing that Finley must work his own way from there the leader goes on. The next man is a latecomer's guest. He lives ten miles away. He has been under conviction of his sins for three months and lives without light on salvation. As a last resort he has come to Uncle Henry's. This class meeting is known the country over for its ability to get souls in contact with God. He voices his frustration. He weeps. The class crowds around him like doctors at a clinic. A question or two . . . and they have the diagnosis. Then comes the remedy . . . and it works. Uncle Henry is

³²Finley, Autobiography, pp. 178-179.

filled with joy at the result. He cries out, "I feel like I could leap over a troop or run through a stone wall!"³³

Next are an old German and his wife, members of the Lutheran Church in Germany. On a previous visit both had denied an understanding of the meaning of the expression "God converting the soul." Now the leader finds them in the distress and misery of conviction of sin. He tried to pray with them but they weep at their ignorance of such important things.

"I feel so bad as if I can't liff," the old man moans.

"You must pray to the Lord to pardon your sins for Jesus Christ's sake," returns the leader quietly. He asks others who know God to begin praying for this couple.³⁴

The old man weeps the more. "O coot Gott! what shall I do? I cannot pray English!"

"Then pray Dutch."

"Can de Lort understand dat?"

"Of course."

Now the old man and his wife begin in real earnest to cry to the Lord in a mixture of German and English. When the English is used, they are saying, "Goot Lort, giff me dat religion of Jesus!" So they pray and cry to God. Others join them in fervent prayer.

Soon the Lord seemingly fills the house with his glory, and the old man is released from the prison of sin. Shouts of glory to God, in German And English, fill the air and it is like heaven begun below.

³³Goodell, Drillmaster, p. 155.

³⁴Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 213.

Another man is there, without the Lord. He is brought under conviction by this all. About daybreak of the next day he, too, will likewise have his soul set at liberty in salvation.³⁵

Now the leader turns to a teenager, a boy. "Brother Watson, how has it been with your soul this week?"

The lad rises, head drooping, silent at first and finally he forces out, "I thank the Lord, well."

From the leader comes, "Praise the Lord! . . . but, no wrestlings with temptation?"

"Yes."

"And did you win the victory?"

"Yes, thank God."

"Hallelujah, Brother Watson. Go as you are and one day the crown incorruptible will certainly be yours."³⁶

Now the leader strikes up an appropriate hymn and is quickly followed by the group.

Let the world their virtue boast,--
 Let their works of righteousness;
 I, a wretch undone and lost,
 Am freely saved by grace:
 Other title I disclaim;
 This, only this, is all my plea--
 I the chief of sinners am,
 But Jesus died for me.³⁷

Next is Sister Lee. The leader addresses this saint of the church.

³⁵ibid., p. 213

³⁶Luckock et al, The Story of Methodism, pp. 168-169.

³⁷Elijah Hedding, Beverly Waugh, Thomas Morris, L. L. Hamiline, and Edmund S. Janes (eds.), Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1849), p. 260.

"Sister Lee, has the Lord been your support this week?"

Sister Lee jumps to her feet and pours out a record of spiritual blessings in rich profusion, the whole interlarded with ejaculations of rapture that stir the little company to increasingly fervent responses. "The blessing of God is upon me," she blurts. "He is my constant portion by day and by night. By Him I have been kept all this week from temptation. Life has become a song and a way of glory. Praise his name!"

From the crowd come now, "Amen!", "Hallelujah!", and "Glory to God!"

From the leader, "So you feel that this has been a week of nothing but spiritual triumph, sister?"

Sister Lee responds with a fervent affirmative.

"You feel that you have the witness of the Spirit to this blessing which has been yours?"

"Yes, glory to God?"

"Well, Sister Lee, this is glorious. How happy you must be! and how happy your husband must be!"

Now there is a sudden chilly silence. Sister Lee's husband is not a Methodist; he is not anywhere near salvation. He is indeed something of the town reprobate. Some have whispered around that he might not have gone so far had things been different at home. Sister Lee's eyes flash but she hesitates to give an answer.

Once more the question comes from the leader, "Doesn't your husband rejoice with you?"

Sister Lee cannot stay silent. "Him! Why that worthless scamp, he

came home the other night and found me singing a hymn tune. 'Ha!' he says, 'more religion, is it?' At once I saw that he was fixing to make sport of me so I flung a mop at his head, and he's been quiet since then."

Sister Lee is not inclined to take easily the leader's suggestion that she may need to clear certain spiritual problems with her testimony before she can rightly claim sanctification. However, others support the leader in this contention. Soon the leader is able to pass on to others leaving behind one who has knowledge of spiritual victories but also has other's yet to be gained.³⁸

Now the leader goes to a woman who is in grief. She has lost a son this week and in the depths of her soul she is grieving over his passing. The leader speaks gently, compassionately.

Suppose that someone was making a beautiful crown for you to wear, and that you knew it was for you, and that you were to receive it and wear it as soon as it should be done. Now, if the maker of it were to take some of your jewels to put into it, should you be sorrowful and unhappy, because they were taken away for a little while, when you knew they were gone to make up your crown?³⁹

The woman sighs and smiles through her tears. The leader moves on to the next person.

Henry Longdon is that next one. He is zealous, a strong, but relative-new member of the church. when questioned about the prosperity of his soul, he replies that his is prospering well. The Lord, he feels, much with him.

I feel that I dare not suffer sin to pass unreprieved. Whether rich or poor, I have no alternative, but in the name of our God, I have set up my banner. I have taken a hazel stick in my hand, to have in readiness, if I should hear any boys blaspheme the name which I so much venerate; but at least, if I cannot beat Satan out of them, they should

³⁸Luckock et al, op. cit., pp. 169-171. ³⁹Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 40.

not sin in my hearing with impunity.⁴⁰

But now the leader asks, "Do you think that God can save you from all inbred sin?"

A surprised look now crosses brother Longdon's face. He stammers, "I know God can do everything; but I do not expect that he will save me, or any of his servants to that extent and degree before death: I think he suffers these enemies to remain, for the trial of my faith and constancy."

The leader does not argue but merely gives him a book on Christian perfection. From here Henry Longdon will go on to read the book, become convinced that this experience is for him, and will begin to meet in a band with like-minded companions for the purpose of searching for this experience. He will find this experience in a short time and go on himself to become a great class leader in his later days.⁴¹

Timothy Hackworth is now singled out by the leader. He has attended twice before. Previous to this time he has been in Methodist meetings and has come under conviction. Now, though having been in the class twice, he has so far failed to express himself. He has, however, wept privately at home. Now as the leader speaks with him, barriers of unbelief are swept away and young Timothy begins to find the peace and then the joy of God's forgiveness. He tells the others of what God has given and all rejoice and praise God with him. He will become a railroad engineer later on and a good lay preacher.⁴²

⁴⁰Church, Early Methodist, p. 126.

⁴¹Ibid, pp. 126-127

⁴²William D. Lawson, Wesleyan Local Preachers (Newcastle-on-Tyne, England: [author], 1874), p. 155

Finally there is James Ayers. He had wondered by the house and heard the voice of the leader in an earlier month. He was attracted by the warmth and unction of that voice. Discovering what was going on there, on a later evening which happens to be this one he has slipped into this class with the others. The young impenitent now finds the leader asking him quietly about his spiritual life. When the young man replies that he does not understand the meaning of know "converting grace," the leader begins to gently lead him through a series of questions about his spiritual life. Finally, the leader extracts from young Mr. Ayers the promise that he will begin to pray and seek a new heart from God. Then, laying his hands on the youth's head, the leader prays solemnly and in melting fashion for God to hear this promise and to accept young man at the right time. Ayers will go from here to experience converting grace and spend fifty of his years as a Methodist preacher.⁴³

Now the hour is up. Perhaps it has been more than an hour. That is the nominal time of meeting and the leader tries to keep it within that time unless spiritual work is really going on. He calls for prayer, blesses the saints, and bids them goodnight with a direction to go straight home. Staying to strike up conversations encourages loss of serious impressions.⁴⁴

As the members file out quietly murmuring God's praises, one can be

⁴³Atkinson, Class Leader, pp. 263-264.

⁴⁴James Wood, Directions and Cautions Addressed to Class Leaders (New York: Tract Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, [n.d.]), p. 7.

heard to say to another, "Brother Green, I will henceforth pray in my family. My heart trembled that I could not stand an examination before my brethren; and if not there, how shall I stand before God?"⁴⁵

In this way then was the ideal class meeting operated. Let the reader understand that all the above did not happen in a single evening. The setting for this class was New England of the 1830's. However, Finley's experience occurred in 1808 in Ohio. The old German and his wife were saved in a class meeting in Greenbush, Massachusetts, in 1799. The times and places of young Watson and Timoth Hackworth were not given in their sources. Sister Lee, likewise, is undated and unlocated by her biographers. Henry Longdon's experience occurred in England in the early part of the nineteenth century. That of James Ayers occurred in Bridgeton, New Jersey, in the early part of the nineteenth century as well.

However, there runs through each experience a single but a strong thread of the power of God working through a small, honest group. The interworking between leader and member is clearly seen in these examples. This responsiveness in the class, particularly its honesty, is a rather phenomenal thing. In fact it is the heart value of the class meeting.

IV. Developments in the Operation of the Class Meeting

Wesley noted that the class should be quite frank. Ideally, it could even criticize the leader or ask his removal, if he became lax or

⁴⁵Atkinson, op. cit., p. 201.

mistaken at some point. Thus the class as a whole could be trusted to come up with the truth. The Theologian, Augustus Strong, said that this is a characteristic of the true Christian Church.

In ascertaining the will of Christ . . . and in applying his commands to providential exigencies, the Holy Spirit enlightens one member through the counsel of another, and as the result of combined deliberation, guides the whole body to right conclusions.⁴⁶

Wesley utilized this principle when he relied upon the classes to come to conclusions of truth on their own.

I ask, "Does this and this person in your class live in drunkenness or any outward sin? Does he go to church, and use other means of grace? Does he meet you as often as he has opportunity?" Now if Robert Peacock the leader has common sense, he can answer truly; and if he has common honesty, he will. And if not, some other in the class has both, and can and will answer.⁴⁷

Out of this honesty much work could be done between members themselves as well as between member and leader. ^P One of the original purposes in having the classes meet together, as opposed to having the leader visit each in his home, was the resolution of individual differences by means of the confrontation of the antagonists by each other before the entire group. This kind of activity may not have been too frequent later on because Wood treats it as though it were something rather new. He cautions leaders to either get the accuser to face the accused or else refuse to hear the accusation.⁴⁸

Despite these negative potentials of the class meeting, they developed over the years for those with the courage to see them through into an institution with many qualities of a family. At its inception it presented

⁴⁶ Augustus H. Strong, Systematic Theology (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1907), p. 903.

⁴⁷ Emory, Works, III, p. 392.

⁴⁸ Wood, Directions, p. 7.

a fearsome portent of dark inquisitions before the lordly leader. Some objected to the class meetings on this basis. Indeed, for numbers of would-be members of the societies and later churches this was too frightening to face. These never joined Methodism, much as they might have wanted to do so.

However, for those who stayed and joined themselves to Methodism and began to endure the class meetings, there was the pleasant discovery that all was not so fearful as might have been imagined.

Though it was a few years before the severity of the first bands yielded to the warmer and more intimate fellowship of the class-meeting, the time came when the latter was perhaps the most important feature in Methodism. For the next fifty years and more the little village societies were saved because of the classes which were the "fire-side" round which the members of the "family" shared common experience and kept their sacred tryst.⁴⁹

Let it not be understood that the examples related above as a single event constitute a rigid stereotype of the class meeting, and that it did not vary from place to place and from century to century. Variations did occur. These, in fact, became part of its downfall. The impact of later variations upon the effectiveness and eventually the life of the class meeting should not be apparent. However, Wesley, recognizing as few others did the danger of allowing too much laxity in following the rules of the class meeting, nevertheless did allow some localized differences where they served to increase the effectiveness of the meetings.

⁴⁹Church, Early Methodists, p. 156.

That . . . with regard to these little prudential helps we are continually changing one thing after another is not a weakness or fault, as you imagine, but a peculiar advantage which we enjoy. By this means we declare them all to be merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution. We prevent, so far as in us lies, their growing formal or dead. We are always open to instruction; willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can for the better.⁵⁰

The discipline provided for the interchange of leaders. The "Large Minutes" said, "Let the leaders frequently meet each other's classes."⁵¹

Wesley wrote to Adam Clarke in October of 1790 telling of his gratification over Clarke's having adopted (in Dublin) "that excellent method of regularly changing the classes." He noted that, where it had been done, "it has been a means of quickening both the leaders and the people."⁵²

Naturalness of the atmosphere of the class was the concern of the leadership. In an effort to put people at their ease and make it easier for them to speak openly, a number of things were done. All three of the following expedients were carried out in the 1870's. A leader in Cincinnati wrote that he would begin by asking his older Christians to speak first. Then he would counterpoint these testimonies with, or stand them in contrast to, the testimonies of the younger Christians in the class. He would have first one and then another testify.

I have one experience meet another; one class of thought offset another, and in this way the members instruct, edify, and electrify each other. A verse is now and then sung applicable to the last experience, the leader encouraging or helping with a verse read or quoted from memory. The object aimed at, and generally accomplished, is to let an old member's experience balance a young member's; a somewhat methodic style is met by a fervent one; and an experience of a per-

⁵⁰Telford, Letters, II, p. 156.

⁵¹Emory, Works, V, p. 213.

⁵²Telford, Letters, VIII, p. 244.

son very much cast down or depressed is met by a happy, triumphant one. Of course all this implies a very complete knowledge by the leader of the peculiar temperament of each member of his class.⁵³

Another leader took a different approach.

I sometimes announce a particular theme for prayer and study during the week. As often as every three months I request all the members to try and live nearer the cross than they ever did, and say to them, "I want you next Sabbath to tell how you have lived during the week." When the time arrives, I say, "I don't care anything about your past life except the past week. What have been your daily and hourly enjoyments? Have you made any growth in grace? Do you feel you are one week nearer home and heaven?" O such meetings follow these individual weeks! Such witnessings for Jesus! Such sweet seasons--to hear them tell how happy they have been all the week--to hear one recount his troubles over, and another recount her treasures above! I believe this to be a very successful way of promoting pure holiness; at least it has proved a great success with us. We have glorious meetings every time we meet--have a revival all the time--have had for the last year.⁵⁴

A third leader followed a still different tack.

I devote one evening a month to prayer and singing exclusively, and one to an experience meeting, either voluntary or solicited, with an occasional word of encouragement, reproof, or advice as may seem best adapted, interspersed, of course, with appropriate songs. On such occasions I generally read at the opening one or more verses from the Bible, making a few remarks in order to draw out from the members the real spiritual condition and feeling of their hearts. I devote generally in the course of one month, two evenings to Scripture recitations, bearing on some subject previously announced, and I find them very interesting and profitable. Two weeks ago the subject which was given out the preceding week was, "Who are the blessed? and, Where shall I find a verse adapted to express my feelings?" . . . Freedom, ease, sociality, with becoming reverence in the classroom, is what I am continually trying to effect.⁵⁵

The reader will recognize the above methods as fairly obvious departures from the normal form of the class meeting. The spirit of reform and change became stronger as time went on until near its effectual end, the

⁵³Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 86.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 234. ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 224.

class meeting functioned like some kind of lecture society or Sunday school class as they are usually operated today. The idea of having a previously assigned subject was not new, though it was not necessarily favored by the Wesleys. Cennick seems to have used it in his meetings at Kingswood.⁵⁶ However, it must be remembered that Cennick is far from an example of a good Methodist. The use of this particular means or approach to class meeting operation, as well as that of the others mentioned above, seems to be a retreat from the spirit of inspection which Wesley intended for the classes to have. The leader could retreat behind his little lecturn and there, lecture or "permit" the sympathetic to get him off the hook by giving a standardized testimony of victory. It is significant that these things were used to relieve a boredom which seemed to rise up in the meeting system in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a boredom which was not there in the beginning.

Goodell expressed the spirit of change after the system had fallen into substantial disuse. "Methodists need to know that one method is not a class meeting. Change methods as much as changing times and customs make necessary, but the need for the class meeting is a fundamental need of the soul."⁵⁷

He offered a list of topics which might be utilized by the class leader during the year. Some of those topics are listed below.

⁵⁶Bailey, The Gospel in Hymns, p. 86. ⁵⁷Goodell, Drillmaster, pp. 28-29.

The Sinfulness of Sin
How to Become Sons of God
The Bible is the Word of God
Bible Prescription for Human Ills
What It Costs Not to Be a Christian
Family Devotions
How We Got Our English Bible
Faith
A Night with the Question Box
Prayer
The Christian Walk
The So-Called Discipline
Difficulties in Coming to Christ
Keeping Out of Temptation
Be Patient
The Thought that Helped
Church Attendance
Confessing Our Sins
Christ's Conversation Falsehoods in Act and Word
Jesus Only
Night with the Psalms
Uses of Affliction
Meditation
Little Worries
The Witness of the Spirit
Missions and Money
Some Ancient Heretics
Growing in Grace
Possession is Better than Profession
A Christian's Experience
The Tongue
Saved for Service
A "Want" Meeting
The Sacrifice of Christ
Amusements
Obedience
Philip Findeth Nathaniel
The Hymns of Charles Wesley
Enduring Injuries (Ill Treatment)
Good Company
Goodness and Usefulness
The Duty for Today
The Holy Spirit
The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax
The Lord's Supper
Holiness

The Heavenly Home
Eternal Life
What is a Class Meeting?⁵⁸

On that fitting question the chapter ends. Coming in like something of a whirlwind and going out like a lamb--thus did the class meeting run its course. One can hardly imagine the group in the farm kitchen sitting around pondering the profundity of "Little Worries," or "How We Got Our English Bible." In operation at the height of its power, the class meeting was forceful, ruthlessly honest organ. It produced men and women of personal courage. It brought out the best, and the worst, in people. It challenged their deepest feelings and lives. It settled their deepest doubts. Yet like some weakened old man it died in its sleep, peacefully, quietly, so that none hardly missed it because of the sickness from which it had suffered for, lo, those fifty year years or so. Why this kind of demise occurred is a key factor in the life of the present day church. It will be considered in Section IV of this paper.

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 207-225.

CHAPTER X

LEADERSHIP OF THE CLASS MEETING

A key factor in the long-standing success of the class meeting was the cadre of leaders which the system produced. The leaders were mostly products of the class meeting itself. They in turn fostered it by becoming its leaders after it had trained them. The leaders in the early days were invariably laymen. Wesley would allow no preacher to have a class of his own. He even encouraged John Cricket, one of his helpers, to put the most insignificant person in each class at the head of it. The farther from the ministry the person was, the better, as far as Wesley was seemingly concerned.¹

Paradoxically the first leader, according to Gregory, was ordained in the ministry. Wesley was the first class leader by this view. In the late 1720's, when he led the Holy Club of Oxford this amounted to a proto-class leadership and, so Gregory feels, helped to prepare Wesley's thinking for the onset of the class meeting system later on.²

That preachers could not lead classes was necessitated early in the years of Methodism by the itineracy of the Methodist ministry. The preacher could not be available every week. Thus other means had to be found. It worked well. Later, when some preachers became settled on station charges,

¹Emory, Works, VII, pp. 256-257.

²Benjamin Gregory, A Handbook of Wesleyan Methodist Polity and History (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1888), p. 16.

they began to take classes. This seems to have been after Wesley's time, however. By the end of the days of the class meeting system, many preachers were leading classes.

Not only men but women could be class leaders. They were used for women's classes and for those of young people and children. Wesley even permitted a woman to meet a class of men, but this was an extraordinary case.³ Apparently this woman was an old and saintly person in whom he saw no harm. Her years of holiness could be helpful to the men of the class. Hester Ann Rogers was a woman of Wesley's day who maintained classes which contained (in three groups) a total of a hundred people.⁴ Atkinson noted that a class-leader in Newark, New Jersey, in 1874 approved of women leaders who were working in his area of the country.⁵ It must have been somewhat common all during the history of the classes

Emerick points to the Methodism of England where women were widely employed in class leadership. He cites a Mr. Farnell who said,

I should say there is not a circuit in England without them. We had four in the church I came from, and very excellent classes of females . . . When I came here to America, I was surprised to find that there were no female leaders. Whenever females take anything in hand, they do it with a will.⁶

Later on as the class meeting grew older as a system the classes got large, sometimes very large. The ideal original number was twelve. This size

³Telford, Letters, VI, p. 233.

⁴Stevens, History, III, p. 102.

⁵Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 110.

⁶Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 111.

soon grew to from twenty to fifty.⁷ Miley reported the size of the classes in 1854 were often three to four times the originally intended one.⁸ In 1874 a church in Jersey City was reporting attendance in the forties and fifties.⁹ One of the popular leaders of the early nineteenth century in England, "Father" William Reeves, had classes numbering as high as eighty. Others of his classes numbered in the seventies.¹⁰

It was likely because of situations like this that Atkinson suggested,

We should have assistant leaders or class stewards, whose duty it should be, in unison with the regular leader, to visit every absentee, sick or well, and kindly induce them, by every laudable incentive to attend steadily these blessed services of spiritual communion.¹¹

In this idea women were to help the women and men were to help the men in the classes.

The importance of the leaders was quickly and well recognized. Coke and Asbury said,

The revival of the work of God does perhaps depend as much upon the whole body of leaders as much as upon the whole body of preachers. Our leaders under God are the sinews of our society, and our revivals will ever in great measure rise or fall with them. In short, we can truly say that, through the grace of God, our classes form the pillars of our work.¹²

In their notes on the 1777 Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church they said, "Every leader is in some degree a gospel minister."¹³ Southey compared class leaders to non-commissioned officers in the army.¹⁴ A bishop addressing the 1860 general conference referred to the class leadership post

⁷Simpson, Cyclopedia, pp. 207-208. ⁸Miley, Treatise, p. 212.

⁹Atkinson, op. cit., pp. 180-181. ¹⁰Ibid., pp. 287-288. ¹¹Ibid., p. 110.

¹²Goodell, op. cit., pp. 11-12. ¹³Atkinson, op. cit., p. 15

¹⁴Porter, Compendium, p. 316.

as a kind of sub-pastorate.¹⁵ Coke and Asbury said elsewhere, "A spiritual body of leaders may counteract the otherwise pernicious consequences of a languid ministry."¹⁶

Many leaders became almost institutions, legends even in their own times. Some of these were William Carovsso, William Reeves, William Bramwell, and Daniel Quorm, all English. The last was a fictional character created by Mark Guy Pearse in the late nineteenth century. He seemed to embody the spirit of class leadership and was, for a while a popular subject among English Methodist readers. The others were Englishmen of an earlier part of the nineteenth century and the latter part of the eighteenth. These men were distinguished for their concern for, and their understanding of, their classes.

These, typical of their kind in their day, were much beloved of their classes, from whom they gained extreme loyalty. Church says that such men often retained their offices as long as they lived. Often as not they would be moved from one class to another in accordance with the practice of rotating class leaders. Some seemed, like Carvosso, to have a circuit on which they traveled, not to preach, but to meet the classes. Something of the strength of the love and loyalty given to good leaders by their classes is seen in the following account of a funeral of an old leader. James Caughey, an American preacher of the 1850's had been conducting an evangelistic campaign in England and had been asked to preach the funeral

¹⁵Atkinson, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁶Church, Early Methodist, pp. 164-165.

message for a departed leader.

Yesterday, (Sabbath) after taking breakfast with the "Stranger's Friend Society," I walked over to the Hendrick Street Chapel to preach. On my arrival, every countenance wore the hues of sorrow. One of their old leaders . . . had just departed for heaven, and their hearts were oppressed with grief. I could not chide them, as his gain was indeed a loss to them, which, in the first shock of the news they knew not how to sustain. All seemed to feel that his place could never be supplied. During thirty years he had been a father to that society. The excitement was increased by the presence of members of his six classes, mingling their tears and sighs together for the death of a most beloved parent. . .

I chose Revelation vi.13-17; and never, never have I seen such a weeping congregation. Their tears and sobs would have softened a heart of stone. Suddenly, like a burst of sunshine on a summer's afternoon, when the rains have ceased, an influence, evidently from God, came down upon the people. The Lord seemed to open heaven to the view of his saints; at least, the veil became so transparent that hundreds felt, during thirty or forty minutes, as if they were surrounded with the glories of the celestial world. The church militant and the church triumphant appeared to unite in a manner it is not possible to describe. I cannot, I dare not attempt it, not even the language given me in that hour. Oh, what views of God and heaven filled my amazed soul! It was what one has elsewhere called, "A vision of glory;" such as, perhaps, none of us ever¹⁷ had before, nor may have again, till "mortality is swallowed up of life."

The character of the class was to a large extent determined by the character of the leader.¹⁸ This system of character traits to be owned by the leader was defined by the early rules. Wesley summed them up as being courage, steadiness, common sense, and common honesty. Church notes,

They are virile qualities, and they indicate the kind of person he intended should be entrusted with the responsibility of the class. If the leader has commonsense, he can answer questions when asked about the behaviour of his members, and if he has common honesty, he will.¹⁹

Apparently with a will to insure that these qualities were always present in the leader, the first conference in 1744 laid down the rule that leaders themselves should be examined periodically in class. The inten-

¹⁷Caughey, Methodism in Earnest, p. 136.

¹⁸Church, op. cit., pp. 160-161. ¹⁹Ibid., p. 161.

tion was that they be examined particularly regarding their method of leading the class.²⁰ The 1854 Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church still carried that rule from the "Large Minutes."

Let each of them [the leaders] be diligently examined concerning his method of meeting a class. Let this be done with all possible exactness at the quarterly visitation. And in order to do this allow sufficient time for visiting each society.²¹

Henry Longdon, whose sanctification experience at the hands of the fellowship of the class was given above (see pages 127-128 supra), was a class leader later on. He wrote regarding the qualities of a class leader,

A class leader ought to be a father in Christ; a man of sound and deep experience; well acquainted with the workings of the human heart, and the devices of Satan . . . He ought to lead the people forward . . . till he delivers them up to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls, "blameless, without spot or wrinkles, or any such thing."²²

When he was asked to become a class leader, he said that he felt he ought to become a "father in Christ" first. When the preacher who invited him to be a leader pointed out that this would take years and that meanwhile the little flock which was the class would be waiting, Longdon showed his true colors--those of a class leader.

I was much affected, I durst not refuse; but with many tears, and much trembling, I engaged in what I considered by far the most important office amongst the Methodists. The first objects of my attention were to convince the people of the necessity of punctual attendance, to conform to all the rules of the society, and to acquaint myself with every member, as much as one may know another; and when I had used every human effort of which I was capable, then frequently to commend them to God in my closet.²³

Emphasis was put upon the extremes of the qualities expected in a

²⁰Church, loc. cit. ²¹Robert Emory, History, p. 29.

²²Church, op. cit., p. 166. ²³Ibid.

a leader but these were called for in such a counterbalancing way that they did not involve extremity in operation. Thus, while the office demanded a great zeal, equally great was the requirement made of common sense and diplomacy. Morality and blamelessness were expected in large measure in the leader, yet the tendency toward moralism was offset by the requirement of sympathy and understanding as a part of the leader's nature.²⁴

Atkinson lists the qualifications of the class leader in this way: a working spirit, blamelessness (of good report though not on moral stilts), common sense, intelligence, sympathy, and enthusiasm.²⁵

Goodell had another grouping. These were a sharp conscience, quick perception, training in Biblical matters, patience, heart (sympathy), willingness (voluntary attitude) and spiritual perception by prayer and meditation. In connection with the last quality Goodell cited an example seen in Psalm 39. "My heart was hot within me, while I was musing, the fire burned." (Psa. 39:3 KJV)²⁶

Simpson held that the class leader's qualifications should be deep personal piety, mature experience, and the ability to give religious counsel and advice wisely and affectionately, and to influence the younger members to systematic attention to all their Christian duties. He should be well versed in the discipline of the church, should read the lives of persons eminent for piety, and such books as clearly set forth the different shades of experience and the Christian duties devolving upon members of the church.²⁷

²⁴Merick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 25. ²⁵Atkinson, Class Leader, pp. 21-30.

²⁶Goodell, Drillmaster, pp. 21-26, 57. ²⁷Simpson, Cyclopedia, p. 228.

Mark Guy Pearse's Daniel Quorm spoke of the nature of the class leader, too.

Class Meetings is like awls and needles--they'll go as long as ever you can keep 'em bright; but when they get dull, they'll rust and then it be hard work. We leaders must keep the place bright and cheerful and attractive if we want to keep members. Why I should every bit as soon think o' goin' to class with my apron on and in my shirt sleeves as think o' takin' all my cares and worries. I get away first of all and lose all my own fears and troubles in the lovin' care of my heavenly Father. I get my own heart put into tune and then the rest'll take the right pitch for me. And then with the fire burnin' I get away to meetin'.²⁸

Goodell warned that unpleasant things would be experienced by the class leader in the meetings. There would be a need for practical inability of the leader to lose his temper. It could cripple a work of many years if the leader were to vent his temper at the wrong time.²⁹ A balance is needed by the leader. He should be

conciliatory, but not servile; winning but not fawning; timely, but not time-serving; simple but not commonplace; interesting, but not sensational; positive, but not dogmatic; tender and affectionate, but not lachrymose and sentimental; orderly but not mechanical.³⁰

Daniel Quorm summed up the leader's occupation well.

A leader ought to be a kind o' doctor that can give to each one the prescription he needs; that can deal out his Lord's medicine and make up a strengthening plaster for them as is weak in the back and can't stand very well, and can clap a stiff blister to them as have caught the fever of worldliness, and can make a pill for sluggish livers, which is commonest kind o' ailin'.³¹

An attempt was made early in the life of the class meeting system by the leaders to have a voice in the government of the church; that is, to exalt themselves to government of the church by right of their positions as spir-

²⁸Goodell, op. cit., pp. 65-66. ²⁹Ibid. ³⁰Ibid., pp. 224-225.

³¹Ibid., p. 65.

itual leaders of the flock. In April of 1771 this developed in the Dublin society. The leaders seem to have assumed some kind of authority which placed them at odds with the preachers. This had created what Wesley called a "jar" continually in the society. He met them on April 27 to try to come to some kind of conclusion. They finally were pacified under his firm hand. He then outlined to the whole society the authority and duties of the class leaders. The only authority they had was spiritual and in that realm were to stay with their function. As an individual, Wesley said, the leader "had authority to meet his class, to receive their contributions, and to visit the sick in his class." As a group the leaders had authority only to "show their class papers to the assistant or the pastor, deliver the money they have received to the stewards, and to bring in the names of the sick."³² This seems to have ended any open power grabs by the leaders of classes.

The image of the class leader as the office developed was that of father-friend. The newcomer was to become known to the leader. The leader was then supposed to evaluate his testimony and converse with him at length regarding the state of his soul, his former life, daily occupations, and mental habits.³³ This meant following up on the membership, both before and after a commitment was made.

Equally important was the duty of the leader to seek out the absentees and see that they became regular again. Atkinson said this was one of the highest attributes a leader could have. Not even the pastor could fill this

³² Emory, Works, IV, pp. 347-348.

³³ Goodell, op. cit., p. 35.

position, assume this duty, to the degree which the leader could.³⁴ One of the real keys to the greatness of leaders seems to have been the fidelity with which they discharged this duty. Where societies slumped, it could be found that the leaders had not and were not visiting the absentees. Where societies thrived, there were no absentees and the leaders were very active in the other phases of the their work.

Atkinson gives an example of a good leader in followup. A man in Jersey City was converted from a life which seemed at least to be leading him to alcoholism. He found his way into a Methodist class. While attending he controlled his appetite for drink. Later, when he moved with his family into New York City, he relapsed into drink and destituted his family. The leader of the class in Jersey City heard of it and hunted him up in New York. The former class member was promised a home for his family and financial help until he could get a job. He came back immediately and returned to the class, confessing his wonderings.³⁵

An example of an energetic and beloved class leader was Jonathan Saville. Laboring at the turn of the nineteenth century in England, this godly man, having been raised as an orphan in unbelievable cruelty, was saved and came to lead classes and preach. His was not so much a preaching but a praying and class-leading ministry. He had in the beginning two and then three classes under his care. His original class "swarmed" six times and the new leaders were mostly former pupils of his. In 1799 his work resulted in a fine revival in Luddenden which eventually saw three chapels

³⁴Atkinson, Class Leader, pp. 100-102.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 103-104.

raised and a large number of local preachers called out by God. He formed a little company of "prayer leaders" which multiplied into twelve bands eventually and maintained eleven meetings in small hamlets which at first had no one capable of conducting such meetings.³⁶

Caughey refers to the address of an old class leader to some younger ones regarding the secrets of success in class leading.

Well, when you are toasting yourselves at your parlor fires on winter nights, or indolently lounging at home on summer evenings, he [the ideal leader] is scampering from Blackpool to Evergreen, from Custom House to Dyke Gate, from north to south, from east to west of the city; in the darkness of the night, in all weathers . . . from cellar to garret, to rich and to poor, to see who he can get to lend an ear to his counsels. He patiently listens to their complainings, he has a shoulder for all their crosses, he lets them feel he loves them by taking a kind interest in what concerns them, and gives the best advice he can for both worlds; in this way he convinces them of his disinterested love, he gains influence, he prevails upon them to attend the preaching of God's word, to read it at home, and to pray for the Holy Spirit. By these means they are brought under a concern for their souls, he gets them into his classes, and they are soon converted to God. This is the way, my brethren, he fills his ranks, and his classes overflow. Has he made a secret of his plans? Has he not over and over again urged you to adopt the same measures, insisting that equal causes will produce equal effects the world over? And he now, in the name of God, humbly presses the same upon your consciences. If you will go and do likewise, the same results will surely follow. It is not in the man, but in the manner in which his talent is occupied.³⁷

William Carvosso was saved as a young man and led to join a class. There he came under conviction of the need of sanctification and sought it with many inward struggles. At last one night in a class meeting he found "perfect love that casteth out fear." "I received the full witness of the Spirit that the blood of Jesus Christ cleansed me from all sin." In a few

³⁶Stevens, History, III, pp. 187-188.

³⁷Caughey, Methodism in Earnest, pp. 178-179.

years' time he was appointed leader of a class. Eventually he left business and became a farmer and an itinerant class leader. His area of Cornwall much benefitted from his tireless efforts and travels. The society at Ponsanooth, when he began with it, had one small class. Twenty-five years later it had two hundred members divided into eleven classes, three of which Carvosso was still meeting. He still kept his three classes but also went about "doing good," from town to town and house to house.

He was so holy, so simple, so genial, and charitable, so "full of faith and the Holy Ghost," the ordinary language of Christian conversation seemed to glow with a new significance when it came from his lips. He was so rich himself in the consolations of faith that they appeared to overflow his soul to all contrite minds which approached him. It is said that by a few minutes' conversation and prayer the whole scenery of the sick man's apartment was often changed; and it was illuminated as by light from heaven.³⁸

James Field, one of the class leaders of Carvosso's day, met five classes numbering a hundred people. He lamented loudly when business pressures forced a reduction of these to four. He complained,

I am confined to business, cannot visit except at night, and this is an unreasonable time, for the members cannot easily be seen, and I always get cold going from house to house; so that the most essential branch of a leader's duty is unfulfilled by me.³⁹

A friend is said to have offered him what amounted to a better business position some distance from where he lived. He declined it because it would have meant his giving up one of his classes in Cork. He said at the time that he intended to meet his classes until he was no longer able to meet them. Church felt that this was indicative of his dedication to the classes

³⁸Stevens, op. cit., pp. 219-223.

³⁹Church, Early Methodist, pp. 167-168.

and of his greatness, but even more convincing was the dedication of the classes to him--they refused to give him up. "So he went his rounds in the evening, cold or no cold, till the end." He made it his business to write letters to new class leaders appointed in Cork or its surrounding district that told them of some of the "secrets" of good class leading. They were said to be truly "human documents", full of loving understanding, and abounding with common sense advice.⁴⁰

One old class leader spoke of his concern for his losses through backsliding.

Once only, in these thirty-three years have I been obliged to part with one from my class, when I thought him a true penitent, without obtaining pardon . . . I let not a penitent rest till he has obtained this blessing for the following reasons: first, It would grieve the Holy Spirit; second, It would prove my want of love to souls, and faith in the truth and power of God. Third, It would give Satan many advantages in perplexing and distracting the mind. Fourth, It would set a bad example to all who may be present, as well as those who should hear of the circumstance. Fifth, It would tend to weaken my own faith. Sixth, As unbelief is the awful, damning sin under the gospel, he who can be the means of accelerating its destruction in the heart of another, and does not; neither loves his neighbour as he ought, nor is he a loyal subject of his heavenly king; nor ought he be very confident of his own adoption into the family of God.⁴¹

In dealing with his membership, then, the leader had to combine relentless directness and unassailable tact. This would demand a courage born of a satisfying prayer life. The leader would have to be honest and direct to get at the spiritual problems. One would not expect the membership to always be aware of or always be willing to bring things before the others. One correspondent to Zion's Herald urged leaders to be punc-

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Caughey, Methodism in Earnest, pp. 180-181.

tual, serious, affectionate, direct, and concise. He warned, "We should be careful not to talk and trifle away the good impressions received."⁴² This same writer also suggested that leaders go directly from the prayer closet to the class meeting, avoid conversing on the way, and to offer silent prayer for the members as he enters.

A correspondent to the Christian Advocate in 1840 urged that the leaders be direct in questioning and that they not let themselves be sidetracked by platitudinous replies to their questions.

According to the Discipline it is his [the leader's] duty to "inquire"--for the purpose of ascertaining--"how their souls prosper." How much is this neglected! How often is this important question, when asked, evaded on the part of the members, by thanking God that it is well with them as it is,"--and so might every sinner who is a stranger to the torments of the damned-- and, after all, no one present can tell anything about their religious experience at all, or what their prospects are for another and a better world; and, consequently, the Leader is not prepared to give them the most suitable advice. . .

But in order to an efficient discharge of duty, and the greatest possible degree of usefulness, he must press the subject, probe deep, and find out what is in the heart. The Leader is to the souls of his members in some sort what the physician is to the bodies of his patients. If he cannot give a definite character to the case, he can only make an effort at a venture. He may happily meet the case, and accomplish nothing but a solemn failure. And if the failure be the result of negligence, let him remember it is said, "Woe to him that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, or carelessly."⁴³

An example of the persistence and tact in getting to the truth is seen in the report by one class member, The member as a young man had been forced to go somewhere on his father's business and miss his class. Having missed once, he began to be careless about attending. Finally one night his

⁴²Letter to the editor, Zion's Herald (Boston), III (January 2, 1825), p. 1.

⁴³Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 203.

father took him along to class with him. Both seemed to have been in the same class.

The leader who had noticed my remissness, said nothing to me on that subject in the class room, but when the meeting had concluded, he took me out, and told me of my fault between him and me alone, dealing with me tenderly, but faithfully and effectually, for, from that time, as long as I was a member of a class, I never voluntarily neglected this means of grace. I pray God to give us universally such leaders.⁴⁴

It is obvious from the forgoing that very high standards were necessary for the leadership office. Very few probably ever really fully met them. However, the success of the class meeting for as long as it lasted testifies to the fact that there were for some time a number of very satisfactory leaders produced by Methodism. Goodell in the far twilight time of interest in the class meeting system commented on the general attitude toward leaders in the latter day by saying that a very great deal of fault had been found against them. He felt it necessary to devote a whole chapter to the leader's character and function.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that the latter part of the last century, especially in America saw more and more dull, lifeless, and even backslidden leaders produced by the church. Hatfield had an experience with a leader of this kind. He was preaching a series of evangelistic meetings at a church and was, as usual, being very outspoken regarding certain common, but sinful, habits. The local preacher and a class leader both took offense at what he was saying.

⁴⁴Letter to the editor, Nashville [Tennessee] Christian Advocate, XI (March 19, 1847), p. 1.

⁴⁵Goodell, Drillmaster, p. 7.

Hatfield characterizes their religious exercises this way:

The class leader had his own dry old prayer that he had been repeating 'nigh on ter forty years', and the local preacher had an old dry sermon that he had been preaching from different texts, for about the same length of time . . . They gave every evidence that the old man was not dead.

The time came when a town drunk came to Hatfield for counsel and help as the class leader was preparing to verbally lay out Hatfield who was not looking forward to the scene just ahead. When the drunk's need and desire became apparent to the class leader, he began to exhort the drunk, telling how he had prayed for him for twenty years. The drunk replied to the startled leader, after telling him first to shut his mouth.

You have no more influence with me than a yellow dog, and I don't want to hear anything out of you. You know you lie when you say you have been praying for me over twenty years. You have never in all these years said a word to me about my soul. You've been fighting this meeting, doing all you can to injure this man, who is doing his best to get people saved. You have been so mad that you haven't prayed for a week, and right now you have more hatred in your heart than I have whisky in my stomach. You are about as much on your way to Hell as I am, even though you are a Methodist class-leader, and I don't want to hear you talk to me unless you are willing to confess your sins like any other sinner and go to the altar and get saved.

Shocked beyond words for a moment, the old leader recovered himself, took the drunkard by the hand, and replied, "Jack, you are right and I am wrong. I promise you right here that if you will go to the altar tonight, I'll go with you and we will both get right with God.

And they did, too.⁴⁶

Hatfield also had dealings with a couple of tobacco-chewing, unrepentent class leaders along the same lines. They eventually gave up their

⁴⁶John Hatfield, Thirty-Three Years a Live Wire (Noblesville, Indiana: Newby Book Room, 1965 edition), pp. 97-101.

tobacco after making spectacles of themselves by revealing the real depths of sin inside.⁴⁷ One can only imagine what their classes were.

Aside from the problem of outright sin, other problems, such as laziness, ignorance, and being bound by tradition, served to make the class leaders dull fellows in the dimming years of class meetings. Goodell lists a number of leaders' mistakes which at some time or other had been committed by many in those last days of the class system.

1. The leader being a driver instead of a leader.
2. The leader getting members to harp on old experiences.
3. Inflexibility. "Do not mistake a sigh for religious piety or a smile for an agent of the enemy. Even a good laugh may clear the atmosphere of some second-hand solemnity as unhealthful as last Sunday's atmosphere left in the church by a careless sexton to ruin the preacher's health and sermon."
4. Not going from prayer closet directly to class meeting.
5. Not beginning and closing on time.
6. Permitting members to ramble.
7. Railing at the church program or personalities.
8. Being absent from weekly prayer meeting.
9. Doing all the work himself as a leader.
10. Scolding members who are not there.⁴⁸

These and more, unfortunately, were pitfalls into which leaders could and did fall. Beyond the carelessness that comes with shallow spirituality

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 215-220.

⁴⁸Goodell, Drillmaster, p. 102.

reflected in some of the above , sometimes there did get into the office those who lacked common sense. One instance of this was the leader in Salem, New Jersey, who in 1874 replied to a member who had just told of a Satanic assault, "Brother, the next time the devil comes . . . take a big club to him."⁴⁹

Other leaders were not so dull, of course, and even in the last days there were those who, by the personal magnetism which God had put within them, were able to continue to help members of the classes to the last. One such as this was an American, David Taylor. Atkinson tells of hearing him lead his class one evening around 1874.

One evening I was hearing him lead his class when not less than fifty persons were present. A member in speaking said that ever since his conversion he had desired to turn back to the world . . . [Mr. Taylor] almost startled me by saying, in tones full of earnest feeling, "I believe you have never had any desire to turn back, but I do not think you are making much progress."

The leader then exhorted the individual to advance in the Christian life. Atkinson said he feared some offense would be taken, but none was and it worked out well.⁵⁰

Thus were the demands made upon the class leaders. In the early days of Methodism many fine and capable leaders were produced. In the latter days, however, it seems that more and more mediocre and poor leaders appeared. Eventually these played their part in poisoning the springs of the classes. Methodism and America paid a price when the class meeting light was extinguished.

⁴⁹Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 35.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 36-37

However, while the light burned brightly in the meeting rooms, there were people in need being helped regularly to the "enjoyment of religion" and strength flowed in the spiritual veins of Methodism. A Key factor was this cadre of dedicated leaders who effectually held the reins and guided members into a new and deeper life. Church pays them a tribute by saying,

For the most part the first Methodist class-leaders were men and women of exemplary character, and their diaries show that it was something much more than fear of disciplinary action which kept them faithful to their charge. Class-leading was to them a vocation and demanded utter loyalty not merely to a set of "Rules" but to the Lord and Master who had called them. They found their highest joy in the cure of souls committed to them, and they accepted the responsibility of their office as a most sacred trust.⁵¹

⁵¹ Church, Early Methodist, p. 163.

CHAPTER XI

OPPOSITION TO THE CLASS MEETING

There was opposition to the class meeting. Let it not be assumed that, because Methodism spread rapidly and so far, or because the class meeting went with it so effectively, there were not those who dragged their heels both inside and outside of the societies, and later, the church.

I. EXTERNAL OPPOSITION

From outside of Methodism; that is, from non-Methodists; there came a great deal of criticism over the years. Much of it stemmed from Wesley's theological stance which appeared to the Calvinist as a belief in a life of sinless perfection for the Christian. Beyond this, though, there were objections to Methodist innovations. These have been offered always in the history of the church when some revived group gets too excited for the sleeping church. However, at times innovations have spelled a downgrading of the church's spirituality as well. The charges leveled against the class were not insincere even if they were misplaced.

Barr cites a book published in 1902 which claimed to be an index of anti-Methodist publications of the eighteenth century. It listed on 157 pages at least 606 different headings which mention both the publication and the answer.¹

¹Josiah Henry Barr, Early Methodists Under Persecution (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1916), p. 209.

The vitriol of criticisms often knew no bounds. An example of such extremity would be the following, an alleged recipe for a Methodist.

Take of the herbs of hypocrisy and the radix of spiritual pride each two handfulls; two ounces of ambition, vainglory, and impudence; boil them over the fire of sedition till the ingredients swim on the top; then add six ounces of the sugar of deceit, one quart of dissembing tears, and put the whole into the bottle of envy, stopping it fast with the cork of malice. When these ingredients are settled, make them into pills. Take one night and morning with the tongue of slander; then go into the society house to hear nonsense and stupidity by way of gentle exercise; fall into pretended fits; go home, cant, sing hymns, and pray till you are heard all round the neighborhood; backbite your best friends; cheat all you are acquainted with; and, in short, under the mask of hqliness commit every other act that an honest man would be ashamed of.²

Criticism of the Methodists reached intensity in places which endangered the lives of the believers. Southwark, Middleses, and Wednesbury were places where Wesley felt the rage of the people in resistance to the gospel. His preachers, too, felt the brunt of Satan's rage as the movement called Methodism gathered momentum. In New England in the late eighteenth century Jesse Lee faced this hostility. Others endured beatings and jail in order to move Methodism into that sanctuary of Congregationalism.³

The Methodists in response were encouraged to be careful in their daily walk. It is small wonder that in the face the stormy criticism which swirled about the movement Wesley charged its members strictly with an orderly walk. Barr pictures the conditions of the Methodist membership.

²Ibid., p. 222.

³Abel Stevens, Memorials of the Introduction of Methodism into the Eastern States (New York: Lane and Scott, 1849), pp. 226-227 and 462-464.

Together with their leaders the Methodists as a body were objects of ridicule, invectives, buffonery, slander, and calumny. False rumors were reported, cartoons and hideous portraits were published; pamphlets, plays, and dialogues were written against them. Some were moderate while others were vicious and slanderous. Charles Wesley says, "Innumerable stories are invented to stop the work, or rather repeated, for they are the same we have heard a thousand times, as well as the primitive Christians--all manner of wickedness is acted in our societies, except the eating of little children." So common was the report that vice was practiced at their society meetings that at times unmarried women scarcely dared to be accompanied home at night by male friends, and widowers sometimes refused to employ housekeepers to care for their motherless children.⁴

Specifically regarding the class meeting many criticisms were offered, including many in the same spirit as those above. Owing to the exclusive nature of the meeting, it appeared to be something to be feared by the outsider. This fear is akin to that which prompted charges of cannibalism to be directed at early Christians who secretly observed the Lord's Supper during persecutions.

A Reverend William K. Bowman, an obvious outsider to Methodism, wrote in a pamphlet entitled The Imposture of Methodism Displayed,

I pretend not to know what is transacted in these meetings [class meetings, which Bowman terms "nocturnal assemblies"], but I cannot help suspecting that associations of this sort are seldom entered into merely upon a religious account, but generally for contrary ends. When I reflect upon the monstrous society of Bacchanals in the Stove of Stimulus, which in the 567th year of Rome was suppressed by Postumius Albinus, I am apt to make ungrateful comparisons.⁵

A Baptist writer of the 1850's viewed the spread of Methodism in the southern part of the United States with an almost paranoid alarm, which feeling he aptly expressed in the title of his book, The Great Iron Wheel. He

⁴Barr, Early Methodists, p. 208.

⁵Church, More about the Early Methodist People, p. 69.

pictured Methodism as coming upon the South as a great iron wheel, rolling in exorably over everything in its path, presumbaly including the Baptists. Certainly, if the gleeful tone of Cartwright's reports of his encounters with Baptists is anything near to being typical of the abandon with which Methodists plunged into the opposition they encountered, then the author had some ground for fear.

This author, Graves, felt that certain inconsistencies in Methodism needed righting. Mainly was the class meeting system a target of his fire. He felt that it was valueless, even harmful, to the Christian life for believers to be forced to attend meetings of the classes and confess themselves under a leader whose piety did not always command their respect. This was seen as harmful in the long run.⁶ It is likely that Graves had taken in a problem which has been shown to be a serious one, especially later in the class system history. However, to say that every leader was unworthy was undoubtedly an overstatement.

Many more specific charges were leveled at the class meeting system, however, and by considerably more erudite men than those who have been thus far mentioned. One common criticism from both without and within the fold was that of an unscriptural origin for the system. Wesley answered this.

I answer: (1) There is no scripture against it. You cannot show one text that forbids them class meetings . (2) There is much scripture for it, even though all those texts which enjoin the substance of those

⁶J. R. Graves, The Great Iron Wheel (Nashville, Tennessee; Graves and Marks, 1855), p. 381.

various duties whereof this is only an indifferent circumstance, to be determined by reason and experience. (3) You seem not to have observed that the Scripture in most points gives only general rules, and leaves the particular circumstances to be adjusted by the common sense of mankind. The Scripture, for instance, gives the general rule, "Let all things be done decently and in order." But common sense is to determine on particular occasions what order and decency require.⁷

Isaac Taylor, probably one of the most scholarly critics of the Methodists, was very outspoken in his criticism of the class. His censure of it was two-fold. *Taylor, an English theologian of the Anglican Church who lived from 1787 to 1856, felt that Wesley was in error in promoting a knowable religious experience and assurance. The encouragement, therefore, to seek this kind of clear experience in the classroom was wrong.

Furthermore the classes gave rise to loud praying which Taylor detested. For him this seemed to be second only to the sin of salvation assurance. Though he was willing to see good in the advance of the laity under Wesley, he felt that the wrong incurred by the foregoing errors offset any advantages gained by them.⁸ One wonders what Taylor would say now to the calls for attack on the "cult of assurance" within Methodism in some quarters.

More than this, Taylor objected to the Methodists following a theological position which seemed to him to lack most of the system which other theologies had. He said,

⁷Telford, Letters, II, p. 298.

⁸Isaac Taylor, Wesley and Methodism (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), pp. 227-228.

Can it be thought possible that the ill-digested and antagonistic mass--the heterogeneous congeries of religious opinions spread over the pages of the Founder's writings, should stand intact in another century, and should continue to command the assent of an educated body of ministers, through the term of the present, and the next generation? . . . A wise and silently effected consignment of Wesley's theological writings to a respectful oblivion, would leave room for the advancement of the Wesleyan ministry at once in religious intelligence, and in scriptural consistency.⁹

Others, including denominational leaders, right down to the end of the class meeting's days of employment charged that it was a "popish ordinance", some kind of Roman Catholic contrivance.¹⁰ The confessional aspect frightened such people. Watson answered this objection to a degree. He said, "These meetings are not, as some have supposed, inquisitorial but their business is confined to statements of religious experience and the administration of pious, friendly counsel."¹¹

Wesley answered more carefully,

I hope I need not pass an harder censure on those (most of them at least) who affirm this than that they talk of they know not what; they betray in themselves the most gross and shameful ignorance. Do not they yet know that confession is made by a single person to a priest?--and this itself is in no wise condemned by our Church; nay, she recommends it in some cases. Whereas that we practise is the confession of several persons conjointly, not to a priest, but to each other. Consequently, it has no analogy at all to Popish confession. But the truth is, this is a stale objection, which many people make against anything they do not like. It is all Popery out of hand.¹²

Miley offers further remarks on the same score to the effect that the Roman confession is sacramental while that of the class meeting is not.

⁹Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁰Thomas Jackson, The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., VIII (London: John Mason, 1830), p. 259.

¹¹Watson, Life, p. 96

¹²Telford, Letters, II, p. 303.

Catholic confession, in addition to being given privately to one person, also includes the most intimate details of specific sins. This was a degree which the class meeting never did insist upon. Further, Catholic confession is made to gain absolution or pardon. The purpose of confession in the class meeting was substantitally different.¹³

The specific purpose of confession in the class meeting might be viewed differently by different persons. In a sense one always confesses in order to gain a kind of absolution, be he Catholic or Protestant. However, the secondary benefits of doing it in a class meeting setting were what really made the class effective. These, the psychological aspects of confession in a group, will be discussed in Section III below. However, these were quite tangible benefits which, though members might not have understood them in terms of present day psychological understanding, were nevertheless achieved fairly regularly, especially in the early days of the class system. Moreover, they were not obtainable in private confessionals.

Miley makes a final point of the difference between Catholic confession and that occurring in the class meetings. It was that the Catholic confession is made not only to the priest (really he is secondary as a confession object), but also, to God, Mary, Michael the archangel, John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and all the saints in heaven. There was no such broad intent in the mind of the confessor in the class meeting. It was to God and group only that the

¹³Miley, Treatise on Class Meetings, pp. 58-62.

member confessed.¹⁴

Taylor leveled the charge of shallowness in religious feelings and spirit at the class meeting system. One reason for this objection was, in Taylor's mind, the belief that Methodism too much emphasized the congregational aspect, the social part of the gospel, at the expense of the private, subjective one. Then, too, Taylor thought Methodism was shallow in that it could seemingly only deal with the aspects of private religion that could be talked about, or "proclaimed aloud."¹⁵ Thus Taylor seemed to be saying that Methodism was introverted but not introverted enough and too much extroverted altogether. This leaves only deeply introverted religion as apparently being acceptable to Taylor, though this form has invariably proven itself in the history of the church to cause the error of mystic extremity.

He was most bothered by this lack of introversion. He felt that there were depths, religiously speaking, where one could only go alone and that experiences in these depths are indescribable. Those moments when the human heart might come into correspondence with the "Infinite Attributes" Taylor held to be beyond Methodism's power to speak of in testimony. "Methodism did not venture into the recesses of the soul further than the tongue might be its guide," he said.¹⁶ Because of this Methodism was destined for

¹⁴Ibid. ¹⁵Taylor, Wesley and Methodism, p. 84.

¹⁶Ibid.

existence in an epoch only. This seems to argue with Taylor's holdings against knowable experience mentioned earlier. Thus his inconsistency becomes glaring.

Yet another criticism Taylor laid at the door of the Methodist movement and the class meeting. Wesleyanism was schismatic. He regretted the insistence that some persons, baptized as infants into the church were treated as unchurched people. He said,

Christian families, trained in a Church which should well understand its commission in the world, and should be alive to its duties, and mistrustful, never, of the grace, the power, and the faithfulness of God, such families, so trained, would send forth from their nurture-bosoms, for catechetical instruction, their junior members--the "members of Christ--the children of God--the inheritors of the kingdom of heaven" --those to whom the customary hour's talking in a "class meeting" would be strangely unsuitable.¹⁷

In other words, it does not seem right to treat the true church members as people were treated in the class meeting. One gets the impression Taylor thought the class meetings undignified. Of course, there is really nothing in the Bible which is supportive of pride and stiff necks. One of the beneficial features of the class meeting may have been its provision of an atmosphere where these things were not possible for any length of time. False dignity came to grief when the class meeting functioned at its best.

The heart of Taylor's objection to the class meeting was more serious than any of the foregoing arguments, however.

Nevertheless, as a religious meeting, thus constituted [as the class meeting was], and thus directed, will not merely fail of accomplishing

¹⁷Ibid., p. 233.

what ought to be its purpose; but it can scarcely fail to give that wrong . . . direction to the religious affections whence spring most of the disorders and irregularities that rob the Gospel of its honors.¹⁸

Taylor then noted that Wesley's application of scriptural precepts in this system aggravated its evils.

What could he imagine would be the consequence of instructing his class leaders to demand of each member an unreserved exposure of a week's sins and temptations? What is it that could be the product of such disgorgements when each was solemnly enjoined, with a remorseless disregard of delicacy, of reserve, of diffidence to pour forth, before all, the moral ills of the past seven days. May there not be some ground for the alleged comparatively harmless nature of auricular confession? The gross-minded and the shameless will be prompted by egotism and by bad ambition to discharge the week's accumulations of their bosoms very copiously; but it is certain that the sensitive, whose consciences are the most alive to the feelings of healthful compunction in the recollection of sin, will not, until the system itself has spoiled them, be able to bring themselves up to any such pitch of ingenuousness; those who should be silent, will be loquacious, those who might speak, will violate their best feelings if they do.

It is not easy to imagine how it can be otherwise, so long as Wesley's instructions are complied with.¹⁹

Here Taylor admitted that he thought that the spirit of good sense and better feeling had influence which might resist this tendency. Nevertheless he insisted,

But--so far as these unedifying outpourings of ill-conditioned bosoms may still take place in a class-meeting, one cannot but be dismayed in thinking of what must be the moral consequence which, in a course of time, will be produced upon the imagination and the religious sentiments of those whose fate it is to listen to the same! . . . It is exceedingly difficult to imagine that a weekly listening to the revelations of the class-meeting can have otherwise than a very corrupting influence upon young and uncontaminated minds.²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 228-231.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 231.

²⁰Ibid.

This followed with an admission that he thinks that most leaders are fairly discreet. Thus while presenting his argument, he twice disputed himself, and rightly so. The whole argumentation of Taylor was that it would not work and, worse, that it would corrupt minds and hearts. This is like saying after the game is over that the victors did not win and that it is impossible to see how they ever would be able to. The class meeting had proven itself quite effective by Taylor's time, yet he was insistent that it did not work and that it could not last. The strange part is that he was half right: it did not last.

In his final remarks Taylor recognized that his fears for the effects of the meeting had not materialized. He admitted that there had been no reported instance of proven extravagances.²¹ Further it was better to assemble in Methodism than to leave members assembled in sin as the established church had been doing previously.²² Thus he made the full circle, the full swing to a position favoring the class meeting. This was the seeming end of most of the sensible detractors of the class meeting; that is, it was unworkable, but it seems to be working and doing some good.

As to the objections of defilement due to confession, there are several reasons why this danger never materialized. One reason is that the classes never provided an atmosphere of acceptance of the obviously gross sins, such as Taylor feared above. Sin was never anything but something to be ashamed of to the Wesleyans. People of such minds as Taylor worried regarding were

²¹Ibid., pp. 228-229.

²²Ibid., pp. 229-230.

never permitted to remain long in the classes without considerable mending of their moral outlook. The salvation experience had a cleansing effect upon a man. Failing to recognize the experience potential of the class meeting, Taylor did not realize the nature of the change effected by it. This is strange in view of his having available to him several fine Methodist histories and being surrounded with a good cloud of Methodist witnesses in his day. Finally, the depth of confession he spoke of here was not sought in the class. The Methodists did not concentrate on confession of sin and sins but upon confession of experiences with Christ. This was uplifting, not destructive. For the Methodists sin was a state of life not a series of acts. If the state were dealt with, the acts would care for themselves. It is unlikely that the confessions that were given were of very great salacious content therefore, because they involved attitudes and feelings, not acts. Wife-battery, evil-speaking, theft, lying and the like were probably not much detailed beyond what the neighbors and members already knew. They seem not to have been indelicately confessed at any rate. In all these accusations Taylor is seen to reflect a rather typical attitude of non-Methodists who knew not what the detail and nature of the class meeting were. It would have been better if he had attended a class for a while.

II. INTERNAL OPPOSITION

Reaction was obtained from society insiders from the very outset of the class meeting. A number of these will be reviewed here in order to

show the nature of the opposition feelings of some Methodists when the class meeting made its impact in their lives. That there was resistance to the institution can readily be seen from the numbers who did not and had to be disciplined by Wesley (see pages 77 to 81 supra).

In the beginning, for example, there was objection to the inception of the class meeting on the ground that, first, it was not needed in the work of the church of Christ until that time and it seemed unnecessary yet. Second, it did not seem necessary when the society first began, so why even now? Both questions found the same answer from Wesley.

That with regard to these little prudential helps we are continually changing one thing after another is not a weakness or a fault, as you imagine, but a peculiar advantage which we enjoy. By this means we declare them all to be merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution. . . We are always open to instruction; willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better.²³

Wesley found them helpful and not hindered by scripture. That was good enough for him and he seemed to feel that it should be good enough for anyone.

Loyalty requirement in the form of regular class attendance and its twin sister, the expectation that confidences would be kept, likewise came under fire from Methodists. It seems to have been inherent in the class structure that there be a family kind of secrecy regarding the things disclosed in the classes. Loyalty was demanded from the members which was equivalent to that which family members might hold toward one another.

²³Telford, Letters, II, p. 298.

Some naturally resented this enforced intimacy. Church says that loyalty requirements were strong, based as they were on the members' kinship and unity arising out of their relation to God.²⁴

In this connection Wesley's autocratic rule of the societies, and particularly in regard to class meeting attendance, was much criticized. In response to a question raised about the offense of some men at Wesley's exercise of such authority as he did in this way Wesley said,

I did not seek any part of it, but when it has come fully unawares, not daring to "bury the talent", I used it to the best of my judgment. Yet I was never fond of it, I always did, and do now, bear as my burden --the burden which God lays upon me, and therefore I dare not lay it down. But if you can tell me anyone, or any five men, to whom I may transfer this burden, who will just what I do now, I will heartily thank both them and you.²⁵

To the charge that he was thus shackling free-born Englishmen Wesley answered,

It is nonsense . . . to call my using of this power, "shackling of freeborn Englishmen." None needs submit himself unless he will; so there is no shackling in this case. Every preacher and every member may leave me when he pleases but while he chooses to stay, it is on the same terms as he joins me first.²⁶

After Wesley's death the question of liberalizing the strictness of the rules came up again and again. At first they were stoutly defended. Gradually, however, they were eroded away in the washing tide of resistance which slowly arose over the next sixty or seventy years. In 1854 the rules were still fairly intact insofar as required attendance was concerned. Rosser stoutly defended them. To the suggestion that the class should be op-

²⁴Church, Early Methodist, p. 161. ²⁵Emory, Works, V. p. 221.

²⁶Ibid.

tional for each member Rosser replied that quickly few, if any, would attend any more. He noted that even with the restraints of obligation fewer than should actually attended.²⁷ Thus, in Wesley's day, Methodist groups did manage to ignore the class meeting, rules notwithstanding.

Some questioned the rule that the leader be appointed by the preacher, saying that he ought to be elected by the people of the class. Rosser replied that most were satisfied with their leaders (which remains to be seen). Further, he echoed Wesley in the "Large Minutes" by saying that difficult leaders, when pointed out to their pastors or ministers could be replaced. However, in an elected position the leader would only need to maintain a block of votes and he could remain. In an elective situation those best qualified by right of their humility would be least likely to seek the office, while those least qualified in the same respect would seek it. For support he cited an old Wesley verse for support in this position.

How ready is he to go whom God has never sent,
How cautious, diffident and slow his chosen instrument.²⁸

Rosser went on to explain that there would be no remedy for the situation when both class and leader turned lukewarm (as they often did in those latter years).²⁹ Of course, when the preacher turned luke-warm the same problem was faced, but at least the preacher was moved periodically. The class leader, having captured the leader's chair, was likely to retain it until he or the class, or both, died.

²⁷Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 200.

²⁸Ibid., p. 53.

²⁹Ibid., p. 54.

The complaint was registered early that the leaders were inadequate for the work. Taylor insisted the majority of them were not fitted because what the class needed was a Bible teacher, a catechist. This obviously could be done only by some trained scholar.³⁰ This of course was not what the class members needed necessarily. It was considered important that the leader be a man of the Book, but not that he be seminary-trained. Cartwright and Finley seemed to feel that this constituted a hindrance and that seminary training did not even seem to do preachers much good. To the other suggestion that there was a general lack of gifts or graces in the leaders in the area of leadership abilities Wesley had a response.

I answer: (1) Yet, such leaders as they are, it is plain that God has blessed their labour. (2) If any of these is remarkably wanting in gifts and grace, he is soon taken notice of and removed. (3) If you know any such, tell it to me, not to others, and I will endeavour to exchange him for a better. (4) It may be hoped they will all be better than they are, both by experience and observation, and by the advices given them by the Minister every Tuesday night, and the prayers (then in particular) offered up for them.³¹

Many other standard objections were offered by the recalcitrant members. "It is not necessary to salvation and therefore I do not attend." "Other churches do not have it." "I do everything else in the church and that is enough." Some were ashamed to speak of their personal lives. Some felt too humble in the presence of the more grown in grace. Some felt unworthy to speak. Wesley found some that just did not like it. Some claimed boredom. There were visiting relatives, bad weather, indisposition, business calls, and speaking inability in case none of the other excuses worked. One thing is certain: of excuses there were plenty.

³⁰Taylor, Wesley and Methodism, pp. 230-231.

³¹Telford, Letters, II, p. 299.

There were two excuses which became more and more prominent in the later days of the classes. One came from the laity and the other, from the church leadership. The former was named by a lady, a member of a class, though unwilling, and restless under the burden of her duties as a class-member.

If the custom of requiring every one to speak, whether they have anything to say or not, could be changed, leaving it optional to speak or to listen only to others' experience, I think from observation and experience of fifty-five years' membership, that it would be one of the most profitable and pleasant meetings that could possibly be held. The present form keeps many good people from joining us, and causes others to leave.

Persons wishing to join our church have objected to me that our membership were required to meet once a week and make a speech, saying they were sure they could not do that, and that the thought of it was giving them great trouble. I have endeavored to answer those objections by saying, they were not expected to make a speech, only to answer questions that might be put to them; or, if requested, to speak the state of their mind, and if they do not think they could relate any thing that would be edifying to others, they could just say that and nothing more.

I suppose it is hardly possible for you strong men to realize the difficulty we weaker vessels find, sometimes, in expressing ourselves before others. There are many pious, intelligent persons who, from a natural diffidence, cannot speak freely in a social gathering of a dozen or twenty people on common subjects with which they are familiar: how much more difficult to speak of the deep experience of the heart.³²

As the Victorian era wore on many felt they had problems with modesty, especially the more genteel women. This period was a time of withdrawal of people intersocially. The forces which had thrown the lower classes together in a former day in desperation, clinging to one another

³²Atkinson, The Class Leader, pp. 95-96.

for survival, had abated. There was setting in upon the whole western world a "system" in which social forms became the acceptable thing, regardless of the feelings behind them. This became the impersonality of the twentieth century. The individual was being lost again after his resurrection in the Wesleyan revival. This is seen nowhere more clearly than in our own American church in the period 1900 to 1950. Sweet points out this impersonalizing trend in the church as a lamentable thing.³³ It can be seen ominously in the reluctance on the part of the individual to an increasing degree over the years to trust himself into the hands of his immediate fellow. The tragic part of it is this, however: if a man cannot be open with another man, who is real and tangible to him, he will be difficultly able, if at all, to be open with his God. The ultimate in this depersonalization is Communism with its teaching that humans are essentially machines. More will be said about the influence of this trend in Section IV below.

There was an excuse for everyone later, if one wanted it. It was not hard to find some at least valid-looking reason for non-attendance. Pyke pretty well sums up the real problem with all the opposers.

It is not enough to point out that conditions are different [from those of the earlier days], that Christians are not exposed to persecution or ridicule as they were in Wesley's day, or that there is a natural shrinking from the frank testimony of those early days. All that can be taken into account; but the question persists whether or not we have a religious experience warm and deep enough to submit to the weekly test of a serious weekly review. It is certain that a semi-developed Christian experience will shrink from such fellowship.

³³William Warren Sweet, Revivalism in America (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1944), pp. 177-179.

Vain repetitions there may sometimes be in such meetings; but these are far less obvious to the kindly heart than the cold, detached critic. Only sapless Christians have made the discovery that this form of fellowship has lost its charm and power.³⁴

One final objection, the one offered by the clergy, in the latter days of the class meeting was the one which probably moved the church leadership to change the attendance requirement more than any. It was simply that the requirement of class attendance was holding back church expansion. There can be no doubt that many were not entering the church because of it. The leadership finally succumbed to the enticement of the promise of enlargement and made the change which cut the nerve of the class. Some said it should go simply because it was an old practice and because it was old it should no longer be used. It amounts to about the same as the other excuse. The desire was to streamline and the church could advance faster. Methodism did grow when it began to relax its hold via the class. It remains to be seen whether or not this was gain.

Rosser spent much energy and ink answering the argument that the class meetings were old hat.

Shall the system of Methodism, which has been wrought to its present noble state--so rational, so stable, so consistent, so holy, so useful to community, and such a blessing to mankind--a system which originated in and has been preserved by the Holy Spirit, in the special interpositions of divine providence--be tampered with, or subjected to vague and doubtful experiments, as if it were a system of human policy and wisdom?³⁵

Then drawing a bead on such innovators with capricious attitudes, he fired again.

³⁴Richard Pyke, John Wesley Came This Way (London: Epworth Press, 1938), pp. 136-137.

³⁵Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 19.

It is much easier for some persons to persuade themselves that the cause of declension, or the reason for slow progress, at any time, is a fault or defect of some part of the system, than in their own and a general deficiency in zeal, or piety, or consistency, or perseverance. They beguile their consciences by supposing that the system does not work well; and it gratifies their ambition to be esteemed as promoters or framers of new schemes and important amendments.³⁶

The answer to such innovators is simple, said Rosser.

The entire economy of Methodism, both as to its spiritual and temporal prosperity, may now be considered to have attained such a degree of maturity and perfection, as is not likely to soon admit of any material improvement.³⁷

With this optimistic overstatement let the chapter on objections to the class meeting in its own day be closed. The leadership of Methodism apparently came to agree with her critics. In the hundred years since the Southern Methodist Church struck the requirement of class attendance from its discipline most other Wesleyan denominations have likewise effectually eliminated it from their rules by the simple expedient of no longer requiring attendance. The main Methodist denomination in America, as has been said still carries descriptions of the class and encouragements to use it in its discipline.

Today none of these denominations, not one of them--evangelical or otherwise--enjoys the spiritual or moral influence that it once did in America. Even those claiming to retain the historic doctrines of the Wesleyan faith have trouble advancing in proportion to anything like the obvious present need. In what now seems to be a searching society, why is it that so few are really finding? Can it be that historic doctrines are not enough? It seems clear that the spirit which killed the class meeting still prevails

³⁶Ibid. p. 16.

³⁷Ibid.

in the land. Mavis does not overstate the case when he says that the surrender of the class meeting is "particularly untimely now."³⁸ It has not been short of tragic for the spiritual impact upon the populace of the country and upon the life of the Wesleyan movement that the classes have been disbanded.

Some during its lifetime and after saw at least a portion of its value. These will be discussed next.

³⁸W. C. Mavis, "Abiding Values of the Methodist Class Meeting," The Asbury Seminarian, X (Spring-Summer, 1956), 20.

CHAPTER XII

SUPPORT OF THE CLASS MEETING

There were numerous people over the years who approved of the class meeting and in their ways supported it. This support was not limited to merely those within Methodism itself. Many on the outside vigorously championed it.

I. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

A few testimonies of the outsiders who approved of Methodism and its class meetings will be considered now. Some seemed even to envy it. One of these was George Whitefield, the life-long friend of John Wesley. What follows is an abstract from some miscellaneous writings of Adam Clarke.

From long experience I know the propriety of Mr. Wesley's advice to the preachers: "Establish class meetings and form societies wherever you preach and have attentive hearers. Long experience shows the necessity of doing this; for wherever we have preached without doing this the word has been like seed sown by the wayside." It was by this means that we have been enabled to establish permanent and holy churches over the world. Mr. Wesley saw the necessity of this from the beginning. Mr. Whitefield, when he separated from Mr. Wesley, did not follow it. What was the consequence? The fruit of Mr. Whitefield's labors died with himself. Mr. Wesley's fruit remains, grows, increases, and multiplies exceedingly. Did Mr. Whitefield see his error? He did; but not till it was too late. His people, long unused to it, would not come under this discipline. Have I authority to say so? I have. Forty years ago I travelled in the Bradford, Wiltshire circuit with Mr. John Pool. Himself told me the following anecdote. Mr. Pool was well known to Mr. Whitefield; and, having met him one day, he accosted him in the following manner:--

MR. WHITEFIELD. Well, John, art thou still a Wesleyan?

POOL. Yes, sir; and I thank God that I have the privilege of being

in connexion with Mr. Wesley, and one of his preachers.

WHITEFIELD. John thou art in thy right place. My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected; and my people are a rope of sand.

And what remains of this great man's labor? Scarcely anything. Multitudes were convinced under his ministry, and are gone to God; but there is no spiritual succession. The Tabernacle near Moorfields, the tabernacle in Tottenham-Court Road, and one in Bristol, with what is called the little school in Kingswood, are all even of his places of worship that remain, and these are mere Independent chapels.¹

From Wesley's own century also comes the case of a woman who was dismissed from the society of a leader named John Nelson. Later she was brought up for a capital crime. Nelson was subpoenaed to testify for this woman. In the course of his testimony read the rules of the band societies (which were carried over in some measure into the classes). The judge, a non-Methodist, said, "Good morality . . . Gentlemen, this is true Christianity!"²

In the nineteenth century a Baptist publication, The Christian Secretary, in the early years of the century had this to say:

From an experience of more than thirty years' duration with the mode of conducting Methodist class-meetings, and their beneficial results, we venture to recommend them strongly to all Baptist churches, to be put into practice . . . Of the blessing to be derived from social prayer and praise in small circles too much can hardly be said, especially when these exercises are rendered strikingly appropriate by the particulars disclosed in answer to the faithful and affectionate inquiries of a skillful leader.³

¹Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 178.

²Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies, p. 113.

³Atkinson, Class Leader, pp. 163-164.

A mid-century Episcopal Church magazine lamented, "From the class meetings the great Methodist revival drew its strength and had they been legitimated in the Church of England, she would have remained in fact as well as in name, National."⁴

Queen Victoria discovered that a female servant of hers was attending a class and was being persecuted by the other servants for it. The queen decided to go herself and see if it was a fit place for her servant to go. She returned from the class meeting and told her servant, "Never forget your class meeting. I only wish the other servants would go."⁵

Henry Ward Beecher remarked once, "The greatest thing John Wesley ever gave the world is the Methodist Class Meeting."⁶ Dwight L. Moody likewise approved: "The Methodist class meetings are the best institutions for training young converts the world ever saw."⁷ Goodell observed that the Society of Christian Endeavor was adapted from the class meeting and had become through its pledge the mightiest class meeting the Church ever saw. It can be seen therefore that not all the non-Methodists were bitter about the class meeting system. As to why no others ever duplicated the reason is the same one for why it is not now practiced even by the Methodists. That reason will be discussed in Section IV below.

⁴Daniel Wise, Popular Objections to Methodism (Boston: J. J. Magee, 1856), pp. 72-73.

⁵Goodell, Drillmaster, pp. 202-204. ⁶Ibid., p. 15. ⁷Ibid.

II. INTERNAL SUPPORT

Feelings about the class meeting ran their highest within Methodism's ranks, in men like Rosser, and Miley, and Atkinson. These felt that it represented the zenith of church organizational efficiency and could not be surpassed. As can be seen Wesley himself did not so feel, but was ever sensitive to possible improvements (see page 133 supra). It may be that the rigidity of the latter day men is one of the symptoms of rigor mortis setting into the class system. Wesley was willing to change it somewhat to keep it fresh. However, he had his own good feelings about the basic soundness of forcing Christians into small group confrontations. There is no question about that. Only six years after the inception of the class he wrote to Perronet.

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to "bear one another's burdens," and naturally to "care for each other." As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And "speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying of itself in love."⁸

In 1825 the conference in Great Britain addressed itself to the churches there,

We more especially enjoin upon you, in the Lord, a diligent and conscientious attendance at your class meetings. It is these blessed institutions which so constantly respect the end of all preaching and of all religious profession--the work of God in the heart . . . Take heed, brethren, that ye forsake not this assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.⁹

⁸Telford, Letters, II, pp. 297-298. ⁹Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 179.

Again in 1855 a similar feeling was expressed at the British conference.

The Conference cherishes an ever-deepening conviction of the value of that spiritual fellowship with each other which our people have been wont to maintain in a regular attendance on our class-meetings, believing that in this course the members of our societies of all ages, and all varieties of knowledge, position, and attainment, are best enabled to walk comfortably with God, to nourish that simple and ardent piety which is their only safeguard against the dangers and seductions of the age, to train up spiritually-minded office-bearers for future service . . . the Conference therefore exhorts all our Ministers to watch over our class-meetings with holy jealousy, and to use every effort to maintain them strictly in their efficiency, directing both their public instructions and their private pastoral influence toward this object with unceasing diligence.¹⁰

Wesley likewise echoed this feeling when he directed one friend, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven; remember you cannot serve Him alone; you must therefore find companions, or make them. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."¹¹

Rosser insisted,

Truth once developed and established can never be lost, though it may be suspended or remain stationary for a time, so the efficiency of the class meeting, once tested and established, remains the same, though suspended, and when revived will exert all its original and legitimate power. And, hence, we cannot conceive what changes or new states of society, or what advancements in civilization, or what alterations and improvements in civil governments, or what expansion and elevation of the human mind, or what new forms of conventional life, or what achievements of the blessed gospel itself, can require any material alterations or amendment of the Class Meeting system, much less its abandonment altogether.¹²

¹⁰Gregory, Handbook, p. 261.

¹¹Fitzgerald, Class Meeting, p. 26.

¹²Rosser, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

The leaders of the classes testified often to the efficacy of the class meeting system, properly run. William Carvosso said, "I believe I never had greater pleasure in meeting classes; in labouring to prop feeble knees, strengthen the hands that hang down, and press on believers all the depths of humble love."¹³

Another wrote, "I love the class meetings. They are the backbone of Methodism."¹⁴ A leader with twenty-five years experience said,

We love each other as classmates. When we meet on the street, we have a kind word for each other. We take an interest in all, rich and poor, old or young. We never discriminate between any, but in the classroom we meet as a family--as one band of brothers and sisters in Christ the Lord. And we never have dry class meetings, but we have pleasant, profitable, spiritual, heavenly waitings before the Lord.¹⁵

A Dr. Brunson, a minister for over fifty years (nineteenth century America) and a "specialist" in class meetings said, "Without class meetings it is next to impossible to keep young converts alive in religion, or for older professors to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth."¹⁶

Some of the most radiant testimonies to the value of the classes came from the members themselves over the years. One said, calling himself "A Friend of the Class Meeting", "These meetings have ever been peculiarly blessed to my own soul--and for that reason, I feel more desirous that all my brethren and sister should share in the good of them."¹⁷

Lady Maxwell was a pious Scottish Methodist of the nineteenth cen-

¹³Carvosso, A Memoir, p. 45.

¹⁴Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 81.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 80-81. ¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Letter to the editor, Zion's Herald [Boston], VI (February 20, 1828), 1.

tury whose spiritual feelings were respected by her pastor and friends. She delighted in the class meeting. After she attended a class meeting she wrote in her diary,

I have to remark now, more than ever, the fulness of the Divine presence in our little class-meeting here; and something still more remarkable (as there is often only myself and two or three preachers) there is, for the time, an uncommon power given me to express my own experience.¹⁸

A correspondent wrote to a paper of the day in 1847 noting the neglect of the class meeting by some in what he called "the far west" (of America), pointing out that some churches there did not even have a class meeting any more. In complimenting the class meeting he emphasized the state of things when it was lacking in a church. "It would take a more able pen than mine to describe the gloom and darkness that surrounds the Church, when the means of grace are neglected."¹⁹

Mrs. Bettie Locke attended a class and heard people whose earthly lives were, some of them, such as should have made them miserable. Instead they were radiantly testifying regarding their joy in Christ. She wrote in one of the periodicals of her day (early nineteenth century) about her first class meeting. She called the article, "How I became a Methodist."

I had bowed my head in many a sanctuary where the lofty spire pointed heavenward, where the light streamed through stained glass windows, and where deep-toned organs' notes fell in prolonged vibrations on my ear; but never did I so feel God's presence shining in our midst. If we could so feel it here, how must it be in heaven. I did not wonder how they who thus meet once in each week could so well understand divine teachings. It is almost needless to say,

¹⁸Church, Early Methodist, p. 168.

¹⁹Letter to the editor, The [Nashville] Christian Advocate, XII (August 20, 1847), 1.

my aversion to class meeting was overcome, and now, as I look back through the dim vista of years, I feel its influence still, and have never regretted the hour it led me to add my name to its list.²⁰

Probably the most eloquent of all are the silent testimonies to the power, efficacy, and delight of the class meeting exhibited by the members over the years as they endured great inconveniences and privations to attend. As those souls sacrificed and accepted persecution as the price of attendance and found their respective ways to class meeting week after week of their lives, they quietly, irrefutably testified to the marvelous working of the Spirit of the class meeting. Peter Cartwright's mother regularly walked on Sundays four miles through the Kentucky wilderness with her little son, to get to a Methodist class meeting in southern Kentucky in the 1790's.²¹

A group of English sailors had persecution from their captain over the matter of class meeting. Nevertheless, finding it essential to their spiritual lives, they met anyway.

They made the time of meeting suit their duties. Their classroom was the forepart of the ship, where they had to lie down, side by side, or else partly on one another upon the cables: the arrangement of the positions allowing them to pass whispers among themselves so that their voices would not attract the attention of their opposers. They were always glad for a gale of wind, so that the noise would prevent their voices being heard by others, and afford them opportunity of easily hearing one another. In this manner they went through the exercise of the class-meeting, and found it to be a means of fortifying themselves against the influences of their evil surroundings.²²

There were many others as well. John Brunskill, born in 1760, set a high value on the class meeting. He held that it had kept him safe from

²⁰Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 67. ²¹Cartwright, Autobiography, p. 29

²²Atkinson, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

temptation countless times when his friends were succumbing. In his life he visited most of the classes in middle England. He lived to be eighty-four.²³ One man tramped every week for five miles to class meeting after a hard day of farming. A Mrs. Mary Burt walked forty miles to persuade Wesley to visit her class. This occurred in 1774. She was thirty-three years old. She carried her baby with her the whole way.²⁴ Ann Darvel died at Farlington, England, at the age of 94, having been a class member for seventy-four years. Mrs. Phillis Burland, died at 92, and was a member for 70 years. Hugh Falls was a member for 70 years. His class roll book shows that he hardly ever was absent during that time.²⁵

What has been presented thus far has been the word of a Methodism contemporaneous with the class meeting itself. However, appropriate words have come from the present time regarding the general value of the class meeting. One of these comes from England, from the pen of a contemporary preacher.

Believing more profoundly than ever in the need and value of the class meeting, I would urge all who are able to gather together for prayer and what was so wisely called "waiting upon God." Let this be the definite object, to discover the will and method of God; not forgetting that upon such gatherings the Holy Spirit may at any time descend.²⁶

Finally, Mavis tells of speaking to an elderly couple who had attended class meetings in their youth in what must have been its last days. Though they had long since ceased attendance, when asked what they thought

²³Stevenson, City Road, p. 462. ²⁴Church, Early Methodist, pp.176-177.

²⁵Ibid., p. 177.

²⁶James Ellis, Ventures in Fellowship (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 14.

the abiding value of the Wesleyan movement was, they replied that they considered it to be the class meeting. The wife told of going to class with her mother in discouraging times with this result, "I have seen the discouragement and distress leave mother during the meeting." Mavis concludes,

This widely traveled minister and his thoughtful wife concurred that the class meeting has such unique value that it should never be abandoned or surrendered by the churches that have been blessed with it.²⁷

These values will be discussed in the next section.

²⁷Mavis, "Abiding Values," p. 25.

SECTION III

DISTINCT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CLASS MEETING

CHAPTER XIII

SOME DISTINCT ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE FULFILLMENT OF RELIGIOUS NEEDS

The class meeting made very distinct achievements in the realms of psychology and religion. Actually these were what made the class meeting system so popular among those whom it helped. Anything which pleases men must have its psychological appeal and that which pleases spiritual men must likewise have its spiritual appeal. Even in Wesley's day the leadership of the church was able to see that there were distinctly helpful qualities about the class meeting. This was why Wesley clung to it so tenaciously. Actually the classes did not contribute anything so new in terms of religious life that had never been thought of or believed before. What the classes did was pave the way to experiences which Wesley taught all could have. His teaching on some of the experiences may have been unique to him, as for example his doctrine of sanctification as an immediate possibility by faith. However, the classes might be compared to a modern superhighway in terms of getting into those experiences. Personal experiences in the church were difficult to achieve because of a number of unintentioned impediments which the church placed in the way, as for instance its insistence on the sacraments to lead one to Christ. Private prayer was viewed by the church as to be not so desirable for the individual when done extemporaneously. Getting personal religious experience, then, was like taking a winding road through hill country

and seeking them in the class was like getting a superhighway to go to the same destination. The question to be considered in this chapter is this: in what ways did the class meeting distinctively aid people and the church?

I. IN AIDING THE ONSET OF THE SALVATION EXPERIENCES

It has been shown in Chapter IX that many were saved in the class meeting rooms. It was a characteristic of the class meeting that men would come under conviction in the preaching sessions, camp meetings, and the like and then led into the class to be saved by one of the members of the leader. In the class meeting the individual under conviction could see those who had the joy of breaking through into peace with God. When faced with the decision of what they intended to do after attendance at two or three meetings (if he lasted that long), he would face a crisis and often come through it to Christ for salvation. One correspondent fittingly observed that the class was a way of having the saints cast their pearls before swine and not have them lost.¹ Indeed, it was in these meetings, at least some felt that a great majority of the conversions of Methodism took place.

Conviction often fell heavily among the class members.

In some of the earlier meetings there were men and women who had known agony and bitter tears when they were "under conviction." They needed no host gospeller to describe hell. They could talk Bunyan's language because they had shared his experience. Life for them was a campaign, with adventures at dawn and twilight, and an enemy who neither gave nor asked for quarter.²

¹Charles L. Goodell, The Drillmaster of Methodism (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902), pp. 220-221.

²James Ellis, Ventures in Fellowship (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 44.

The Reverend Jesse Lee told of a revival in Virginia in 1787. "The work was not confined to meetings for preaching . . . [and] in the class meetings the Lord frequently set mourning souls at liberty."³

George Braddock, an English sailor, was blown off a ship in a storm off the coast of England and driven miraculously ashore alive by the waves. He was left stripped and dazed on the shore. He found refuge in a house near a place called Mousehole. This was the birthplace of William Carvosso, though he was not a resident there at this time.

In the first house I came to, the people were still asleep; but they rose and received me kindly. This preservation induced me to think very sadly and seriously of my state; and then it led me earnestly to cry to God for mercy. I joined the religious people that first met at John Harvey's: we were few; and when we gathered together in the great kitchen, we looked like a little band that had struggled to the shore, while the waves still roared behind us; but the day of salvation had broken upon us.⁴

Braddock was saved and lived in the area for many years.

Rosser explained the potentiality for salvation in the class meeting.

In the class meeting, where religious experience is the only subject of consideration, and the expression of it is so plain and simple, it is easy to see how readily an earnest and sincere penitent may obtain instruction and encouragement; as when those who are deeply acquainted with spiritual things refer to the discouragements they encountered, the struggles they endured, the self-denial they had to exercise, the duties they had to perform, and the long dark night of trial they had to pass, before they found forgiveness of sin . . . In the suspension of temporal business, in the absence of the world, and in the presence of Christ and his people, the whole soul of the penitent may easily concentrate itself upon being now saved from sin.⁵

³John Atkinson, The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1874), p. 260.

⁴Leslie Church, The Early Methodist People (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 159.

⁵L. Rosser, Class Meetings: Embracing Their Origin, Nature, Obligation, and Benefits (Richmond, Virginia: L. Johnson and Co., 1855), p. 162.

In this way the preaching which convicted was followed with the influences which encouraged salvation in the class meeting. However, Rosser went on to suggest that the reverse could happen as well in the class meeting; that is, the class might bring conviction and the preaching service might see the victory in salvation. In fact instances were cited of this latter possibility by Rosser.⁶

Ultimately the value of the class meeting lay in its ability to follow up revivals of religion rather than bring them about. Preaching was still the means of bringing believers in but the classes functioned to keep them by first confirming their salvation experience and then enlarging it indefinitely thereafter. Emerick says, "The classes were not designed to produce revivals; [but they were rather] the outgrowth of them and they contributed to [their] furtherance."⁷

II. IN THE PROMOTION OF THE SPIRIT OF FELLOWSHIP

Miley said that the principle of association on an intimate basis for Christians is necessary to every well-ordered church government, adding,

It is the adoption of this principle to so great an extent, and in so appropriate and efficient a mode, as in her class meetings, that Methodism owes much of her spirituality and power, and consequently, much of her efficiency in doing good.⁸

Wise commented that there was real value in the fellowship engendered in the class meetings and that it was unique to the Methodists alone. Atkin-

⁶ Ibid., pp. 163-164.

⁷ Samuel Emerick, Spiritual Renewal for Methodism (Nashville, Tennessee: The Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), p. 51.

⁸ John A. Miley, Treatise on Class Meetings (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854), p. 43.

son held that the class meeting was the nursery of Methodist power and said that the fellowship was the inner secret. "The secret of power on the part of Methodism . . . has been from the beginning its own internal brotherly culture of spiritual life, in obedience to its own tested rules of weekly fellowship."⁹

Without the fellowship of the class meeting the Methodists would not have been so nearly able (or willing) to bear each others burdens. They would not have been able to encourage one another.

Christians must drive an open and a free trade; they must teach one another the mysteries of godliness. Tell your experience; and tell your conflicts; and tell your comforts. As iron sharpeneth iron, as the rubbing of hands maketh both warm, and as the live coals maketh the rest to burn, so let the fruit of society be mutually sharpening, warming, and influencing.¹⁰

Wesley described the blessings of the close fellowship of the society and the class meeting particularly.

By the blessing of God upon their endeavours to help one another many found the pearl of great price. Being justified by faith, they had "peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." These felt a more tender affection than before, so those who were partakers of like precious faith; and hence arose such a confidence in each other, that they poured out their souls into each other's bosom. Indeed they had a great need to do so; for the war was not over, as they had supposed; but they had still to wrestle both with flesh and blood, and with principalities and powers: so that temptations were on every side; and often temptations of such a kind, as they knew not how to speak in class; in which persons of every sort, young and old, men and women, sat together.¹¹

⁹Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 258.

¹⁰Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 47.

¹¹Thomas Jackson, The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., VIII (London: John Mason, 1830), pp. 257-258.

Gregory said, "Many now happily experience that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before . . . As they had daily more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for each other."¹²

Rosser insisted,

Where the intimate fellowship of the class meeting is unknown, it is not surprising that piety should decline, divisions and jealousies occur, other means of grace be neglected, and the church suffer loss both in influence and numbers.¹³

Wesley recognized that the class meeting fellowship was good for removing "little misunderstandings" and the "composing of little quarrels." The appearances of the interpersonal difficulties of the members of the societies from time to time in the early societies was one of the reasons which prompted Wesley to have the classes assemble rather than be visited separately by the leader.

Probably the most striking testimony to the value of the fellowship in the class meeting was the way it swept the frontiers of America. Men and women, such as Peter Cartwright's mother, walked for miles sometimes in their loneliness and temptation to attend the warmth of the class meeting fellowship. More concrete, however, are the testimonies of the individuals who themselves benefitted from it. A class leader said,

We love each other as classmates . . . I have assurance that my class love me, and they know that I love them; and so we are going on by the grace of God (the Holy Spirit helping our imperfections) from

¹²Benjamin Gregory, A Handbook of Wesleyan Methodist Polity and History (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1888), p. 19.

¹³Rosser, op. cit., p. 152.

grace to grace and from glory to glory.¹⁴

Even Isaac Taylor, critic of Methodism and the class meeting, was willing to testify to the relative value of the class meeting system over some of the ways of functioning in other, more Calvinistic groups.

The religious contemporaries of Methodism, not to speak of the lifelessness which had then fallen upon most of them . . . [and] the disciplinary principles recognized in these bodies, at that time (in some degree amended since) were founded upon a far too narrow concept of the social intention of the Gospel . . . If you chance to stand a few feet away [from the bright center of Puritanism], you barely see a glimmer of light, or feel a glow of warmth. Who, at a little distance outside a puritanic church of the rigid sort would surmise that he was standing so near the ministration of--"The Glorious Gospel of the Blessed God?"

Wesleyanism then, with its more practical and its more widely-based discipline, was a great gain, as compared with the exclusiveness, the small efficiency of the then existing nonconforming communions. If we have deductions to make from this praise, let it first be bestowed in terms so decisive and ample as shall leave abundant margin, even after our severest annotations have found room.¹⁵

Watson recognized the "social principle" was important in the classes.

It is the principle which underlies the class meeting that we now wish to consider. This principle, emphatically, is the social principle; and the class meeting is but a provision for the employment and consecration of the social principle for religious purposes.

It is a wholesome, disciplinary safeguard against isolation and individualism among church members, and in matters of religion.¹⁶

Thus was the class meeting effective for fellowship. As will be seen in the next chapter this fellowship feeling can be very psychologically wholesome for troubled souls. It is the setting into which the Lord can

¹⁴Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 278.

¹⁵Isaac Taylor, Wesley and Methodism (New York, Harper Bros., 1852), p. 213.

¹⁶J. J. Watson, Helps to the Promotion of Revivals (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), pp. 66-68.

bring healing. For that matter it must exist before he can administer anything of value to his people. This spirit of oneness seems to be that which accompanied the church in all its great revivals. If men cannot relate healthily to each other, can they relate to God? While it is true that man cannot relate to others unless and until he achieves a basic relation with God; nevertheless, it is equally true that he cannot wholly relate to God as a Christian seeking a deeper life if he cannot have a comfortable relationship with men, for both God and other men are personalities. The similarities of dealing with each are inescapable. If a man cannot enjoy an open, trusting relationship with another real, vital, and immanent personality, there would not seem to be much difference whether or not it would be God's or man's.

Thus the class meeting effectively, at its best, provided a good setting for Christian salvation and fellowship. Church correctly observes, "If modern forms of Christian fellowship can reach heights and sound the depths of those groups of friends so surely knit together, the outlook for the future will brighten into the glory of a new day for all mankind."¹⁷

III. IN ITS USE OF CONFESSION

The early church was characterized among other ways by its clear, public confession. Mowrer points this out along with his expression of regrets that the church retreated quickly from this practice.¹⁸ This

¹⁷Church, Early Methodist, p. 178.

¹⁸O. Hobart Mowrer, The New Group Therapy (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand, 1964), p. 123.

was indeed one of the great losses of the Church. The use of private confession failed miserably to achieve any very practical moral life in the medieval church member life. Indeed there have been those who have insisted that it has been a degrading force in the member's life. Chiniquy makes a strong point of this, saying that private, auricular confession has been used in church history to effectually promote immorality by the hearer of the confession. In helping the sinner to recall sins committed he may suggest certain ones as possibilities, thus serving to acquaint the more naive with immorality previously unknown to him.¹⁹ Mowrer likewise, though from a more psychological standpoint condemns private confession as relatively ineffectual in producing moral healing.²⁰

There was something about confession in the presence of the brethren openly which seems to have made a difference to the early church members. Wesley sensed this and recognized it as a scripture-taught idea. He often quoted scripture in this regard. "Confess your faults one to another . . ." (James 5:16 KJV). Creation of an atmosphere of fellowship, a family atmosphere as some have put it, is a necessity for effective confession. Watson recognized the importance of a social atmosphere of small church group meetings. He said, "Man becomes more social as he becomes more enlightened and refined; more social as he becomes more like his Maker." He added on the

¹⁹Charles Chiniquy, Fifty Years in the Church of Rome (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), pp. 10-23; and _____, The Priest, the Woman, and the Confessional (Sea Cliff, N. Y.: Christ's Mission, [n.d.]), pp. 13-88.

²⁰Mowrer, op. cit., pp. 86, 97.

value of confession within the church setting, via public testimony, "Confession relieves the mountain-burdened heart, inspires the brethren with confidence to rally again about him to his rescue, and to welcome home the prodigal, him who was lost." In the class meeting this value was maximized. "In the class meeting the brother freely discloses his struggles with the world, the flesh, and the devil."²¹

Was this needed? Watson thought so.

Now were no provision made in the Church for the natural relation of experience, a great natural want would have been provided for . . . But as to hear others talk about it [Christian experience], has a tendency to excite thought and feeling, it can be regarded as a wise provision of the Church that she instituted class meetings, and those kindred associations, the love-feast, the general class, etc. How often are they found quickening the lukewarm, reclaiming the backslidden, opening the eyes of the blind and the mouths of the dumb! Who has not often resorted to them out of respect for the discipline of the Church and returned delighted and refreshed?²²

The creation of a family atmosphere was often not enough by itself. There was a need for compulsion. There had to be some pressure to encourage the testimony of the membership in the class sessions. Immense pressure was put upon the individual in the middle ages for private confession.²³ Aquinas made clear the requirement of confession in his day through his writings. "Confession is required of all adult children of the Church. There is no such thing as dispensation from the duty of confessing."²⁴

²¹Watson, Helps, pp. 66 and 72-74.

²²Ibid., p. 75.

²³Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 249.

²⁴Paul J. Glenn, A Tour of the Summa (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1963), p. 401.

Wesley saw to it that compulsion came into play in the class meeting as well. The individual was made to feel that he was grossly miscreant if he failed to own up and speak up in the class meeting sessions. He was made to feel that he had let his fellows down if he failed to speak in class. Fitzgerald held that the secret of the class meeting's success lay right there . . . in the mild enforcement of testimony. "It was a resurrection of a buried gift; and the living, glowing, growing, rejoicing, witnessing Church sprang into life."²⁵

One of the prominent characteristics of the classes then was, as Rosser put it, "the free and simple communication of mutual experience." Goodell held this to be the enduring element of the class meeting for the hundred years previous to 1902. Emerick said,

Facing sin and guilt, the Class Meeting was saved from Pietism and Moralism. Remembering God's forgiveness and His gracious acts, mighty to save, Methodism was kept from resignation and despair. The heart laid bare in the midst of forgiving love--thus does God bring to birth new creatures in Christ.²⁶

One of the values of the open confessional kind of fellowship was that it brought together people in different social strata to a common level of spiritual nakedness. It served to keep people properly humble, properly considerate of others, and properly concerned about the world around them. One writer put it this way:

²⁵O. P. Fitzgerald, The Class Meeting (Nashville, Tennessee: M. E. Church, South, Publishing House, 1880), pp. 23, 24.

²⁶Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 64.

The class meeting was . . . a means of expression for people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to speak. It afforded some satisfaction for those who in the polity of the Methodist Church had otherwise no place. The servant girl would follow her mistress in telling the assembled people what God had done for her. The leader of the class might be the manager of the local factory or he might be one of the workmen engaged there. On the class-leader's book, as members to be visited, could be found people with every variety of occupation. The social grades were brought to a common level, when each week, the people met together to pray, and praise, and share their experience. The democracy of the class meeting helped to undermine the Toryism of official Methodism.²⁷

That a divergence of status and social position in life could come together and confess, and testify, and often weep together with little restraint is a testimony to the leveling power of the Wesleyan revival and of the class meeting system.

In connection with the confessions made in the classes, the fears of Isaac Taylor of excessiveness and even morbid sexual appeal in the confessions made during class meeting sessions have already been mentioned (See pages 165-168 supra). These dangers did not seem to materialize. Goodell, looking back over the entire history of the class meeting, insisted that these dangers had been negligible, far from inherent, in the nature of the class meeting system.

The dangers of the class meeting kind of confessional system are less than would be supposed, for when godly people are met for religious converse, they are met under the inspection of Heaven, and the most unlikely are often led to the utterance of the grandest things of God.²⁸

Rosser likewise seemed not to be too preoccupied with the negative things that could possibly have been confessed in the class meeting to much

²⁷Miley, Treatise on the Class Meetings, pp. 46-47.

²⁸Emerick, op. cit., p. 68.

as the positive things which, when brought out, could be so beneficial to the members present. These things were what he called the "glorious facts of religious experience." Specifically they were,

Deliverance from the guilt, condemnation, and power of sin,--exultation in the joys of remission of sin,--sensible advancement of fellow Christians toward purifying faith and perfect love,--entire sanctification and the seal of the abiding Comforter,--the blissful prospects of death and heaven,--are all of this nature. To these may be added the simplicity, meekness, humility, faith, love, patience, resignation, and courage exemplified in the lives of the pious, which add lustre to their testimony.²⁹

Seeing this then it is small wonder that Atkinson encourages his readers to attend class regularly.

None should shrink from speaking in class, because to edify is a privilege, and the humblest and the feeblest may say some word which, spoken from the heart, shall go to other hearts, and prove an inspiration and a joy. The faintest utterance, a single sentence, may do this work. And surely any one who loves Christ can speak a word for him and for the comfort of his disciples.³⁰

The class meeting was feared certainly. It was, in a sense, a fearful device. However, the pain of confession before one's friends was quickly healed by their love. This was the real heart of the class meeting. No device or system the Church has ever proposed has been so effective in this important area.

IV. IN AIDING THE ONSET OF SANCTIFICATION EXPERIENCES

Wesley's contribution to the doctrines of sanctification extant in the church to his time was as unique in that area as was his contribution

²⁹Rosser, Class Meetings, pp. 149-150.

³⁰Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 93.

of the class meeting was in the area of social life in the church. Turner says that Wesley, in his doctrine of sanctification, "restored to Protestantism the New Testament promise of complete deliverance from sin and perfection in righteousness in this life."³¹

Strangely the concept of entire sanctification in the Wesleyan sense received little recognition in the writings on the class meeting, with the possible exception of Rosser, who was far from profuse in his references to it. Little encouragement seems given in the literature for the class leaders to bring others into the experience of entire sanctification. This doctrine along with that of the class meeting has had a peculiarly checkered history as far as acceptance and preachment goes. It has, like the class, had far more lip service than practice associated with it.

Particularly strange is the apparent diffidence of many to the doctrine in the church when its founder is even today so exalted as a great man in mind and leadership. There is no question about how he viewed the doctrine of Christian perfection. This attitude has been recounted in Chapter V of this paper.

The need of the experience and its achievement in the class meeting sessions is mentioned by enough people, however, through the literature that it can be seen as an important factor of the meetings. Atkinson, for exam-

³¹George Allen Turner, The More Excellent Way (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1952), p. 131.

ple recognized the problem of sin in the believer's life and the importance of the class in meeting this problem.

They [new converts] have been devoted to sinful follies, and even addicted to profligate vices. But in a powerful revival they have been suddenly converted. They intend to lead a new life, but old habits strive to regain their wonted mastery. Old associations also are their tempters. Inexperienced, uninstructed, they have to battle with cunning and powerful foes. It is not surprising therefore that they should stumble and even fall.³²

Rosser, too, saw the problem of the new convert.

The young Christian soon finds his feeble resolutions unequal to the forces of habits formed before conversion, and the power of temptation ever seeks support from the religious communion of the class-room, seldom can he endure the first revival of evil habit or resist the first assault of temptation; and shortly he will relapse into his former sins . . . Unsupported, the vows of the morning are violated before evening, and remorse for recent guilt is so discouraging, that ordinarily the only relief he feels is in the resolution, "I will repent and do better tomorrow." Weakness, disappointment, and fear ensue, and matters are worse. Had he mingled with God's people, he might have fulfilled his vows, or had he fallen, he might have recovered; but by hiding his failures, he had to contend with them alone, and by concealing his desires, he took the most effectual method to extinguish them.³³

Rosser puts his finger on the problem of the convert here; namely, his hidden sin which somehow escapes public notice and festers inside. The nature of this kind of sin Rosser itemizes with the comment that these are sin problems of many in the church. A partial list of some of them is as follows:

1. Pride (most of all)
2. Vanity
3. Love of pleasure
4. Love of money
5. Worldly ambition
6. Sensual desires
7. Forwardness
8. Levity

³²Atkinson, *Class Leader*, p. 101.

³³Rosser, *Class Meetings*, p. 159.

9. Envy
10. Jealousy
11. Maliciousness
12. Covetousness
13. Perniciousness
14. Prodigality
15. Insecurity
16. Deceit
17. Resentment
18. Impatience
19. Self-righteousness³⁴

Rosser likely mentioned the above because these were the problems which he in his ministerial experience had seen in the class meetings. If these are the subjects of the class meeting confessions, then Taylor's objections on account of danger of defilement of the imagination would not seem valid at all. Still, they do represent definite problems with sin. For these problems the Christian in the class was accountable. In the class the member sought something and usually found it.

In other words every Christian in a regenerate state, finds remaining in him, though subdued, some particular corruption still struggling, which was prominent in the corruptions of his heart before conversion, and which will remain there till he is sanctified. Each of these cases requires a particular assistance, in order to [achieve] a complete conquest; and when they submit to the weekly watch-care, and directions of the leader and are brought weekly into association with persons eminent for godliness, they are enabled to make the clearest discoveries of the odiousness of sin, and to use the best means for their polishing and perfection.³⁵

Rosser depicts the work of the leaders when they deal with the young convert in this way:

He [the young convert] is encouraged to besiege the throne of grace with a holy violence and importunity of faith, that he may be saved from all obduracy, and unbelief; and overcome inward corruption and outward temptations; and bear patiently the manifold infirmities and defects of himself and others; and subdue all emotions of pride, and self, and tempers contrary to the love of God and man; and grasp the promises of entire holiness; and acquire the preparation for the open vision of God.³⁶

³⁴Ibid., p. 169.

³⁵Ibid., p. 170.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 149-150.

Several examples of people being sanctified through the impact of the class meeting are known. One such person was Henry Longdon, mentioned in the exemplary class meeting in Chapter IX of this paper (see pages 127 and 128 supra). His leader had made him aware of his need for Christian perfection in love. After he discovered its possibility in the class, he decided to seek the experience and joined a band.

So he continued seeking this fuller experience of the grace of God! Quite simply he describes its coming: "One evening, at our band, the presence of God peculiarly overshadowed us . . . We were presently baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire. Being purged from all iniquity, we fully and heartily gave up our bodies and souls to be the Lord's forever."³⁷

He was awakened in the class and discovered the experience in the band. Both of these were small groups in which spiritual growth was the intended outcome for the membership.

Another such person was William Carvosso, also mentioned before. He came by a copy of Wesley's Plain Account of Christian Perfection one day when he joined a class in Mousehole. In the class were some good, experienced Christians.

Carvosso was soon seeking the "perfect love which casteth out fear." An entirely sanctified heart was the conception of true religion which he derived from his earnest reading of the Scriptures. He sought it long, and with many inward struggles; but was enabled at last, in a class meeting, to perceive that it was to be obtained, like his previous change, by faith alone. "I then received," he says, "the full witness of the Spirit that the blood of Jesus Christ cleansed me from all sin."³⁸

He found this experience when he was twenty-one years old and lived with shining in his life to the age of eighty-five.

³⁷Church, Early Methodist, p. 127.

³⁸Abel Stephens, The History of the Religious Movement of the Eighteenth Century Called Methodism, III (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1895), p. 220.

Even Isaac Taylor, for all his disapproval of Methodism and the class, grudgingly admits its provision for the cure of souls.

Where it affected conversions, there it also provided for, and carried forward, the cure of souls. The cure of souls--a very few exceptive cases allowed for--had been wholly neglected, or forgotten on all hands, at the time of the Methodistic revival. The Episcopal Church in its several offices, assumes the existence and the efficiency of a universally extended religious training; and it is on the ground of this hypothesis that these offices are susceptible of a good and scriptural interpretation. But as this (supposed) cure of souls--intended to embrace the community, from the first weeks of its life, to its close, had fallen into desuetude, and had quite ceased to be a fact, Wesleyanism deserves high praise (apart from its merit as a mission to the irreligious) on this ground, and because it supplied so sad a lack service on the part of the Church.³⁹

V. IN AIDING PASTORAL OVERSIGHT

The contemporaries of the class meeting readily recognized its value in the area of pastoral work. In the itinerating system of ministry, which many held essential to Methodism (and to spirituality in the preacher) the class meeting did the work of the pastor while the minister would be making the rounds of his circuit. Not many class leaders made the rounds of classes in similar fashion. However, a few exceptions in this have been noted, such as, Carvosso, Saville, and others. Most leaders were settled and thus could more easily act as a resident pastor in matters which might otherwise be handled by a stationed pastor. The class leader was responsible in spiritual matters to the traveling minister. One writer felt that the class meeting approached the ideal of pastoral oversight with the implication that it was better than having a resident minister. There were several who felt this way.

³⁹Taylor, Wesley and Methodism, p. 217.

There were a number of aspects of the class meeting system which greatly aided the work of the church.

Growth of the Class Leader

First, of course, there was the class leader himself. He had to grow in grace, and that preferably ahead of his class members, if he were to be a successful leader. He it was who had to lead the way each week in testimony. He would usually give his experience first. It needed necessarily to be a hopeful one, one which would encourage others. If he were to let his testimony fail to ring too often, his members would become restless and look to the possibility of another leader. Wesley mentions complaints to Wesley that, at first anyway, his leaders were not worthy men; they supposedly had some growing to do since they, like the members, often had some growing to do. Wesley offered to replace any not proven to be worthwhile. He further noted they would undoubtedly get better, which many did. Pyke adds to this,

Without a doubt, the growth in grace among the class leaders, which Wesley foreshadows in his letter [to Perronet], was no vain prophecy; and the members were greatly enriched in a happy fellowship with others, who testified to an experience which they shared with all who loved the Lord.⁴⁰

As has been seen in Chapter IX the class meeting did much for the raising of the laity to a point of usefulness to the societies and to the communities. In that case emphasis was laid on the class meeting as an inadvertent training ground for labor leaders. It gave them confidence

⁴⁰Richard Pyke, John Wesley Came This Way (London: Epworth Press, 1933), pp. 137-138.

and understanding needed to lead other men in the campaign for labor reforms. These men, many of them, were leaders and in the position of class leadership they were trained for public appearance and speaking.

Atkinson said that preachers, many of them, arose out of the class.⁴¹ Fitzgerald held that every Methodist society, because of the class meeting, was an army in the field. The process involved people being saved, then turned into exhorters, then class leaders, and finally preachers.

It conserved the fruits of its continuous revivals, leaving the mighty men of God who traveled and preached untrammelled in their ministries, and allowing them to go to the regions beyond at the shortest call from the captains of the itinerant host . . . It [the class meeting] was to all intents and purposes, a theological seminary.⁴²

Rosser termed the class meeting a normal school for the ministry of Methodism.

The layman as a leader exercises in public, prayers, singing, and ministering instructions, reproof, warning, admonition, consolation, encouragement, visiting absent or delinquent members, spiritual attentions at the bedside of the sick and the intimate acquaintance of the leader and the pastor and knowledge he obtains of church matters in the leader's meetings all contribute to qualify him to preach, and to take charge of the church itself when called or sent forth. In the class room the leader learns the first lesson of the preacher, and when he becomes a preacher, he continues the exercises and labors of the leader on his circuit or station. . . .

Calamitous would be the day to the Methodist Church, should this normal school of our ministry ever be abolished! God forbid that such a wo [sic] should ever befall us!⁴³

One would have difficulty in finding a group in the history of the church, short of the New Testament Church itself, which could exhort like

⁴¹Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 327. ⁴²Fitzgerald, Class Meeting, p. 40.

⁴³Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 57.

the Methodists. This peculiar function of Methodism seemed to be one of its own products. Particularly is this clear in America.

It may be safely said that no people could exhort like the Methodist laymen. It is in the class room they learn the art of public address. They not only speak, but constantly listen to the speaking of the others, and thus they acquire skill in the appropriate expression of thought and feeling which renders them so effective in exhortation. Divest the Methodist laity of its hortatory power and you deprive the Church of an arm of its strength. That power is the fruit chiefly of the class-meeting training.⁴⁴

A comparison with other churches in the heyday of the class meeting in American Methodism is very revealing. The participation of the laymen in the church services was apparently not nearly so much, at least in some churches. The following excerpt from a speech by a Congregational pastor in the 1850's at New Braintree, Massachusetts, shows this.

Fifty years ago it was an unusual thing than any duty of a devotional character was performed in public, even by professors of religion, especially in the presence of their pastor. It was not until I had been in this place more than eleven years that I was permitted to hear a sentence of prayer by one of my people. So far as I ever learned, under the ministry of my predecessor there was not a single social meeting in this place. It was much after this fashion in most other churches.⁴⁵

This of course refers to other churches in the New England area of those times. However, there is an attitude reflected here which likely involved much of the settled east coast of America.

The class meeting offset this tendency by invoking in the men and women who attended and led the class meetings the ability to be effective in their leadership functions. The class meeting was effective in culti-

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Atkinson, op. cit., p. 335.

⁴⁵Gregory, Handbook, p. 261.

vating ministerial graces.

Thousands of useful and eminent ministers of our church, no doubt, first felt their call to preach in the class room, and when they became class leaders, by their pious and varied exercises as leaders, they acquired that knowledge of spiritual things, and that habit of affording instruction which enters into the ⁴⁶inceptive preparation or groundwork for the preaching of the gospel.

One of the great values of the class meeting is that the ministers whom it fostered were forced to think in terms of practicalities. It was difficult to sit in the class meeting and think solely in the theological terminology that one might hear in a seminary. When the suffering membership spoke of spiritual problems, they would not yield to theological abstractions but concrete applications of the Word of God in ethical, experimental terms. One of the great temptations of the revival makers after a period of revival is to lapse into abstractions regarding aspects of the Christian life and experience. The class meeting helped greatly in offsetting this. The proposed experience or level of life was wonderful, but how to obtain--that was the question before the groups and that is what the groups had to thresh out. It was a challenge which came before every generation of class members. Fitzgerald said that the class meeting taught the doctrines of Methodism carefully and made them personal to the believer.⁴⁷

Goodell made an informal survey of some of the preachers of circa 1900 in the Methodism of the New York City area. The conclusion drawn was this:

⁴⁶Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 57.

⁴⁷Fitzgerald, Class Meeting, pp. 42-43.

The class meeting has been the cradle of leaders, exhorters, local preachers, and traveling ministers. When the young man was converted, he was assigned to a class. A stammering sentence was his first testimony, but practice gave confidence, and experience gave ability, and the leader said to the pastor, "That young man ought to be used for the church," and so our leaders and ministers were found out. But for the class meeting many of us would never have found usefulness. In conversation with six of our leading preachers in New York it was found that five of them had been converted in the class meeting and through it had entered the ministry.⁴⁸

Coke and Asbury likewise earlier held that class meeting was a necessary training ground for the Methodist ministry. In the 1796 Doctrine and Discipline they said, "We can truly say, that, through the grace of God our classes form the pillars of our work, and as we have before observed, are in a considerable degree our universities for the ministry."⁴⁹

Oversight of the Rank and File Converts

Rosser held that without the class meeting system, an itinerating pastor would not be able to know his flock, nor, therefore, meet his responsibility of gauging their spiritual depth.⁵⁰ This thought is echoed in R. W. Dale's remark that "never, so far as I know, in any church had there been so near an approach to the ideal of pastoral oversight as the class-meeting in its perfect form provides."⁵¹

The art of public prayer and helping others along was learned in the class room. Singing publicly was also helped in the class since spontaneous singing was often heard. Such people as the class meeting brought along

⁴⁸Goodell, Drillmaster, p. 14.

⁴⁹Robert Emory, A History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), p. 332.

⁵⁰Rosser, op. cit., p. 130.

⁵¹Church, Early Methodist, p. 153.

spiritually were then able to turn to the beginners in the group and help them through the same experiences.

This reserve of praying power is, in a great measure, peculiar to Methodism. No people have shown themselves so full of devotional gifts, and so possessed of prevalent energy among gathering crowds of earnest seekers. The rapidly growing numbers who, from time to time, have pressed into the societies, could never have been guided to the mercy-seat or permanently brought under saving grace but for this abundant spirit of prayer. This is essential to Methodist success. Where was the power felt first? . . . In the class meeting. The class meeting is the school for the development of its grace and expression of prayer.⁵²

Rosser makes the point that for the itinerating ministry the class meeting is essential. It permitted the preacher, through information given him by his class leaders, to meet those who needed special help with little or no delay in finding them out.⁵³ To do away with the class meeting system, said Rosser, would be like advancing an army into enemy territory without establishing forts to defend the supply routes and to occupy the territory gained. Such a course would be certain death for Methodism; Rosser felt.⁵⁴

The class meeting in the Methodist revival system as an essential tool likewise is pointed out by Rosser. The leaders of the class meetings by their constant contacts with the membership, which would include new Christians as well as mature ones, tended to keep them interested in the participation of each member in the benefits of revival. "They tend to labor and pary for revival" in the class room.

⁵²Atkinson, Class Leader, p. 333. ⁵³Rosser, op. cit., p. 51.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 52.

How much the class leaders contribute to making the Methodist Church a revival church no one can estimate. No wonder churches generally are so unskilled and inefficient in revivals. They have no men like these leaders to bring forward into battle; no class of men like them to engage in the work of revival. Each leader, accustomed long to guide, conducts his class into the battle-field, and shouts them forward to the contest.⁵⁵

Atkinson adds that "the power of the class meeting as a revival agency is demonstrated by its entire history, and cannot be adequately measured."

Administration of Remonstrance

Wesley quickly noted the value of the class meeting system in the area of remonstrance and correction of backsliding. As has been seen, he likewise made timely and firm use of this as a means of discipline where remonstrance was not heeded. This is an important point because it is precisely here that the class meeting pinched the member hard. It is at this point, as will be seen, that the class meeting began to fade first.

The individual was initially tested for his need of correction when he applied for admission to the church or society. The class meeting thus was for the applicant a test of religious character.

The class meeting is the principal Methodist test of character. Experimental religion is the only ground of right to association with the spiritual church of God.

The destitution of holiness or spiritual life, or of strenuous efforts to obtain it, is a disciplinable offense. The Discipline looks beyond the mere form and profession of religion. The Church is bound, by her very nature and objects, to insist upon pure and experimental religion as an essential to the right of association of her and enjoyment of her privileges . . . The class meeting is the only institution of the Church by which the pastor can surely and satisfactorily

⁵⁵ibid., p. 165.

determine the spirituality of his flock; and this is done, not only by his personal examination of the class as often as possible, but by the representation of the leaders who have visited the classes in his absence.⁵⁶

Beyond the applicants there were those who were already members who needed reproof and correction which the class meeting afforded. One of these was the lukewarm professor, the soul who had backslidden to a semi-enthusiastic state from a warm condition of spirit. This person faced a crisis in the class meeting.

Formerly, loving God and happy in his service, they were fond of their class. But degenerating in spiritual life and comfort, cultivating daily the love of riches and pleasure, and daily neglecting repentance before God, very naturally at length it became exceedingly disagreeable to relate the state of their heart to others. They are now subjects of a most painful conflict; the strivings of the Spirit and the remains of the carnal mind are in comotion. Pride, self-esteem, and love of the world are in constant contention with the obligations of humility, love of God, and love of his service. And so the lukewarm are fruitful in excuses for the neglect of the class: pressure and hurry of business, slight indisposition, unfavorable weather, engagements with company, unexpected occurrences, and such like impediments, afford temporary pacification of their conscience, and become the flimsy apologies for their absence . . . A revival of spirituality can only be secured by returning to the true and original design of this prominent and indispensable institution of Methodism.⁵⁷

Likewise, the formalist was touched by the class meeting when he hid behind his formalism to avoid the touch of spiritual experience during the class meeting time. This was the fellow who hung back from the class because of his feelings that the church should not be so undignified in expression of feelings so emotionally and openly.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 124-125.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 154-155.

There is nothing attractive in the class meeting to the formalist. In public worship, in hearing the word, in receiving the sacraments, he may borrow a Christian name, and fill his place with worldly advantage and credit; and in ordinary conversation, on the general history, doctrines, and advantages of Christianity, he may express his admiration, and display his talents; but when he is required to disclose his own religious experience, and relate candidly and humbly the progress of spiritual life in his own soul, he is either tortured into negative and evasive answers, or dissimulates a piety corresponding to his pretensions. He cannot endure a heart-searching examination which discriminates between what he is, and what he knows, and professes; and so he is seldom found at the class meeting. Nor is that all: conscious of his destitution of experimental knowledge, and compelled to repress all high pretensions of piety, he is never found heartily engaged in special religious meetings, as in times of revival, and so he contents himself as a decent hearer of the Word, as a devout observer of the sacrament, and as a supporter of the general objects of Christianity, to which he contributes his money and influence, and that, too, in order to maintain a fair reputation as an avowed friend of the church. A proper observance of the class meeting would soon either cure or remove this evil from the church; for formalists then would shortly become what they ought to be, or retire from the church⁵⁸ because they will not consent to become what they are required to be.

Other Benefits

One writer summarized the benefits of the class meeting system by listing them this way:

What Is the Class Meeting?

- It is a school where all come to learn.
- It makes people think.
- It spreads knowledge.
- It leads to prayer.
- It develops spiritual strength.
- It develops Christian brotherhood, and gives us a special interest in others.
- It is a great social leveler.
- It is a church builder, because it develops a working agency.
- It is a complete system of shepherding.
- It is the church's "barometer."

It is what the heating apparatus is to the building.
 It is a spiritual gymnasium.
 It is an experimental station in the Christian life.
 It is a tower of observation for the pastor.

Here spiritual travelers compare notes and gain information concerning the way they are going.⁵⁹

Even the non-Methodists got specific about the values of the class to the pastoral work of the church. A Reverend E. S. Atwood, writing in the 1870's, said,

This much may be said of convert training methods which might be selected by a pastor, they must be discriminating, specific, personal, in their character. Preaching will do something, the freer form of lecture-room address [will, too], but neither are adequate to the exigencies of the case. A general rule, no expedient has proved more efficient than the plan of convert classes, meeting week by week, and following the Socratic method of question and answer. Personal views are thus elicited, and personal misapprehensions corrected, while each secures the benefit of the experience of all the rest. Until experience shows some better method to be practicable this must stand as the most serviceable, the fullest of promise, and ordinarily the richest in results of any that has yet been fully tried.⁶⁰

The highest tribute was paid by Fitzgerald.

How intense the feeling that thus found expression! How strong and absorbing the religious purpose! The great revival was at its white heat when these rules were adopted, and we need not wonder that in contact with such a spirit formalism and worldliness were swept aside by the breath of the Lord.

It is not claiming too much to say that to the class meeting Methodism was indebted more than any other agency for the vigor of its discipline, the purity of its membership, and the permanence of its acquisitions. It was at once a means of grace, and a test of sincerity. It made every class leader a drill-sargeant in the army of the Lord. By it the church recovered its lost gift of utterance, and where surpliced state stipendaries had mumbled printed prayers to sleeping audiences, or empty benches, the voices of tens of thousands of men and women, rejoicing in the liberty wherewith they had been made free, were heard telling the wonderful things of God. As in the apostolic days, believers

⁵⁹Goodell, The Drillmaster, pp. 223-224.

⁶⁰Atkinson, Class Leader, pp. 200-201

exhorted, comforted, and edified one another. It was a resurrection of apostolic power and a restoration of the apostolic usage.⁶⁶

The class meeting then had definite and unique contributions to make to the conversion, growth, sanctification, and calling to Christian full-time work of its adherents. It was a meeting place for all social levels and, by showing the most humble that he could speak and pray in public, it helped to prove to many that God did plan a ministry for them. It helped to separate as little else has in the church the secular Christians from the spiritual ones, and to acquaint each with his position. In giving the spiritual Christian a good interpersonal sense of reality it provided the knowledge he needed to adjust his life to appear to be in conformity with the will of Christ and to be radiant with his glory. These people, when the class meeting functioned well, were attractive and unifying for the church, not divisive, factious, and weakly.

However, part of this value and contribution arose not only from the extremely unique spiritual approach used in the classes, but also, from its equally unique, though perhaps inadvertent, use of good psychological practices. This is perhaps where the class meeting shined brightest; that is, in its grasp of inherent rules of effective healing in small groups. These insights, used by Wesley commonly in the classes, but "discovered" later by "science," will be considered next.

CHAPTER XIV

SOME DISTINCT PSYCHOLOGICAL ACHIEVEMENTS . OF THE CLASS MEETING

Part of the genius of the class meeting system was the quality of psychological insight which lay behind it. Wesley would have found it difficult, indeed, to name the modern psychological knowledge which is tucked into his classes, but it is nonetheless there. Space does not permit an extensive treatment of modern group therapy techniques here. The purpose of the paper does not require this. However, it would be incomplete if it did not draw some kind of parallel between modern understanding of groups, particularly therapy groups, and the class meeting groups.

It seems ironic that what the Methodist Church once used to provide itself with strength and purity of testimony has largely been abandoned by it, while largely secular forces, suspicious if not actually intolerant of the church, have taken it up and used it with no small effectiveness. Equally ironic is the timing of the beginning of modern therapy group "discoveries" and the casting off of the class meeting system. The matter of timing will be discussed first.

I. THE RISE OF GROUP CONCERNS

The last embers of the class meeting system were glowing in 1900. Goodell wrote his book shortly later and, as has been reported above, he lamented the passing of the system. It seems to have had a spurt of

revival in America, but this did not last more than a few months or a year or two at best. Talk of its widespread use in European Methodism is probably optimistic because by 1912 the British had ceased requiring it's attendance as a condition of membership. Mainstream American Methodism had ceased to require it before the turn of the century.¹

Corsini observes that as late as 1930 there had not been expressed a great deal of interest in group therapy.² Hare shows a comparison of the numbers of bibliographical references to small group studies as they appeared from 1890 to 1953 in the literature.

<u>Period</u>	<u>Number of Years</u>	<u>Items in the Literature</u>	<u>Items/Year</u>
1890-1899	10	5	0.5
1900-1909	10	15	1.5
1910-1919	10	13	1.3
1920-1929	10	112	11.2
1930-1939	10	210	21.0
1940-1944	5	156	31.2
1945-1949	5	276	55.2
1950-1953	4	610	152.5

This reflects the great interest to have begun really in the 1920's.³ Thus group therapy is comparatively recent in its acceptance.

However, to find the real beginnings of it some feel that one must go back even as far as ancient Greece. This desire to find one's profes-

¹ Samuel Emerick, Spiritual Renewal for Methodism (Nashville, Tennessee: The Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), p. 18.

² Raymond J. Corsini, Methods of Group Psychotherapy (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1957), p. 7.

³ Paul A. Hare, Handbook of Small Group Research (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. vii.

sion in the ancient world seems to lend a kind of solidarity of approval of the ages to it; the weight of historical approval seems to be behind it. The following suggestions by Corsini and others that group therapy arose in the earliest days of Greek classicism seem to arise in the same spirit that Miley had when he tried to find the proto-type of the class meeting in the groups suggested by Jethro to Moses (see page 2 supra).

The first suggested early use of group therapy is that form of healing used in the Greek temple at Epidaurus between 600 and 200 B. C. To this temple came the mentally and physically afflicted to hear talks, lectures, and discussion. Additionally, they got rest, baths, and what seems to have amounted to general suggestion therapy.⁴ Others have held that Greek forms of drama and medieval plays as well constituted forms of group therapy.⁵ Nearer the present time, the Marquis de Sade, himself a patient in a mental institution, was able to provide inadvertently a help for other patients in the form of plays which he wrote for them, enabling them to get the benefits which were later confirmed to be in what Moreno called "psychodrama."⁶

Corsini says that the next real kind of group therapy was found not until two thousand years after the Greek activities in the sermon of the Protestant Reformation. This was a kind of gathering of small groups together for something like the group therapy of today.⁷ In fact Corsini holds this

⁴Corsini, op. cit., p. 10.

⁵Hugh Mullan and Max Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 3.

⁶Corsini, op. cit., pp. 7-8

⁷Ibid.

to be the oldest form of what can really be called group therapy. It is somewhat surprising, in view of the somewhat sweeping generalities employed by Corsini in order to gather in so-called therapy groups that he does not see fit to include the relationship of Jesus and His disciples as a kind of therapeutic situation, which it obviously was.

In 1776 Mesmer in Paris had groups of people sitting around tubs holding bars through which "magnetism" was said to flow. It is reported that enough were cured to warrant Benjamin Franklin's investigation of it.⁸ Overlooked by Corsini as well in his historical survey is the Methodist class meeting and band system.

Group therapy is considered among modern day therapists to have really found its beginning an official sense in the work of Dr. Joseph Pratt in Massachusetts beginning in 1905. He was concerned about treatment for poor tuberculosis patients who could not afford treatment under supervision. He hit on the idea of having them gather periodically in homes of one or another of the patients for meetings. These meetings were to help the patients get the instruction they needed and be visited by a nurse assigned for this purpose weekly. The same nurse was to stay with the class throughout its life ideally. The first class was formed in 1905, financed by funds from a sympathetic church. Before long a number of such classes had been formed not only by Pratt and the pastor of the church, each independently but also other churchmen who were interested in the work. Some

⁸Ibid.

prospered; many others, however, failed.⁹

The pastor, Elwood Worcester, was deeply interested in healing through religion. He was well acquainted with the work of Wesley. He alluded to Wesley's self-healing experiences wherein the founder of Methodism was healed through what Worcester called 'the power of spiritual understanding,' which included both mind and spirit.¹⁰ In 1906, spurred by the success of Pratt's work, Worcester began a similar work among what he called the "nervously and morally diseased." He called them classes.¹¹ This term does not seem to have arisen so much from any overt feelings which Worcester entertained toward the Wesleyan class meetings, as it did from the very nature of the groups themselves. They like Pratt's groups functioned like classes. They came under much critical fire from the rank and file of the church's membership, and also, presumably from some of the members of the healing professions.¹²

The characteristic meeting of this work, which came to be known as the Emmanuel Movement was a heavy emphasis on prayer, psychology, and audience participation.¹³ An evening prayer meeting in an Episcopal Church was depicted as composing the following elements: choirless hymn-singing, Bible

⁹Joseph H. Pratt, "The Tuberculosis Class: An Experiment in Home Treatment," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Nerger (eds.) (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 112-114.

¹⁰Elwood Worcester and Samuel McComb, Body, Mind, and Spirit (Boston: Marshall Jones Co., 1931), p. 343.

¹¹_____, _____, and Isadore Coriat, Religion and Medicine, The Control of Nervous Disorders (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co., 1903), pp. 4-5.

¹²Corsini, op. cit., p. 4.

¹³Lyman Powell, The Emmanuel Movement in a New England Town (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1909), pp. 10-11.

lessons, Apostle's Creed, prayer requested and offered extemporaneously, and Worcester or McCombs speaking on some psychological subject. It was noted that more than 2000 of those coming to these groups by 1909 experienced the disappearance of illness.¹⁴

Pratt's work met with success which he had not really expected. Corsini thinks that Pratt was at first little aware of the psychological aspect of his work.¹⁵ Certainly his address to the New York Conference on Hospital Social Service in 1917 shows this. However, he was directed to the works of Dejerine around this time and soon was beginning to appreciate the value of group interaction in the cure of disease and in the cure of emotional problems as well. In 1930 relying on the methods learned in the tuberculosis classes Pratt and his associates began work in Boston with group therapy. He spent much of the rest of his life in this area.¹⁶

Pratt's classes were of the lecture type. No discussion of symptoms among the patients was permitted. The patients met in classes of from fifteen to twenty weekly and kept records of the patients' symptoms and treatments in account book fashion. They were mixed according to sex and race.¹⁷

The class time would be spent something like this: the patients' record books would each be inspected by the attending specialists. Each one was weighed and had his temperature and pulse taken. Gains in weight were posted on some kind of board for all to see. Pratt goes on,

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 10-14. ¹⁵Rosenbaum and Berger, op. cit., p. 123.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 127. ¹⁷Mullan and Berger, Group Psychotherapy, p. 4.

After a few words of commendation and cheer, or a brief talk, the members in turn come forward to my desk or to that of my assistant. The record book is carefully inspected, advice given, an entry made on the clinical history of the patient's condition. If a candidate for membership is present, one of the "star" patients is frequently asked to testify what the rest treatment has done for him, and this is done with the enthusiasm that exerts a powerful influence on the newcomer. But the healthy appearance of most of the patients probably makes a deeper impression than anything that is said.¹³

There are striking similarities between the class meeting and the classes of Pratt. In each for example, there was an authority figure around whom the members clustered. This was the leader in the former case and the doctor in the latter. Further, careful attention was paid to the progress of each person in both groups. In the Wesley class the interest was in spiritual progress, but who can deny that this was gauged in no small degree by emotional progress, or psychological improvement? The persons who improved were publicly approved and encouraged. These were used in each group to encourage the weaker and newer members of the group. There was a spirit of positivism and progress in each. Negativism took a back seat. A kind of public confession was made in each, and this on a week by week basis before the class. That this kind of operation was effective in the decrease of emotional problems was acknowledged by Pratt himself, and surely was picked up by Worcester as well. Pratt utilized the same techniques when he undertook work with the emotionally disturbed in 1930. If this improvement occurred in Pratt's groups, it follows that the same kind of procedures worked in the Wesley classes beginning one-hundred and fifty years earlier.

¹³Rosenbaum and Berger, op. cit., pp. 116-117.

However, it was not only Pratt who discovered the improvement of emotional problems by the use of groups. One researcher believes that group therapy as a science was advanced independently by as many as twenty different researchers in the first twenty years of this century.¹⁹ Lazell early in the second decade of the twentieth century was supposedly the first to use the group method with psychotics. He felt it to be successful with them to the degree which it seemed to be because their problem revolved around fear of personal involvement with authority figures such as psychiatrists. Moreover, there seemed to be strength in a community of like sufferers. Lazell reported that many inaccessible patients heard and retained much of the material from lectures to the groups even though they sat and fantasied or talked to themselves all the time the lecture was in progress.²⁰

In connection with communities of psychotics it is noteworthy that a psychiatrist discovered in 1937 that his patients gained benefit from group treatment. Out of his work came another discovery: that former psychotics who have recovered can be helpful when put into groups which include former psychotics who are just in the process of finishing recovery, such as those released from hospitals but having to return for outpatient treatment. When the fears try to return and the newly released are trying to build a new life pattern it was found that former psychotics who have successfully done so giving help and understanding when it is needed. The psychiatrist

¹⁹Editorial in The Pastoral Counselor, III (Spring, 1965), pp. 1-2.

²⁰Kullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, p. 6.

who began this treatment eventually founded an organization called "Recovery, Inc." This is a kind of club in which released patients participate for mutual emotional benefit. "Many go to the club because they cannot afford to go to a psychiatrist. Also they go because there are not anywhere near enough psychiatrists to handle the millions of mentally disturbed patients."²¹

L. Cody Marsh reported that he had some success with what came to be called the "revival-inspirational" technique. In this Marsh addressed patients at Worcester State Hospital in 1909. This consisted of lectures calculated to inspire confidence. Note-taking was required. Additionally, art classes and dancing classes were offered. There was some improvement.²²

Thus did group therapy have its beginning. Discovered almost accidentally, it was a happy solution to a growing two-fold problem. One was that there were simply not enough therapists for individual treatment in the field of psychiatry. There still are not. The other was that individual therapy was too costly for the bulk of the needy. It really began to come into its own in the 1930's and since World War II group therapeutic treatment programs and approaches have come in for considerable study. Today it is a wide field of study with many facets.

Another field of study was developed contemporaneously with that of group therapy which also involved the study of small groups. That was the

²¹Walter Alvarez, "Results are Better after Group Therapy," Atlanta Journal, June 26, 1967, p. 22B.

²²Mullan and Rosenberg, Group, p. 6; citing Mental Hygiene, XV(1931), 320-349.

new field of sociology. One of the early findings of one of its founders was another aspect of small groups, their naturalness. Charles H. Cooley found that people seemed to gravitate into small groups which could be characterized by their intimacy and their face to face relationships. He described them this way:

By primary groups I mean those characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses, but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideas of the individual. The result of intimate association, psychologically, is a certain fusion of individualities in a common life and purpose of the group. Perhaps the simplest way of describing this wholeness is by saying that it is a "we"; it involves the sort of sympathy and mutual identification for which "we" is the natural expression. One lives in the feeling of the whole and finds the chief aims of his will in that feeling.²³

This primary group was characterized largely by its sense of we-ness.

Cooley called these groups "nurseries of human nature," which makes them a pretty basic element in the formation of personality, emotional and spiritual. Much work has been done in the study of such groups by sociologists since those early days. Many cultures have been studied and many kinds of primary groups have been investigated. The Association Press of the YMCA has a considerable bibliography on such small social groups.

II. CLASS MEETING ACHIEVEMENTS AS PRIMARY GROUPS

Did the class meeting fulfill the characteristics of what were later

²³Charles H. Cooley, Social Organization (New York: Scribner's, 1909), p. 23.

called primary groups? Primary groups function because they sustain primary relations; that is, basic relations; between people. The characteristics of a primary group are three. One is that they involve a response within the group to whole persons; that is, there is honesty on a broad personality basis between the members. Another characteristic is the deep and extensive interpersonal communication which occurs between the members. There is not much reserve here, deep feelings finding easy expression, relatively speaking. Finally, primary groups involve personal satisfactions for the members. This latter element serves to hold the group together and to encourage further communication interpersonally on the basis of the first two characteristics.²⁴

If there is a failure to develop any one of the three above, the group does not become a primary one. It will be some form of what is called a "secondary group" which Zanden characterizes as the "polar opposite" of a primary group. In the secondary group the group goals, external things, become more important than deep and honest interpersonal communication. Individuality tends to be lost in the secondary group with each individual taking up some kind of role or false, perhaps assigned, identity. It is to this role being played by a member which the others now respond. Such groups may often have a good mechanistic function for the accomplishment of an external task, but they may at the same time be very unsatisfactory to the in-

²⁴Leonard Broom and Philip Selznik, Sociology (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 139.

dividual member.²⁵ They are poor in personal expressiveness permitted to the individual member.²⁶

Examples of secondary groups which are normally that kind would be labor unions, social clubs, political parties, and the like. Some groups may be either primary or secondary, depending upon whether or not they fulfill the characteristics of either group. For example, a family is a group which ideally is primary. It is supposed to involve broad and deep personality interinvolvement among the members and it is supposed to provide real personal satisfaction for each member. This is what the family is for. Unfortunately, however, most family relationships are not ideal and the family often takes on varying degrees of secondary group character. The husband and wife may develop partially closed communication channels and begin to react in terms of roles and not persons. This pattern of life spreads to the children who are forced into such relationships as well. All are dissatisfied with the role-playing routine, but unless something happens to reopen the channels of communication between persons, the problem will get worse and not better. Friendships are often secondary relations, not primary, too. They do not provide personal satisfaction but are rather the result of roles played for the sake of an external goal, perhaps having to do with status in the community and the like.

Did the Wesleyan groups fulfill the requirements of primary group relations? Certainly they did on paper; that is, according to the inten-

²⁵Janes Vander Zanden, Sociology: A Systematic Approach (New York: Ronald Press, 1965), p. 214.

²⁶Paul Horton and Chester Hunt, Sociology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 183-184.

tion of the founder of Methodism. The characteristics of such primary groups he carefully demanded for his classes, and for his bands and love feasts as well. The Oxford Club, when it began in the late 1720's, was a secondary group with the group goal of improved studies and grades. It turned eventually into a primary group with all the characteristics of that kind of fellowship. That the classes carried in their meetings the primary group interpersonal communications and satisfactions has been seen above in chapters IX and XII. However, the classes often, especially in the latter years, took on the characteristics of secondary groups. This cost the group some of its personal satisfaction over the years; eventually all of it was taken away and the classes were dropped. This will be discussed in the section on the deterioration of the class meeting.

It was not that the classes developed secondary characteristics later because they were there in the class as were the primary ones from the beginning, just as they are in the family. In the class there was the influence which tended to make broad and deep interpersonal communication with accompanying personal satisfaction. Also, though, there was the pressure for conformity, the playing of the role of the saved, sanctified individual. A member was under considerable pressure to conform to the image of the person who was the finished product of the class. He would be strongly tempted to never admit backsliding once having achieved because of the necessity of his group role as the "arrived one." It became a matter of which set of characteristics would be dominant. At first and for many years the primary characteristics were encouraged. The groups

breathed deeply of the fresh air of free expression and experience and grew healthy under the wholesome satisfying relationship pattern set for the classes. But later on, little by little, roles came to be established. It became more difficult to express freely feelings of doubt, problems of sin and suffering. Everyone still acknowledged the deep personal satisfaction of the classes, but this was constantly growing shallower and shallower like some lake filling up with silt behind a dam, until finally there was just no more satisfaction and almost everything was done by rote.

However, insofar as Wesley and his plan for the classes is concerned suffice it to say that he was a sociologist without lingo. He never talked of primary groups, but his groups, when they did well were primary, and when they backslid, he recognized their secondary quality. He recognized the danger of secondary group leaders and encouraged regular change of leadership and constant improvement in the leaders' experiences to keep the meetings vital. Yes, the classes were ideal primary groups when they did well. But like many families, they often left something to be desired in their mixture of primary and secondary qualities.

III. CLASS MEETING ACHIEVEMENTS AS THERAPY GROUPS

How can the class meeting be judged as to its psychologically therapeutic benefits? To answer this question it is necessary to find or create by definition some criteria for measurement of the effectiveness of each. Fortunately, this has been done by Corsini and Rosenberg. In an effort to arrive at those elements within therapy groups which were of dynamic and therapeutic essence, they searched the literature for common elements. They be-

lieve they found nine of these. Simply stated these essential characteristics of therapy group dynamics are (1) acceptance, (2) altruism, (3) universalization, (4) intellectualization, (5) reality testing, (6) transference, (7) interaction (8) spectator therapy, and (9) ventilation.²⁷

An additional category was given, entitled "Miscellaneous." Into this was put anything which could not clearly be classified under the nine above. This paper will content itself with the first nine. What follows will be in part a consideration of those nine dynamic aspects of group therapy in relation to their apparent use (or lack of it) in the class meetings. Additionally, this paper will also consider three categories of elements which are not part of Corsini and Rosenberg's consideration, but which appear to be worthy of some consideration for each kind of group. These are (1) group leadership functions, (2) the desirable size of groups, and (3) the composition of the membership in the groups. Each of the twelve terms will be defined as it is taken up.

Acceptance

Corsini and Rosenberg found this most frequently used or mentioned concept in the literature. They define it as "respect for and sympathy with the individual. Acceptance implies belongingness, a warm, friendly, comfortable feeling in the group."²⁸

²⁷Raymond J. Corsini and Bina Rosenberg, "Mechanisms of Group Psychotherapy: Processes and Dynamics," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 340-348.

²⁸Ibid., p. 342.

Is a sense of acceptance necessary in good group therapy? The literature utters an emphatic, "Yes." Wittenberg insists that "complete acceptance, not grudging, not half-hearted, has great emotional value toward improved group discipline."²⁹ Foulkes says that the need for understanding and acceptance "forms an everlasting stimulus for communication."³⁰ Scheidlinger says,

A permissive and accepting climate, planfully fostered by the therapist--coupled with the stimulation accruing from the group interaction --breaks down many resistances, thus facilitating the production of conscious and unconscious tendencies, of guilt, anxiety, and tensions.³¹

Thus it would seem that in order to have a therapeutic atmosphere a sense of acceptance on a personal basis is essential.

An instance of acceptance and its impact upon one member of a therapy group stands out in the literature dramatically. A colored man, a member of a therapy group, finally reacts to the continued acceptance of himself by the group. "He said he was fully prepared for rejection, all kinds he said, by a lifetime of experience. Suddenly he bellowed out, 'I can't stand all your acceptance! I don't know what to do.'"³² Certainly the world is so full of rejection, acceptance can be a disconcerting phenomenon, but it is also refreshing, healing.

²⁹Rudolph M. Wittenberg, The Art of Group Discipline (New York: Association Press, 1951), p. 43.

³⁰S. H. Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis (New York: International Universities Press, 1964), p. 41.

³¹Saul Scheidlinger, "The Relationship of Group Therapy to Other Group Influence Attempts," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 354.

³²Shana Alexander, "The 300-Year Weekend," Life Magazine, LIX (September 24, 1965), p. 28.

Did the class meeting have this kind of therapeutic acceptance for the member and the stranger? Wesley saw himself that the class meeting carried this idea along with a truly wonderful effect in the lives of the partakers.

Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to "bear one another's burdens," and naturally to "care for each other." As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other.³³

Atkinson said that the brotherly love engendered as a kind of culture in the class meetings was the secret of its power.³⁴ Rosser agreed. He held that without the class meeting it would have been impossible for the members of the societies to bear one another's burdens in the Christian manner.³⁵ This, he said gave the member a chance to get away from the distractions of the world, with his personal problems, and breathe freely for a while.³⁶

Miley insisted,

The principle of intimate Christian association is necessary to every well-ordered church government . . . It is to the adoption of this principle . . . as in her class meetings . . . that Methodism owes much of her vigor and growth, and much of her spirituality and power.³⁷

Another writer said, "No means of grace has equalled it, in the exper-

³³John Telford, The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley, E. A. II (London: Epworth Press, 1931), p. 297.

³⁴John Atkinson, The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1874), p. 258.

³⁵L. Rosser, Class Meetings: Embracing Their Origin, Nature, Obligation, and Benefits (Richmond, Virginia: L. Johnson Co., 1855), p. 137.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷John A. Miley, Treatise on Class Meetings (Cincinnati: Swornstedt and Poe, 1854), p. 43.

ience of countless burdened souls, who have come week by week to speak and to hear, and to go away refreshed for the hard and difficult life they have."³³

Church puts it most strongly of all.

In the face of [examples] . . . it is ridiculous to dismiss the class meeting as the product of a passing emotion or to comment, contemptuously, that it was a gathering of neurotics who shut themselves in a selfish circle to practice introspection. Some of the more intimate pages of self-revelation in the personal journals may astonish or shock our modern susceptibilities, but it cannot be too strongly emphasized that the love of which they spoke and sang was, at its best a virile and self-sacrificial quality which sought to give rather than to get.³⁹

However, the acceptance in the the therapy group is not directed by the literature to reject nothing at all. On the contrary there are limits to what therapy groups are to accept both for the sake of the group and of the member. To fail to reject some things would be failing to be honest with one's self in the group. Clinebell says that to fail to reject at times may be cruel and may not permit an individual to come to see the elements within himself which are objectionable.⁴⁰ Hiltner says that the group context should be one in which negative feeling can be expressed.⁴¹ This negative feeling has its limits but at least there is place for this in group contexts.

³⁸Richard Pyke, John Wesley Came This Way (London: Epworth Press, 1933), p. 136.

³⁹Leslie Church, The Early Methodist People (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 178.

⁴⁰Howard J. Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), p. 226.

⁴¹Seward Hiltner, Preface to Pastoral Theology (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), p. 215.

Good groups will integrate but not accept irrational needs of individuals for long. "[If] irrational 'free association' [occurs], after a few sessions, the group will react to this kind of conduct by group members."⁴² In reacting to this kind of wandering around and not really dealing with the obvious issues of feeling in the group, the group may react in several ways. One of these is what Barnlund calls "over-cooperation." The group can produce certain norms of function which will preclude any work accomplishment. It may, too, take on an air of sweetness and light which is entirely a surface affair and the membership will then be mutually tolerating each other to avoid pain.⁴³ In this connection Barnlund warns that the more neurotic members of the group may have a greater influence on the group, because of their greater concern with self-protection.⁴⁴

In this case it is suggested that the group note the unacceptability of some things. "While we cannot always accept what . . . people do--their actions, their language, or manners--we will have to learn to accept them as human beings."⁴⁵

There are certainly some rejective elements in the class meeting structure. The habit of ejecting visitors every other meeting, the attitude of "join us or get out after you meet with us two or three times," and the disciplining of members lax in attendance show this. Members were welcomed

⁴²Mullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, p. 168.

⁴³Dean C. Barnlund and Franklin S. Haiman, The Dynamics of Discussion (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1960), p. 195.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 197.

⁴⁵Wittenberg, The Art of Group Discipline, p. 44.

as long as they clearly meant business. The examples of Wesley's personal disciplining of several societies show his feelings all too clearly about those who approached the healing potential of Methodist societies and classes frivolously. These make amply clear what Wesley thought of limited acceptance of the individual member (See pages 67 to 73 and 76 to 81 supra). Moreover, the questions put to the member each week tended to exclude his hiding from the searching eyes of the group for very long. Ideally, of course, while those eyes were searching, they were also loving. Thus a member, though pained by the work of the group upon him, could nevertheless feel confident that it would all work out to his benefit in the long run.

When a happy correspondence between the outward walk and inward piety of believers is discovered . . . we are not only prepared to comfort, encourage, and strengthen one another, but form an intimacy of the holiest nature, a union of the strongest character, and co-mingle and heighten the purer charms and real endearments of religious society. . . Union is strength and Christian union is the best strength. . . .

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." (Rom. 15:1 KJV) Bear with their errors, and correct them; bear with their scruples and endeavor to relieve them; bear with their failures, and admonish them to do better in the future; bear with their weakness, and strengthen them; bear with their doubts, and remove them; bear with their inconstancy, and confirm them; bear with their coldness, and animate them; bear with their fears, and encourage them.⁴⁶

Thus is the ideal character of the Wesleyan classes one of acceptance. Geraldine Pederson-Krag offers no surprising news when she says that most group therapists of today attribute their successes to the education of the group

⁴⁶Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 151.

members and to the permissiveness of the group atmosphere.⁴⁷

Altruism

Corsini and Rosenberg describe this in terms of group function this way: "Closely related to acceptance, but in addition involving wanting to do something for others, is the mechanism of altruism. The essence of this mechanism is the desire to help others."⁴⁸

This factor is pointed out pretty clearly in the psychological literature. Scheidlinger says that there is a love need in the individual which only the group can fill.⁴⁹ This is undoubtedly part of the drive which causes people to form primary groups. Part of the work of altruistic members is acceptance as has been suggested. Mullan and Rosenbaum suggest that this includes accepting the somatic symptoms of the emotional conflicts and not permitting them to be suppressed by medication.⁵⁰ Love for the membership or something like it makes them all want to see the membership benefit. In psychological groups it seems that, though the members may come together in rather selfish attitudes; i.e., "What can I get from this group?", there arises, nonetheless, a true desire to help.

The leader of groups is cautioned to never let the negligence of the members, such as lateness and absence go unnoticed, to be unnoticed and undiscussed by the groups. The idea seems to be that the member is to be made

⁴⁷Geraldine Pederson-Krag, "Unconscious Factors in Group Therapy," Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XV (1946), 180.

⁴⁸Corsini and Rosenberg, "Mechanisms," p. 342.

⁴⁹Saul Scheidlinger, Psychoanalysis and Group Behavior: A Study of Freudian Group Psychotherapy (New York: Norton Co., 1952), p. 50.

⁵⁰Mullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, p. 207.

to feel that the group cannot get along without him. The group ought to, in effect, say to such people, "Bring your illness. Have your diarrhea with us. Bring your physical symptoms and feelings."⁵¹ Freud noted that where a powerful impetus to group formation had been given the neurosis might diminish and even temporarily disappear.⁵²

Kotkov says that patients have been used as "adjunct therapists" in most kinds of group therapy.⁵³ This means simply that they help each other in the manner of therapists in group interaction, asking questions, making interpretations, and suggesting areas of exploration for one another. They also show each other that they are not alone in their problems by confessing similar difficulties. Patients taking the lead in such groups help to diminish the feelings of rejection and dissociation from the group.⁵⁴ The 1937 discovery of the utility of recovered psychotics in helping recovering psychotics (see pages 225 and 226 supra) is a notable example of this kind of "big brother" help.

There are numerous indications that the altruistic spirit prevailed strongly in the class meeting sessions when they functioned at their best. Goodell's description of the latecomer to the class meeting who weeps with his frustration at his inability to get "peace with God." "The class crowds around like doctors at a clinic. A question or two . . . and they have the diagnosis. Then comes the remedy . . . and it works."⁵⁵

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 208-209.

⁵²Scheidlinger, op. cit., p. 74.

⁵³Benjamin Kotkov, "Psychoanalytic Applications to Levels of Group Psychotherapy with Adults," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 371.

⁵⁴Ibid. ⁵⁵Goodell, Drillmaster, p. 155.

An anonymous psychiatrist wrote that the class meetings were healthy in that the new converts' problems were repeatedly discussed during the class times. This gave a carefully conditioned support of the "emotionally disturbed."⁵⁶ Rosser observed that there was a religious sympathy to be found in the class meeting by the disturbed brother.

Whether oppressed by distressing fears or painful doubts, or suffering from secret temptation or open persecution, or contending with inward corruptions or outward afflictions, or seeking a sense of love or the full salvation of God,--the Christian, by a plain and simple statement of his case, will excite in the mind of his brethren a sincere sympathy and concern in his behalf; and they will recite similar scenes and trials through which they have passed; they will elevate his views of the mercy and goodness of God; they will console and support him by explaining the promises of his grace; they will fervently and repeatedly intercede for the blessings he seeks; they will recount numerous examples of fortitude, patience, and submission suitable to his case; and assure him that his is the ordinary experience of those whom Jesus loves.⁵⁷

Wesley rejoiced to see people in his societies experiencing the love of God and in turn sharing it with others so as to make them hunger after it.

I rode to Chester. Never was the society in such a state before. Their jars and contentions were at an end; and I found nothing but peace and love among them. About twelve of them believe they were saved from sin [sanctified wholly]; and their lives did not contradict their profession. Most of the rest were strongly athirst for God, and looking for him continually.⁵⁸

Later Wesley went to Whitby.

Here I found a lively society indeed; the chief reason of their liveliness was this:--Those who were renewed in love, (about forty in number) continuing fervent in spirit and zealous for God, quickened the rest, and were a blessing to all around them.⁵⁹

⁵⁶(Anonymous), "Psychiatry and Spiritual Healing," Atlantic Monthly, 194 (August, 1954), p. 43.

⁵⁷Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 149. ⁵⁸Emory, Works, IV, p. 134.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 380.

Rosser concluded that nothing was more encouraging than to see others in a high state of grace, especially when one himself is groaning after it.

Nor is any thing more comforting to one weak and weary, than to feel that not only Christ, but his people, help to bear his burden, care for him, watch over him in love, advise and exhort him from time to time, and pray with him, and for him, as he has need.⁶⁰

The class meeting certainly saw its membership in the role of Kotkov's adjunct therapists. They advised, they admonished, they worked with the reluctant, they encouraged the shy, they praised the honest, held nothing back of themselves for the sake of the others, and they rejoiced with the victorious. Thus the class meeting would seem to have been a therapeutic agent from this standpoint as well. Altruism, needed for good therapy groups, was much present in the better class meetings.

Universalization

This factor is defined by Corsini and Rosenberg as the "realization that one is not unique, that there are others like oneself with problems either identical with or very similar to one's own."⁶¹ In therapy groups there appears to each member eventually when the initial smoke begins to clear the knowledge that others in the group have similar problems, similar fears, and, more important, similar guilt or sin problems. The member's personal factors of disturbance appear, when this happens, much smaller, though this may be far from a solution. It at least is an encouragement to go into deeper faith and trust in the group.

⁶⁰Rosser, op. cit., p. 152.

⁶¹Corsini and Rosenberg, "Mechanisms," p. 342.

Hall plainly shows that groups for therapy are best made up of people with differences, because these differences are supposed to stimulate and challenge other members of the groups.⁶² However, the literature elsewhere that members must likewise have similar problems. Scheidlinger says that this helps to remove or relieve the "painful feelings of isolation, stigma, and inadequacy."⁶³ Foulkes holds that one of the most significant experiences a patient can have is that "obsessions or impulses which he thought were confined to himself, sometimes literally to himself alone, are present in that haphazard selection of people he finds in the group."⁶⁴ This for Foulkes is a specific therapeutic factor in group work. It is held to be something like the work done by a mirror when men stand before one--they see themselves.⁶⁵ Part of the image they see is truly themselves, but part of it is in the other persons in the group. When a man sees something negative, which he knows to be part of himself, and about which he does not like to think, in some other person, he can work up the courage to look at it as it appears in the other person.

It can be deduced from Chapter XIII that the confessional aspect of the class meeting played right into the hands of the class leader for the purposes of universalization. As the younger members (in terms of spiritual life) heard others testifying to their weaknesses, their former sins, their present temptations, and the like, the newer members were able to identify with the older ones whose experience was greater. This gave

⁶²D.M. Hall, Dynamics of Group Action (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printer and Publisher, 1957), p. 18.

⁶³Scheidlinger, "The Relationship," p. 354.

⁶⁴Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis, p. 41. ⁶⁵ibid., pp. 33-34.

them courage to look into their own lives and bring up things for the group to see which they would not have had the strength to do alone. Then as these appear the others respond with yet more identifying material. In this regard note the quotation from Rosser at the top of page 240 above.

In group therapy a technique is recommended for "breaking the ice" is a process which Mullan and Rosenbaum call "going around." This consists of the leader "going around" the circle verbally, addressing each member and asking him to participate fully and spontaneously in what . . . [he] perceives, or in what he conceives, of a single member's problem, dream or fantasy, or interaction either in the group or outside it."⁶⁶

The authors claim that this has the effect of forcing the patients into co-therapist roles for a time. It also assures the patients that their perceptions are "valuable, meaningful, and not to be ignored." In this system they hold that there is ego support for the neurotic patient.

The technique of "going around" attempts to defeat the neurotic's belief [that he is alone emotionally and sinfully] in that what he perceives cannot be true and cannot be real, for by the time the individual comes to psychotherapy there is a real loss of self-regard. Attempts are made, therefore, to strengthen ego defenses and controls, and to assure the patient that what he is and what he says is meaningful to the therapist. Through the technique of "going around," each member of the group becomes aware of his own individuality and worth. He learns to accept the idea that he is a distinct entity with his own set of past experiences.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Mullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, pp. 164-165.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 166-167

Previous to this time he felt that he was a nothing, an amorphous blob called human by some strange quirk of blindness on the part of others. As each goes around he becomes aware of himself by seeing portions of himself (through his problems) in, the other speakers. He sees their problems. They bear a more than vague similarity to his own. In the humanity revealed by their failure to solve the perplexities of life the individual member begins to get the idea that maybe his problems are not so unique, that his failures are not so grotesque in his sight any more. He gains the courage to recognize his own shortcomings openly along with his humanity and individuality as well.

Did Wesley groups practice this beneficial technique of "going around"? Did universalization occur as a process in the classes? To answer the questions one need only consult the rules of the class as they were first given.

That it may be discerned, whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class: one of whom is styled the leader. It is his business to (1) see each person in his class once a week at the least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require.⁶⁸

Additionally the "Large Minutes" say, "Let each leader carefully inquire how every soul in his class prospers; not only how each person observes the outward rules, but how he grows in the knowledge and love of God."⁶⁹

Having each member speak was a strong condition of the class meeting during much of its lifetime, though speaking in class was not distinctly free association. However, even free association is used to get at the underlying

⁶⁸Emory, Works, V, pp. 190-191.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 213.

problems of the member, just as the questioning was in the classes. It is true that these questions became stilted and ritualized near the end of the use of the class meeting, but even then they had power because some members feared exposure despite the security of the stereotypy that surrounded the class later. The lady's eloquent plea that the "speaking" be made optional shows that (see page 173 supra).

The Wesley class meeting system, then, utilized the later-discovered principle of "going around" to get every member to speak up and with this also achieved the quality of universalization which modern group therapists consider therapeutic. It comes as no surprise that a therapy kind of result came from class meetings when classes so obviously engaged in this kind of activity.

A further word might be said about the relationship of the Wesley "going around" to that of Mullan and Rosenberg. Free association is simply speaking what is on the mind at the moment, regardless of what it is. The content of this expression, whatever it may be, is then analyzed during therapy in connection with other such statements to uncover some of the hidden, unhealthy or unwholesome drives which are running the personality. When this definition is considered for a moment, it ought to be seen that, though questioning did occur in the Wesley groups, there was a degree of freedom given to the individual. The questions limited his field of speaking, and unquestionably might put the member under some tension, especially if he preferred to talk of the weather rather than his spiritual state. However, within the area of the subject at hand; i.e., subjective religion; the member was free to respond in any way he saw fit. If he were serious, he wanted to speak in this area and so his answers became a kind of good free association.

Even if he did not want to speak, and still did, his mind was making associations which would be susceptible to analysis by a shrewd leader. The testimony of "Sister Lee" is perfect in this regard. She had a ringing testimony, but the leader read through it and found some underlying feelings which he discussed. This amounted to pretty good analysis, and it served to point up how great the similarity of therapy groups and classes was at this point, despite differing jargon regarding what was going on (see pages 125-127 supra).

Intellectualization

Corsini and Roesenberg define this as a "process of learning or acquiring knowledge in the group. Intellectualization leads to insight, which itself we considered not a mechanism, but a result of intellectualization."⁷⁰ This seems then to be the process whereby the member, having become aware of himself, both he and the group, now begin to come into some kind of understanding of themselves.

Foulkes remarks on the subjects discussed in his psychoanalytic groups in England. A certain subject of conversation seemed to be taken up at each meeting of the group. Each time it was a different one. What surprised Foulkes was the variety of subjects and the apparent depth of knowledge the group membership had regarding these subjects.

S. H. F. was particularly struck by this fact in Group 2, composed of labourers, skilled artisans and clerks. At the same time, unconscious material, arising from so-called deep levels, made no small contribution side by side with the everyday problems which are associated

⁷⁰Corsini and Rosenberg, "Mechanisms," p. 342.

with habits, attitudes to work, superiors, inferiors, embarrassments, social inhibitions, hobbies, etc.⁷¹

Some of the subjects chosen, probably unconsciously, for discussion in these groups were fear of becoming insane, fear of losing control, headaches, menstruation, phobias, street anxiety, birth, babies, food, education, children and parents, traumatic experiences, dreams, symbolism, relation of the sexes, marital relations, interpretation of the mental and physical (elements of life), revenge, compulsion, homosexuality, religion, hair and head, inner objects, hypochondriacal manifestations, and sleep.⁷²

It is notable that despite this overt agenda of topics, there were still coming out unconscious things which the groups in actuality wanted to know about. The subjects mentioned above were like legislative bills put up before houses of legislature to which riders have been attached. The riders in the case of group therapy are the unconscious things that come with the main topics. These things constitute what one writer called "the hidden agenda" of group meetings.⁷³

Scheidlinger points to the varied relationship between the intellectual content of the group work and the emotional content. He feels that most group therapy is rather an intellectual thing, not penetrating very deeply into the emotional aspects of the members.⁷⁴ Others note that various

⁷¹Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis, p. 26.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Barnlund and Haiman, Dynamics of Discussion, p. 187.

⁷⁴Scheidlinger, Psychoanalysis and Group Behavior, p. 211.

factors influence the depth of therapy. For example, the presence of both sexes in the group will render the work of the group of a much deeper level than if there is merely one or the other present.⁷⁵ Moreover, as the size of the group increases the level of therapeutic penetration of the members' personalities is progressively more shallow.⁷⁶

That the intellectual faculties of the members enter into the level of therapy is clearly seen in Hall's notations on the qualities of mature groups. Some of these are development of sufficient cohesion to permit the assimilation of new ideas without the disintegration of the group, group ability to inform itself in problem-solving, skill in making adjustments to group processes, ability to collect appropriate information on group behavior, and ability to determine the progress made.⁷⁷

Patients break through in moments of intellectual insight to see their problems in some new light, which knowledge frees them to some degree from themselves. Foulkes reports sometimes "astonishing" improvement almost instantaneously in patients. "Sometimes an individual would surprise us all by changing his fundamental outlook, perhaps of years or even a lifetime."⁷⁸ In one such group some members' comments were revealing.

I haven't talked much but I have gotten a lot of relief out of hearing feelings like my own expressed.

I think part of my illness was caused by bottling up my hostility. It had to come out some way so it came out through my body.

⁷⁵William Furst, "Homogeneous Versus Heterogeneous Groups," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Rosenbaum and Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 408-409.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 411. ⁷⁷Hall, Dynamics, p. 173. ⁷⁸Foulkes, Therapeutic, pp. 26-

I could remember hating my brothers but it was a guilty hate. Now I can face the fact that such feelings are normal.⁷⁹

Then having such intellectual (and consequently emotional) release, these patients in turn could be of some help to others in the group. They could become Kotkov's "adjunct therapists" (see page 239 supra). Mullan and Rosenbaum spoke of the helpful way in which these who had intellectualized their problem solutions, or partial solutions, were able to lend themselves to others in the group. They can, say Mullan and Rosenbaum, make accurate interpretations before the therapist offers any. They multiply this effect since there are usually more than one who gain insight during the group sessions. Their multiplied correctness, supported by the therapist, is useful in that it is broader as well as more emphatic to the counselee.⁸⁰

Moreover, didactic or teaching groups are becoming more common in this field. Pratt's original groups and other early ones were mostly the lecture kind of meeting. Some therapists even required the taking of notes by the disturbed people and patients. Klapman holds that the didactic, class-type atmosphere is security for the counselee who shrinks from the inquisitorial atmosphere of the individual therapy session and from that of the group session as well.⁸¹

This last remark is particularly pertinent for the Methodist class

⁷⁹Dorothy Baruch, "Description of a Project in Group Therapy," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 270-271.

⁸⁰Mullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, p. 206.

⁸¹J. W. Klapman, "The Case for Didactic Group Therapy," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds., (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 334.

meetings. These had a little of the class atmosphere in the teacher-figure, the short lecture before the testimony time (which got longer as time went on), and the question and answer session. The purpose was to learn the will of God for the individual member. However, part of the learning of this will was centered in permitting the leader and the class itself to probe around in the individual's feelings and inner life. It must be remembered that especially late in the class history they tended more toward a didactic atmosphere. The reason for this seems certainly because the members and the leader found it less frightening than the older method. The list of subjects for the leader to discuss with his class as it is given on pages 136-137 above indicate that this method of approach was satisfactory at least to leaders. As in the groups mentioned by Foulkes it would seem that the overt subject being discussed might not necessarily hinder the "hidden agenda" for the class membership. Often unfortunately these subjects were used in the last years of the classes as substitutes for the real concern of the group members.

It is noteworthy that such intellectual approaches to the operation of therapy groups is not noted for its ability to deeply penetrate in healing. This method was discarded largely in the later days of group work and is only now coming back into use by psychiatric workers. Geller reserves this method for the larger therapy groups in which analysis is not possible. These are groups of more than fifteen members. Analysis is not possible because there are too many and varied interactions to be observed by the therapist.⁸²

⁸²Joseph Geller, "Concerning the Size of Therapy Groups," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 411.

It is interesting in this that as the size of the class meetings grew, so did the natural tendency to lecture to the groups. More and more toward its end the leaders of the class meeting lamented that they did not know what to talk about. Thus groups of subjects such as those of Goodell mentioned above were published. So it would seem that even in its decline the class meeting followed the principles of group therapy somewhat.

The preference in the class meeting clearly was for testimony, sharing, and confession, with pedagogy taking something of a back seat, just as therapy groups seem to be doing today. The place in the church for more strictly teaching functions and minimal application is and has been the Sunday school. However, the "therapy" was carried on primarily in the class meeting before the "evil" days came. Thus Wesley and Methodism seem to have intuitively utilized that which is characterized elsewhere as "late" discovery.

Reality Testing

This concept means that the group situation is one where real and important things happen; it is not only a temporary artificial environment. It assumes reality and in it the patient can test himself in a safe and unthreatening atmosphere.⁸³

Reality testing is thus the process of trying one's real wings in the group atmosphere. When they do not work well, the permissiveness of the group will encourage the use of unprejudiced self-inspection for correction purposes so that the next time, hopefully, more nearly perfect flight can be accomplished. Each member gets his opportunity sooner or later.

⁸³Corsini and Rosenberg, "Mechanisms," p. 342.

Scheidlinger says,

The reality inherent in the compresence of a number of people, each with his own needs and behavior patterns, offers numerous opportunities for trying out one's attitudes and activities as part of the group experience. This is apt to further the individual's awareness of his own functioning, while the interpretations supplied by the therapist and the other members can promote insight into his unconscious motivations.⁸⁴

The member of the group feels more prominent, more self-aware in therapy groups as opposed to social and educational groups. And yet in some other ways he is less so. Pederson-Krag points out that in any group a person loses part of himself. His unconscious mental processes are more nearly dominant when he is in groups than when he is alone. In groups his feelings are stronger and simpler than usual.⁸⁵ Actually, however, these things are not necessarily bad. Indeed they point to the truth of Scheidlinger's belief in increased self-awareness. When in a therapy group, this unconscious self-will of the individual member will come more to the fore than it would normally in social or educational groups; that is, it will come more into prominence in the member's awareness than in the other two kinds of group. Thus if a person frequents a therapy group, he is more likely to run into his unconscious self than he would be if he merely visited educational groups or those gathered for more social purposes.

Hall makes it clear that if the group, any group, is to succeed, it must discourage group-destroying roles and group-dependent roles in favor

⁸⁴Scheidlinger, "The Relationship," pp. 354-355.

⁸⁵Pederson-Krag, "Unconscious Factors," pp. 180-181.

of group-building roles.⁸⁶ Group-building roles are those which portray the real unconscious person in the member, as far as therapy groups are concerned. Reality testing, encouraged in permissive atmosphere, is the means of doing this.

The danger in groups is that the individual's suggestibility is heightened considerably, depending in part upon the size of the group, its nature, and its leadership.⁸⁷ It has already been pointed out that the more neurotic members tend to try to dominate groups for purposes of defense. This is, of course, where the therapist comes in. He helps to keep the group on the trail of itself.

There is another danger in that the group tends to lessen the individual's critical faculties somewhat. The member will tend to fail to check facts, for example, before drawing a conclusion. However, once again the reality testing procedure by permission of the group will encourage the member to learn by trial and error. Thus, though his powers of analysis are somewhat lessened, he will be encouraged by group permissiveness to use what is left to him as best he can toward himself.

Reality testing in this manner seems likewise to have been a member function in the class meeting. Evidence of this can be seen in the recounting of the questioning in the meeting portrayed on pages 123 to 129 above. For example, James Finley showed it as he hesitantly revealed his inner conflicts to the class. More clearly a test of reality is seen in "Sister Lee," who was partially successful in projecting a somewhat false image of her-

⁸⁶Hall, Dynamics, p. 19.

⁸⁷Pederson-Krag, loc. cit.

self upon the group only to have the group reject it. She performed this again when she pictured herself to the group as a wounded and indignant martyr. The class readjusted this picture, too, in a little reality testing of its own. It tested her with a revelation of what its image of her was. She was left somewhat open-mouthed but apparently accepting of this one. Likewise, Henry Longdon's image was a distorted one, that of a righteous soldier of the cross. He trusted it to the group in a test of reality, to see if his image matched the group's picture of him. Through the leader in a reality testing on the part of the group, Longdon was made aware of something of his own personality needs. His image of himself as a zealous defender of God, when tested in the reality of the group, found itself full of imperfections. A hypocrite could not long live in the class before his reality testing showed himself to himself and gave him an atmosphere where he had the courage to change his image.

That the class meeting employed the member in reality testing, an acknowledged group therapeutic tool in a permissive atmosphere is clear. The only real difference between modern groups and the Methodist kind was in reality the fact that the Wesleyan leader did not know the modern jargon or the official definition of the process.

Transference

Corsini and Rosenberg really do not define this so much as they merely comment, "This concept implies the existence of a strong emotional attachment either to the therapist, to separate members of the group, or to the group as a whole."⁸⁸

⁸⁸Corsini and Rosenberg, "The Mechanisms," pp. 342-343.

This is something of an over-simplification. There is more to it than strong emotional attachment or feeling. It was recognized by Freud as a part of the psychoanalytic process, and a key part.

Anyone who has grasped from analytic experience a true impression of the fact of transference can never again doubt the nature of the suppressed impulses which have manufactured an outlet for themselves in the symptoms.⁸⁹

The transference which, whether affectionate or hostile, every time seemed the greatest menace to the cure becomes its best instrument, so that, so that with its help we can unlock the closed doors of the soul.⁹⁰

Redlich and Friedman characterize transference this way:

Transference means the movement toward the analyst of emotionally charged behavior which had been previously displayed to key figures such as parents and siblings; that is, the analysand re-experiences or demonstrates in the analysis certain aspects of his infantile neurosis. In clear or masked form, he tries, in characteristic maneuvers, to achieve with the analyst what he once wanted from significant persons in his life.⁹¹

Essentially transference implies the ability to invest in others, to shift and modify behavior directed toward the search for love and satisfaction and self-esteem; in analysis, the infantile sources and repetitive patterns of this human tendency are observed and discussed with the aim allowing transference to be compelled, more under the organization of reality satisfaction, less driven by infantile needs.⁹²

In this connection a concomitant with transference on the part of a patient is another phenomenon, called in the profession "counter transference." It is described this way: "Countertransference in medical practice means the archaic emotional reaction to the patient which the physician carried over from his own earlier professional experiences."⁹³

⁸⁹Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis (New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 1920), p. 386.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 385.

⁹¹Fredrick Redlich and Daniel Freedman, The Theory and Practice of Psychiatry (New York: Basic Books Publ., 1966), p. 276.

⁹²Ibid., p. 281. ⁹³Ibid., p. 802.

This factor, together with transference itself, may constitute a real problem in the interview situation between the counselee and the analyst if the analyst is not aware of them or cannot detect them. As pointed out by Redlich and Freedman above, the object is to make both transference and countertransference conscious matters for discussion in the interview situation, analyzing them as to source, intensity, and the like.

The effective use of these phenomena is called by Berne a "transfer cure."

Transference Cure . . . means the substitution of the therapist for the original parent, and . . . signifies that the therapist either permits the patient to resume with him a game that was broken off in childhood by the untimely death or departure of the original parent, or else offers to play the game in a more benign form than the original parent did or does.⁹⁴

Summing it up, then, leaves this understanding: there appears to be a development of some kind of emotional attachment in the patient-therapist relation in which the patient tries to receive satisfaction in regard to some earlier emotional need (negative, positive, or both). This arises as the patient becomes aware through the permissiveness of the therapist that just about anything will go in the interviews. Thus the patient is encouraged to permit the nearer-to-consciousness unconscious items in himself to come out. The frustrated drives of an earlier time gradually begin to expose themselves in this open atmosphere. The therapist on his part is trained hopefully to be watching for signs of this process and to call attention to them as they appear. He is also to be aware of the responses to the patient's expressions which are based on the therapists own similar

⁹⁴E. Berne, Transaction Analysis in Psychotherapy (New York: The Grove Press, 1961), p. 161.

needs and compensate for them in his dealings with the patient or counselee. The patient is ideally able to see his drives and feelings in their true significance eventually and because of this insight bring them into a true perspective in terms of their influence on his activities and feelings.

Mowrer frankly doubts the therapeutic value of this process.

Freud correctly perceived something more deeply ominous in situations of this kind, where a "transference" of sorts may indeed be said to be operative, but not, it seems, in precisely the way which he supposed. It is, I maintain, a kind of reaction that should be avoided and is in no sense essential to radical personal change. It develops, in my observation, only where the whole conception and process of therapy is unduly protracted and individualized.⁹⁵

Mowrer feels that this method of approach fails to do two important things. One of these is the failure to recognize guilt in the patient.

If there is one thing, more than any other, which accounts for both the former popularity and the effectiveness of psychoanalysis, it is, I submit, the fact that its practitioners have so consistently refused to recognize the reality of evil in the life of the neurotic and to do him the honor of supposing that he has character enough to be deeply sick at heart and mind because of it.⁹⁰

In speaking of a case in the literature in which a woman was described to have had some repressed feelings associated with her father, probably from some kind of incest episode, the analyst told her of her relief obtained

⁹⁵0. Hobart Mowrer, The New Group Therapy (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1964), p. 162.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 258-259.

through the process of transference. Mowrer comments,

The analyst's understanding of the situation seems to have been limited to this: "The so-called positive transference was found to be largely based on a reaction formation to her hostile feelings." . . . And what lay behind the hostility? A guilt which the analyst never helped her consciously acknowledge, but which he did help her "work through" in three and a half years of expensive "analysis." How genuinely liberated and whole was this woman even then? We do not know, but the therapeutic effectiveness of analysis in general is not very impressive.⁹⁷

Mowrer believes then that the essence of therapy lies not merely in dealing with the patient's feelings but with the very real and felt guilt that underlies them.

Regardless of the danger or lack of it inherent in the process of transference, it is recognized as an element to be reckoned with by all therapists, and one which will, if not recognized, be dangerous to the therapeutic ends intended. Wender recognizes elements of this process in group therapy.⁹⁸ However, he says it helps the members of the group to socialize more rapidly. Scheidlinger likewise recognizes what he calls transference. He says,

Some of the emotional reactions evolving in the course of the group interaction, expressions of love and aggressive impulses, as well as the ego's mechanisms of adjustment, might be related to the transferences, rather than to current reality, the people and the setting composing the group.⁹⁹

These transferences, like identifications and other emotional processes within the group are primarily unconscious. The individuals involved are accordingly also largely unaware of the motivations underlying their behavior and attitudes. This serves to explain why there

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

⁹⁸ Louis Wender, "The Dynamics of Group Psychotherapy and Its Application," Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 215-216.

⁹⁹ Scheidlinger, Psychoanalysis and Group Behavior, p. 83.

is so often a discrepancy between the way the individual actually behaves and the way he thinks he behaves.¹⁰⁰

Transference is not recognized by Scheidlinger as the most desirable therapeutic process in which the group can indulge. Probably one reason is that the other patients do not know how to cope with it. Another is that the patient needs to react to present reality as it really is, which is very constructive as a group process. By playing games with the past he indulges in some quality of unreality.¹⁰¹ Fortunately, transference in the groups is "diluted," it never gets too strong. This is because other members are also in the process and the person doing the transferring of feelings divides it up between the other eight to ten members. This may aid the therapeutic atmosphere greatly because it allows the patient to have his transference reactions in full total force, but the impact is cut by whatever the number of the group is.¹⁰² Foulkes says that this kind of transference is shallow and inhibits deep therapy. Deeply unconscious material will be less likely to be forthcoming in groups.¹⁰³

One final aspect of the transference situation should be mentioned. Foulkes says it really has relevance in the therapy atmosphere. He gives instances of transference between a married man and a married woman (not married to each other) who because of transference were able to communicate well in the group regarding deeper levels of their problems than they could do with their respective spouses.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 84. ¹⁰¹Ibid. ¹⁰²Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁰³Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis, p. 24.

That people are in terms of ordinary life complete strangers to each other establishes another important feature of the T-situation [T for transference], namely that whatever might happen with the group, it has no immediate consequences in the outside reality of current life.¹⁰⁴

How did transference fit into the Wesleyan class meeting, if indeed it did? One thing is certain and that is that the members had strong feelings for each other. This is quickly seen in the meeting recounted on pages 123 to 129 above. More than this, some specific testimonies point this way. Wesley himself tells of the affection of the members for each other. "They began . . . naturally to "care for each other" . . . They had a more endeared concern for each other."¹⁰⁵

The words of the old leader with twenty-five years' experience behind him comes to mind here,

We love each other as classmates. When we meet on the street, we have a kind word for each other. We take an interest in all, rich and poor, old or young. We never discriminate between any. but in the class room we meet as a family--as one band of brothers and sisters in Christ the Lord.¹⁰⁶

The family relationship was inescapable to even the casual observer. The group had a closeness and intimacy which resembled that of the family. They engaged in family feelings. The leader was the friendly father to the "little family." He was often loved as a father (see pp. 141 ff. supra). Certainly the intimacy of those groups denotes some qualities of transference as it has been defined above. Noteworthy the feelings expressed and held were positive. Negative feelings were drained away through

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 159. ¹⁰⁵ Telford, Letters, II, p. 297

¹⁰⁶ John Atkinson, The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1874), pp. 80-81.

encouragements to seek and find the deeper life which internally, where it really counted, attempted to remove bitterness and hostility from the member at its root. If the member "froze" himself in negative feelings or indulged in them for the sheer enjoyment of it, he was not suffered with indefinitely by the class. This activity would fall into the category of fulfillment of Mowrer's with that therapy, instead of involving itself with a lot of useless expression of negative feelings in transference, would instead cause the individual to deal with his guilt directly.

It seems therefore that a transference kind of reaction was seen in Wesleyan class members. It was used in a limited sense and in a positive one to give members assurance of an atmosphere in which they could "work out their own salvation" and to grow up to some quality of emotional independence. When the individual had grown to a point where "termination" of the class therapy could occur, he was then able to go out and be a father to his own class. Jonathan Saville's class, which "swarmed" six times is an excellent example of this process. The feelings of many did not remain neurotically attached to the leader when the class meeting was at its best. This is why Goodell held along with others that the class meeting was the breeding ground for future preachers. This is how the political elements of England's labor movement were able to freely and assuredly arise out of the gutters and mines and factories and lead the movement effectively without hostility getting out of hand. The class meeting provided an acceptance atmosphere wherein the individuals involved by mutual acceptance and brotherly concern (altruism) discovered their common failings, intellectualized

their problems, and lifted each other by mutual love to some position of self-respect. Yes, the class meeting had transference, and it used it, too --about as effectively as it could be used in many cases. Note a classic example of this from Wesley's journal. "I met the society [at Worcester] of about a hundred members, all of one heart and one mind; so lovingly and closely knit together, that I scarce have seen the like in the kingdom."¹⁰⁷

In modern therapy the term, transference, carries with it a negative, unhealthy connotation. This has some basis but there ought to be made clear the understanding that transference need not be bad or unhealthy. Its real danger comes in its not being known or detected in therapy and thus acting unseen to interrupt the therapeutic relationship. It is unhealthy insofar as it arises from frustrated desires to do normal things and to receive normal things; e.g., love to and from parents and siblings. The desire to love one's father or mother or sister or brother is quite normal. The desire to be loved by them is likewise normal. Even after a patient comes to see that his strangely warm affection for the analyst is a transference of the desire to have the same love toward the patient's father, the patient will still care for the analyst and consider him a friend. The patient will likewise expect some friendly feeling from the analyst which should not be without its fatherly elements. Both may fully understand this to be the case. Both may offer that kind of friendly affection and receive it, respectively, without any sense of ill health now because they choose to do what they do, knowing why they do it. The patient is not now loving his

¹⁰⁷Emory, Works, IV, p. 322.

analyst because he is his analyst, but his concern carries elements of filial love. This is inescapable and certainly not unhealthy. That people slide their love around to various persons and add to that love certain characteristics which would fit love given to another person who has a somewhat similar role in the loving one's life is not strange or unhealthy, if he knows he is doing it and why. It is merely human. If one must love everybody to exactly the same degree in the exact same manner, that person is rigid and unhealthy. People talk and rightly so about second fathers, second mothers, near-sisters and almost-brothers and rightly so.

It is clear from the Bible that Jesus not only recognized this as a quality of men but encouraged it. In John 15:12 Jesus laid down the basic rule that the disciples were to love each other as he, Jesus, loved them. He was a father to them, a brother, and a casual friend all rolled into one. Their concern for each other had elements of transference in it for certain. Young John would surely have looked up to some or the older disciples in something of a son to father feeling and they would likely have returned the feeling.

Jesus declared that causing children to stumble; that is, to fail to reach God; was a very serious offense in the sight of God. He seemed to be implying that failing to be a good father would inhibit the child from being able to develop a good father-son feeling toward God. A father who is hard on a very young child and who occupies the position in that child's life of omnipotence and omniscience, may well make it difficult for the child who will tend to conceptualize God basically in the image of his father and

will transfer feelings from his father to God in the process.

Thus to say that transference occurred in the classroom is not to do despite to the classes. If a patient experiences a positive transference to his analyst, then recognizes it, and yet retains a sense of warmth (albeit now not so compulsive, but satisfying and free of guilt) toward him, is this unhealthy? Is the patient still sick--or is he freed to catch up on all his back giving of love?

If a troubled soul found in the classroom that there were those who were willing to let him be a son, or a brother to them and they in turn were willing to be a father or a sister or a brother to him, is this offer of permission to transfer feelings unwholesome? It would not seem so. The individual members knew what they were doing. They were not afraid to call each other sister, or brother, or even on occasion father. An example of the latter possibility is seen in the name given to "Father" William Reeves by his loving class members. The reason why these feelings were not so unwholesome is that the membership recognized them pretty clearly as brotherly, sisterly, and fatherly feelings. It is possible without straining one's imagination too hard to even picture an occasional new member remark to the society, "I have always wanted some loving brothers and sisters. Praise God, at last I have them." This strengthened people. It was not unhealthy. Thus there is no disgrace in the use of transference in the classes. They made the best possible use of it. They may not have known the terminology but they knew what they were doing and that it was good.

Interaction

Corsini and Rosenberg feel that this is the most difficult of the mechanisms to identify in group therapy with understanding, and then to classify. The reason is the relation of this category to unspecified relationships within the groups. "What this process seems to amount to is that any interaction engaged in by a therapeutic group manages to have beneficial results."¹⁰⁸ This is pretty well borne out by the literature.

Barnlund and Haiman, speaking of interpersonal attitudes of the group members, say that they "are not consciously recognized by them [the members], or, if they are, cannot be brought into the open. They remain beneath the surface, on the hidden agenda."¹⁰⁹

Thus unconsciously the membership of the group is working on a matter or a set of problems, while consciously it may be working on seemingly different material. This brings about a continuum of shifting activity, give and take, and other interpersonal doings as each person tries without realizing it to bring up the hidden agenda.

There is a continuous change in feelings, attitudes, skills, experiences, so that a process of adjustment is always going on, a kind of incessant shifting of position as small or large disturbances upset the comfortable feeling of being together.¹¹⁰

In the well-operated group this shifting will not be destructive to the group spirit, though it may test that spirit.

¹⁰⁸Corsini and Rosenberg, "Mechanisms," p. 343.

¹⁰⁹Barnlund and Haiman, Dynamics of Discussion, p. 187.

¹¹⁰Wittenberg, Art of Group Discipline, p. 38.

On the other hand there cannot be passivity in the group or its work will not be done. Without interaction, no work is accomplished.¹¹¹ The most effective, mature groups will show directness and freedom, as well as frankness and vigor in the discussion of problems.¹¹² Ideally a kind of feedback is desirable in the interaction process so that a person may see what he said with clarity.¹¹³ Foulkes refers to this as a kind of mirror reaction which he lists as one of the important therapeutic factors in group therapy.¹¹⁴

As the interaction goes on and the atmosphere remains accepting; that is, encouraging to expression of deeper feelings, some members will become anxious over the threatening appearance of deeper material from all. The group will try to prevent this anxiety from being experienced by trying to keep the conversation on a level which does not involve dangerous feelings. The group will try to be intellectual instead of emotional, or it may even be silent and uncommunicative. It is the therapist's job to call attention to this tactic and thus undermine it.¹¹⁵

When the anxiety begins to rise, as the dangerous material nears open consciousness in the group, the members will begin to show restlessness more and more strongly. They will jockey with each other for the best defensive

¹¹¹Barnlund and Haiman, op. cit., pp. 265-266.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 197.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 254.

¹¹⁴Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Therapy, p. 41.

¹¹⁵Mullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, p. 203.

positions. They will parry one another, bring up extraneous subjects. Sometimes they will get silent and have tense expressions on their faces. The interpersonal conflicts which may take place can be various. Overt expressions of hostility might include monopolizing the conversation, rank pulling, persistent negativism, and defensiveness by perhaps persistent dogmatizing. This latter would take on the aspect of something like, "Don't confront me with the facts; my mind is made up." A more indirect means of hostility display might be utilized by a member wishing to show hostility. Some of these might be any of biting, cutting jokes, moralisation using the pious negative, blocking further progress by demanding a critical examination, the broken record technique, holding whispered side conversations, and encouraging power struggles using a partisan spirit.¹¹⁶

This kind of spirit arises when important, personal things are about to come into the consciousness. The activity of the membership especially toward one another will be governed a great deal by what they sense is coming next. Shana Alexander, writing of her participation in a marathon therapy session lasting a little over twenty-four hours, brought some of this into sharp focus. With her was an assortment of about twelve other people, including two therapists. She tells of the way feelings seemed to arise within and take her by surprise.

This was a human pressure cooker, and by mid afternoon [they had begun at about 6:00 A.M. on a Saturday] the pot was really bubbling. Soon I felt tears, laughter, and rage spurting inside me with unaccountable force, as if subterranean veins of emotion were rupturing one by one.

¹¹⁶Barnlund and Haiman, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-231.

Although I swiftly lost track of time, peak emotional moments stand out: a pair of young lovers tried to describe their feelings and I was suddenly so moved, I almost wept. Another time I filled up with fury and was shocked to hear my own voice snap at a perfect stranger, "Liar! I don't like you because you have not been telling us the truth." Other people joined me; I became the lead hound of a baying pack: what's more I liked the feeling . . . Another time listening to the squabbling of a long-married couple, I suddenly got so nauseated I literally had to lie flat on the floor and hold on to keep from getting seasick . . . I grew progressively more awake. Then at hour twenty, I was overcome by a yawning fit, crawled under the piano with my pillow and instantly slept.¹¹⁷

Were there unconscious feelings behind these outward expressions and conscious feelings?

When I awoke only minutes later, the strange view of the underside of the piano was shockingly familiar. Then I remembered that as a little girl the cave underneath my composer father's piano in our living room had been my special hideaway. Simultaneously it struck me how eerily the Marathon therapy session agenda was recapitulating my own life. The piano was my childhood lair; the girl in love was me in first love; the young bride was me as a bride, secretly writing Mrs. in front of my name and yearning for monogrammed towels. A composite of many people was the here-and-now me--the baying hound, another girl who kept changing her mind, and especially of all people the colored man who could not accept group acceptance after years of rejection--see page 233 supra . Even the squabbling couple fitted in: I had certainly heard that fight before and the seasick part was not that I was one of those dreary, pathetic people but both.¹¹⁸

What was the interaction like at the end? Was it worth it all? Did "therapy" occur?

Around Saturday midnight I had the thought that . . . "Hell is other people." But now in the misty hour of dawn it seemed to me instead that we were all of us in a dim, prehistoric cave, an ancient clan wrapped in animal skins huddled around our council fire. Far from being atavistic or savage, this seemed to me instead a profoundly civilized scene.

¹¹⁷Alexander, "300-Year Weekend," p. 28.

¹¹⁸Ibid.

We were all human beings, sharing and savoring our common humanity, not out there in the jungle clawing and hacking each other to bits.

When the sun came up, I took my enormous breakfast out onto the front porch. The air smelled sweet and I felt immensely refreshed and proud that we had all come through the Marathon together--not just that I had survived . . . The Marathon [confirmed] some things that most great weekends only hint at: it can be a marvelous feeling to trust a stranger.¹¹⁹

Thus from a member's eyes and feelings is a group therapy session.

Is it a wonder that the literature indicates the greater the interaction, the greater will be the eventual liking of the group members for one another.¹²⁰ Foulkes lists emotional and intellectual exchange as one of the therapeutic factors in the therapy sessions.¹²¹ The size of groups is correlative with the cohesiveness or internal attractiveness of the group to the members.¹²² Likewise, interpersonal activity seems to be enhanced by periodically moving all the members in relation to one another. Alexander told of how each time the group relocated according to the leaders' instructions, "we went deeper into ourselves."¹²³ This apparently has the effect of breaking up dynamic balances that get established between members and keeps them off-center emotionally.

Membership interaction as a therapeutic agent is best summed up by Wender.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, Group Dynamics: Research and Theory (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 80.

¹²¹Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis, pp. 33-34.

¹²²Cartwright and Zander, op. cit., p. 81. ¹²³Alexander, loc. cit.

In the group the patient develops criteria for evaluating his own problem against the problems of others in a way that is not feasible in individual treatment. An individual who prior to his hospitalization regarded his problem as unique and peculiar to himself learns through exchange with the group that many of his fellows have similarly predicted ego conflicts and begins to view his own problems with greater detachment. The individual experiences a resultant lessening of personal tensions, his attitudes undergo modification, and his whole outlook on behavior changes. In this entire experience he is reinforced by the experience of the group.

The patient's drive to get well derives greater impetus through this method than when only individual treatment is undertaken.¹²⁴

And the class meeting--does interaction between the membership bear any analogy to the interaction in group therapy? The last paragraph above could have been written in praise of the class meeting, considering all the previous chapters in this paper. It is clear that the members interacted well when the classes were at their best. It was not just a matter of the leader asking questions. It consisted of the leader beginning with his testimony, offering to interact, and then receiving all the interaction of the others in the class. If there was inconsistency, this was brought out. If there was something to be learned by the beginner, after a few testimonies, it could not be ignored. The example class meeting (see pages 123 to 129 supra) more than shows this.

Spectator Therapy

"Through this mechanism people gain from listening to and observing themselves and others."¹²⁵ The members who just sit often gain by it. They can see and hear and learn a great deal by intellectualization and by uni-

¹²⁴Wender, "Dynamics of Group," p. 216.

¹²⁵Corsini and Rosenberg, "Mechanics," p. 343.

versalisation. Typical is the woman in one group who afterward said, "Haven't talked much, but I've gotten a lot of relief out of hearing feelings like my own expressed."¹²⁶

One strange kind of group therapy utilizes this principle strongly. It is called "multiple therapy." It is not widespread as a discipline and has, probably like most, its limits. However, some elements of it are used in even the average therapy group, like the class meeting. The technique is to have more than one therapist for a patient, and to have these therapists discuss the patient's case in front of him. Sometimes it is only two therapists and one patient, which is really individual therapy. In some instances as many as four or five in a group of therapists associated with the patients who may be more than one.¹²⁷

Sometimes it involves a bit of role playing with one therapist taking the part of the patient and the patient listening in. Hayward et al feel that the very intensity of the therapists' discussion convinces the patient of their desire to help him, which is the beginning of therapy.¹²⁸ Early work also included one case in which some interns and residents attended sessions of didactic therapy with neurotic patients. After a time the students were asked to participate in group discussions and even lead the group alternately. It was concluded that the presentation and discus-

¹²⁶Baruch, "Description," p. 270. ¹²⁷Geller, "Concerning Size," p. 12.

¹²⁸M. L. Hayward, J. J. Peters, and J. E. Taylor, "Some Values of the Use of Multiple Therapists in the Treatment of Psychosis," Psychiatric Quarterly, 26:244-249; cited in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, Eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 392.

sion of these cases with the patients themselves present tended to give those under discussion "vicarious catharsis," or relief through those doing the discussion.¹²⁹

In a somewhat similar sense it has been found that using more than one therapist enables the enlargement of the group from between six and ten to twelve or even more.¹³⁰ This calls to mind the discussion above of having patients act as "adjunct analysts." In this technique, part of a group analysis process used by Wolf, a patient is encouraged to "free associate" about the patient next to him. Good use of interaction is made. More important, the patients themselves are encouraged to look for and point out the psychological processes that result. They are told that they are assisting the therapist, which they really are. A patient, if he is hit in the "center" by another's remark, is asked to admit it. This penetration of his facade is then taken up by the other patients and the therapist and explored further. Wolf is careful to point out that both the patient under scrutiny and the scrutinizing patient profit from this kind of interplay. Insight and sagging self-esteem in the "victim" and the "hunter," respectively, are the results.¹³¹

Again and again the exponents of the class meeting mention this kind of function as a benefit of the class meeting. The gathering of the class

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Herman H. Spitz and Sheldon B. Kopp, "Multiple Psychotherapy," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 396.

¹³¹Alexander Wolf, "The Psychoanalysis of Groups," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 289.

around the disturbed man (see page 123 supra) is a prime example. Rosser's remark of how "iron sharpeneth iron" is also in point (see page 193 supra) and it also shows insight in this direction.

It is easy to see how readily an earnest and sincere penitent may obtain instruction and encouragement; as when those who are deeply acquainted with spiritual things refer to . . . the long, dark night of trial they had to pass.¹³²

There is another aspect of the class meeting system which probably was more advantageous in this regard. The therapy groups are always started as a unit and terminated as such. The class meetings went on and, ideally, when the member became too spiritual for the group, he went out to start his own class. This left a residue of others in the class in all stages of growth. Some "adjunct class leaders" were always around the classes. They did not have to be developed first before the class could have this kind of help. There were other such leaders around who had developed previously, while the new generation of adjunct leaders was being developed, thus a class, once it got going, would always have more experienced people as part of its makeup. Therefore, while in therapy groups there must occur as many as half a dozen meetings before the members can be of much help to each other and the therapist in the way suggested above, the class leader always had their equivalent available.

Ventilation

Corsini and Rosenberg say that this is one of the most important of

¹³²Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 162.

the mechanics of group therapy. It "is the release of feelings and the expression of ideas usually repressed in other nontherapeutic situations."¹³³

Some group members do not express themselves verbally. They try to hide anxiously and make themselves relatively invisible. Mullan and Rosenbaum note this kind of member with the remark that he must be brought out in some way. However, even watching him may be a learning experience for the therapist and for others. His posture, facial expressions, and tension symptoms give him away. The therapist is warned not to be tricked by stereotyped cultural expressions such as speech, social amenities, fixed smiles, standard modes of grieving, and regularity in attendance.¹³⁴

As has been pointed out in Chapter XIII confession is good for the release of mental tension. Worcester et al saw this as they entered upon their work in the Emmanuel Movement.¹³⁵ C. J. Jung held that the need for confession is written into the very nature of things. This need is universal, according to Jung. "There appears to be a conscience in mankind which severely punishes the man who does not somehow . . . confess himself as fallible and human."¹³⁶

Mowrer basis his whole approach on the concept of public confession of "sins," which need not necessarily be such, but which might merely be elements of life that cause neurotic defense patterns to develop.

¹³³ ~~Rosenbaum and Berger~~, Group Psychotherapy, p. 343.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 209-210.

¹³⁵ Worcester et al, Religion and Medicine, p. 248.

¹³⁶ Carl J. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul. (London: K. Paul Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1933), p. 39.

We must once again recognize radical openness with the "significant others" in one's life, not only as the most effective means of "treatment," but also as the best form of prevention as a way of life. Instead of being told that, as long as we are "normal" or "well," confession to our fellow men is not necessary, we thus should be led to see the virtue of this kind of openness in general. Here I believe is a powerful new "psychiatry" and the basis for a revitalized and wonderfully effective professional and lay ministry as well.¹³⁷

Not only, then, will public confession (ventilation) provide for a measure of relief, but it has other values when made a practice of life. Mowrer tells of a student in one of his classes who told him of a bank in Chicago which regularly gives its employees a lie detector test. "It helps the employees," said the student, "to stay honest." Mowrer responds by saying, "This amounts, in effect, to a periodic confession." Mowrer continues,

Often we think of confession solely as a mechanism for relieving us of guilt associated with acts already committed. If confession is not made artificially easy, I am persuaded it has not only this redemptive function but also a strong prophylactic one as well.¹³⁸

The most valid context for this kind of confession is the atmosphere of a good therapy group.

There is no other [experience] in which the individual may speak so freely and openly about himself and his fellows and may share deep emotional experience with what, after all, are no more than casual acquaintances. It is a situation in which one can establish close personal contact, study interpersonal relations, work out selfish interests, learn to socialize, and give vent to opinion about one's peers--and oneself. It offers an opportunity to live through the unfinished business of childhood in what amounts to a family setting, with the group supplying the warmth, security, and even love.¹³⁹

¹³⁷Mowrer, New Group Therapy, p. 90.

¹³⁸C. Hobart Mowrer, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand, 1961), pp. 215-216.

¹³⁹Editorial in The Pastoral Counselor, III (Spring, 1965), 1-2.

Thus confession is encouraged in the groups. However, confession of feelings, and that is more of what confession should consist of should be limited to group therapeutic situations. One analyst warns his patients that any exposure of mutual confidences disclosed to the group will result in the member being immediately dropped. This serves to keep petty gossip quiet until transference takes over and an esprit de corps is raised.¹⁴⁰

While it is desired that the inner feelings receive the ventilation treatment, there can be a too-soon release of them. This can be injurious to the only partially formed confidence of each member in the group. Hays says that within about three meetings the individuals will begin to want to expose anger feelings. The next one after this occurs will see some exposing themselves too much in terms of feelings. It is better to put this off somewhat longer to insure the achievement of enough group strength to withstand the stress of over-exposure of feelings.¹⁴¹

Wolf in his work with analytic groups prefers at the beginning to have the patients establish rapport by relating dreams, fantasies, reveries, or daydreams to the group. He asks the group at this stage to avoid "censorship of fanciful speculation about one another's productions." This is a kind of personal testimony and free association time, actually. In the next few meetings he concentrates on establishing the growing rapport firmly.

¹⁴⁰Wolf, "The Psychoanalysis of Groups," p. 283.

¹⁴¹Statement by Dr. Ray Hays, personal interview, 1965.

He [the analyst] for the group can do this best by his own spirit of warmth and optimism; by not advocating too deep interpersonal or spontaneous interaction of an aggressive or hostile nature prematurely; by a sympathetic, permissive attitude toward each patient's ventilating of his frustrating problems, dreams, and aspirations.¹⁴²

When ventilation begins to come, it may seem to flood. The group, as it grows aware of the permissiveness, will become more and more impelled to speak out from within. Finally one person will do so. At this point emotional contagion may sweep the group. This is a phenomenon which involves the engulfing of the group in feelings expressed by one person. Scheidlinger says that it varies in intensity with the degree of group identification with the first ventilator and with the state of susceptibility due to latent emotional tension within each member.¹⁴³

The group in its context is more suggestible. There is a quality of submersion of the individual, which, while not nearly complete, still effectively lowers the internal barriers of the group member to the expression of coarser, simpler emotions.¹⁴⁴ Illing and Jung argued over this as a valuable factor. In response to a letter from Illing in which Illing said that some therapies are more effective because of emotional contagion as a principle, Jung said,

I consider any psychic disturbance, whether neurosis or psychosis, to be an individual illness; the patient has to be treated accordingly.

The group experience of sects, e.g., the so-called Oxford Movement, are well known; likewise the cures of Lourdes, which were unthinkable without an admiring audience. Groups cause not only astonishing cures but just as astonishing psychic "changes" and conversions, because the suggestibility is increased

¹⁴²Wolf, loc. cit. ¹⁴³Scheidlinger, Psychoanalysis and Group, p. 51.

¹⁴⁴William McDougal, The Group Mind (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1920), p. 56.

The group increases the ego; i.e., the individual becomes more courageous, more impertinent and assertive, more secure, fresher, and less cautious; the self, however is reduced and is pushed into the background in favor of the average.¹⁴⁵

It was the self, of course, which Jung thought should come to the fore. He concluded,

Individuals can be improved because they let themselves be treated. Societies, however, let themselves be seduced and deceived, temporarily even for good. This refers only to temporary and morally weakening effects of suggestion.¹⁴⁶

These were Jung's feelings in the mid-nineteen-fifties, even as group therapy was beginning to really make headway as an accepted therapy. It may be that Jung was not completely up to date because group therapy got a comparatively late start in Europe. It did not get much of an introduction there until after World War II.

Scheidlinger says that the reason for the rapid spread of feelings in the group is that others see the release that comes to one who fulfills his desire to ventilate and that it can happen comparatively without guilt feelings plaguing him. Serious "acting out" problems are rare in the group setting. When the time comes to really begin to encourage ventilation, the members are not to be encouraged to bring out endless details of their respective childhoods, but rather to unfold their feelings regarding present experiences.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵Hans A. Illing, "C. G. Jung on the Present Trends in Group Psychotherapy," in Group Psychotherapy and Group Process, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 182-183.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁴⁷Scheidlinger, op. cit., p. 54.

We stress to the patient at this time that he is in therapy not because of "reality problems" but because of his fears and his fantasies about his problems. We may say, "Reality is never half so frightening as fantasy" . . . We encourage them to speak of experiences, including those of here and now, that trouble them in their relationships with others.

The patient is not urged to bring positive, pleasant experiences to the group [simply] because he is required to; we suggest instead that he bring all of the feelings that he cares to share with the group. We find that most of our patients will bring negative or painful experiences to the group, but rarely does a patient describe a positive series of human involvements. Prior to the point of termination positive experiences may be described [however].¹⁴⁸

Thus ventilation occurs and is encouraged in the group setting where the nine mechanisms under consideration here are in operation.

Is this form of ventilation with interpretation by the group the best form of group therapy, or is there something which functions better overall in terms of group reactions? Thomas reports that a review of the literature on group therapy in 1943 showed that essentially two systems were functioning side by side, with various degrees of co-mingling of the two. The one he termed the "analytic" and the other, "repressive-inspirational."¹⁴⁹ These two forms, says Thomas, are both effective, but at the time of his writing it seemed impossible to tell which was really the most effective.

Since that time emphasis seems to have been given to the analytic model of group therapy, which is defined by Scheidlinger as one which tries to loosen repression, to free blocked psychic energy, and to recognize and

¹⁴⁸Mullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, pp. 197-199.

¹⁴⁹Giles W. Thomas, "Group Psychotherapy: A review of the Recent Literature," Psychosomatic Medicine, V (April, 1943), 166-180.

analyze unconscious motives. The repressive-inspirational method places emphasis on purposeful control of impulses, on repression, and on the finding of outlets in religion, work, and other activities.¹⁵⁰ Some instances of the use of the repressive-inspirational technique were described in the portion of this chapter dealing with the history of group therapy, particularly in the work of L. Cody Marsh (see p. 226 supra). It would seem, despite the preference of the profession for purely (or nearly so) analytic therapy in groups, that the repressive-inspiration technique ought to be reconsidered.

The real question, for the purposes of this paper, is: did the class meeting embody use of ventilation techniques? That there was confession in the class meetings as well as general description of feelings is certainly clear. Were other, perhaps negative feelings permitted, as well as expressions of personal guilt feelings? For the answer to the question one need only consult Wesley himself. In the very beginning he saw this possibility as one of the values of the class meeting. People could come together and express their negative feelings toward one another in something like a permissive atmosphere. This is not to say that the class would permit the feelings to continue undiminished. However, the class often was willing to let individuals lay out their hostility openly. In this way the class permitted ventilation. Wesley said that "little misunderstandings and quarrels of various kinds frequently arose among relations and neighbours; effectually to remove which

¹⁵⁰Scheidlinger, "Psychoanalysis and Group Behavior," pp. 210-211.

it was needful to see them all face to face."¹⁵¹ One can well imagine the hostility which might break out in such meetings. It was permitted, but not endured without some analysis and correction. It seems quite clear that repressive inspirational techniques were brought into play as well. "Advice or reproof was given as required, quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed; and after an hour or two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving."¹⁵²

The class meeting resulted in a fellowship which regularly was able to not only ventilate regarding the past and present feelings and experiences, but also, to exercise the "prophylactic" kind of ventilation mentioned by Mowrer (see page 275 supra). In the fellowship of confessors the class meeting members were able to keep their lives remarkably clear of much that was unhealthy spiritually and mentally or psychologically. Wesley defined the results of this fellowship.

By the blessing of God upon their endeavors to help one another, many found the pearl of great price. Being justified by faith, they had "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." These felt a more tender affection than before to those who were partakers of the like precious faith; and hence arose such a confidence in each other that they poured out their souls into each other's bosom. Indeed, they had great need so to do; for the war was not over, as they had supposed; but they still had to wrestle both with flesh and blood and with principalities and powers: so that temptations were on every side; and often temptations of such a kind as they knew not how to speak in a class, in which persons of every sort, young and old, men and women, met together.¹⁵³

Ellis characterized the class meeting as a place where the soul's adventures may be recounted and correlated.¹⁵⁴ One may say that the inner life of men is an adventure, even though it may not be pleasant. Much adven-

¹⁵¹Telford, Letters, II, p. 297. ¹⁵²Ibid. ¹⁵³Jackson, Works, VII, p. 257.

¹⁵⁴James Ellis, Ventures in Fellowship (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 47.

ture is pleasant only when it is past and cannot possibly harm the individual. "The urge to tell what God has done for us is not rooted in vanity, but in the nature of the Christian experience."¹⁵⁵ One need only look at the session set down on pages 123 to 129 above to see that ventilation of feelings, good and bad, was not foreign to the classes. Moreover, in accordance with Thomas' suggestion it did have its repressive-inspirational characteristics. Finally, following the line of Mowrer, the continual expression of confessional feelings and experiences did work in the classes to uphold the weak and preserve the strong. The ventilation available through the class meeting seemed above all to combine the best of therapy techniques.

Before closing this portion of the discussion on ventilation one further note should be made. Mowrer says that the confession should be made before "significant others."¹⁵⁶ If this is the case then the standard therapy group falls short and has missed a possibility. As has been mentioned above the literature makes much of the fact that the deep revelations in therapy groups occur in the presence of strangers for this is what the vast majority of such groups are. If the therapy is to work its fullest, then it must, or should be carried out in the presence of those who see each other every day or who may even be better than average friends in terms of intimacy. Where is it easier to speak about one's shortcomings--before strangers or friends before whom the individual has tried to substantiate a false image of some kind? If so, then therapy groups might better be made up of groupings of

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p.10.

¹⁵⁶Mowrer, New Group, p. 93; and _____, Crisis, p. 103.

friends wherein confession would be harder, but presumably more rewarding. Maybe Jung was right when he said regarding therapy, "One can never achieve the good easily; the more it costs, the better it is."¹⁵⁷

The class meeting, of course, was among friends. They carried over the class meeting spirit into daily life. The Methodist love feasts and watchnights were examples of this. The societies would gather to rejoice when the classroom would not any longer hold the joy it created. The class meeting created a personal atmosphere in which the members lived out their lives, ideally, and these lives were lived for all but one hour per week outside the classroom. Thus, unlike the group therapy atmosphere, which is somehow largely checked at the door on the way out and then picked up again the next session, the individuals in class meeting groups, as they had their daily concourse with each other continued the therapeutic openness they found in the class room.

Duration of the Group Meetings

The duration of group meetings for therapy in terms of the lifetime of a particular group is vaguely recited in the literature. Apparently it is highly dependent upon the particular group. Foulkes was most specific in the literature. He denominates several kinds of groups, the average of which seems to be several months long at least. The kind of group plays a part. There is what is called an open group, in which people are free to come and go, be absent at times, leave for good when they please and the like. Foulkes makes a point of the fact that these groups do not usually

¹⁵⁷Illing, "C. G. Jung," p. 184.

go as deeply into therapy as do the closed groups which allow no new members once they have begun, require attendance, and other more stringent restrictions on the membership.

Foulkes further says that there seem to be optimal times in group therapy for terminating the groups. Apparently some kind of cyclic function occurs in the therapeutic accomplishments of the groups. On the average, says Foulkes, it is best to try and terminate at one of these high points rather in the middle of a trough. For example, "a case may have reached a good point after six hours [of meetings] and again after six months; the next time is eighteen months or two years, after which it may be a matter of years."¹⁵⁸

However, vague the literature may seem to be, the life of the group as far as pre-planning is concerned should be from eight to twelve sessions and no more, according to Dr. Ray H. Hayes. He spoke from his context of the U. S. Narcotics Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky, as a staff psychiatrist. The termination time of a group in therapy seems open-ended somewhat. This is a frustration to the therapist as must be interminable periods of analysis stretching into the years for individuals. Hayes says that after six sessions it will be clear whether or not the group will be able to "jell" as a therapy group. If they will not, the group should be dismissed and another formed. If it does, it will achieve some good by the twelfth session. Then it can decide whether or not to continue. Hayes

¹⁵⁸Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis, pp. 40, 236.

seems to feel that shorter term groups are more beneficial than longer lived ones.¹⁵⁹

Dr. George R. Bach and others have developed the "Marathon" in group therapy, which represents a departure from the normal mode of conducting the sessions. Whereas the usual therapy session runs for about an hour and a half once or twice weekly, Bach organizes groups and has sessions lasting from thirty to forty hours. This has been carried through with some success. His rationale is something like this:

So many people are fakers. They pose. Play games. They refuse to take off their social masks and be honest.

The Marathon [the long-term session] can achieve what regular group therapy sessions can't--it destroys fakery. People can only fake for two or three hours. They fake symptoms. Perhaps they say, "I drink too much," when they know that's not their problem at all.

But after about five hours they get emotionally sick. Their masks are so firmly fixed they go to sleep, or get headaches, and have to leave.¹⁶⁰

About one in fifty cannot stand the strain.

Bach feels that the fighting in groups like this (verbal fighting) is not for the purpose of destruction of relationships so much as it is to let the other person know how one feels. Thus in a sense it is actually constructive. This technique has been used to help hundreds of persons in a relatively short time is has been in use.¹⁶¹ It is this kind of session which Shana Alexander describes (see pages 233 and 267-269 supra). She says, "This unremitting intimacy is said to force out buried emotions which otherwise would take months of couch time [individual therapy] to surface."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹Statement by Dr. Ray Hayes, personal interview, 1965.

¹⁶⁰Associated Press Dispatch, Louisville [Kentucky] Courier Journal, June 14, 1965, p. 1.

¹⁶¹Ibid. ¹⁶²Alexander, "300-Year Weekend," p. 28.

Strikingly the class meeting stands in pretty direct contrast to the duration times of the therapy groups, Marathon and otherwise. The classes went on interminably. Once begun they were never stopped. This constitutes the most startling difference over the therapy groups. There is something here which perhaps the class meetings might have learned from therapy groups, had they existed in the earlier days of Methodism. That is the need for relatively short duration terms of existence for particular groups. The class meetings suffered from stereotypy after a while. The therapy groups become dependent after a while. This is why Foulkes says that the peaks of desirable breakup times stretch out and become less frequent as the group continues in existence. It might have been better if the class meetings had broken up periodically and rearranged the membership into different classes. Wesley seems to have come to see something like this because he called for frequent interchanges of leaders among the various classes.

On the other hand it may be that a certain value did accrue from the longevity of the classes. At least the members came to recognize their need of each other as human beings. The classes provided a kind of haven for the "instantly troubled" where those with everyday immediate problems could get help as the problem arose. In therapy groups are only members who have lived under the burden of their problems for some time and who are consequently much sicker and harder to help. How to prevent the long term class members from getting morbidly dependent or retreating into stereotype was a problem of the classes which was never completely solved.

One wonders how the ideas of Bach might have worked if they had been used in the classes. Would it have been better, the impracticalities aside, to have had less frequent class meetings and run them longer, say from fifteen to forty hours? The closest thing to this was the so-called "watchnight." About the time the classes were being started, Wesley heard that several in Kingswood met together to spend the night frequently in prayer and praise and thanksgiving. Wesley refused to forbid this practice though some had urged him to. Instead he proclaimed a watchnight and invited the skeptical to come.

I sent them word I designed to watch with them on the Friday nearest the full moon, that we might have light thither and back again. I gave public notice of this the Sunday before, and with all that I intended to preach; desiring they, and they only, would meet me there who could do it without prejudice to their business or families. On Friday abundance of people came. I began preaching between eight and nine; and we continued till a little beyond the moon of night, singing, praying, and praising God.

Was it successful? Was there therapeutic value in the practice? Wesley thought so.

This we have continued to do once a month ever since in Bristol, London, and Newcastle, as well as Kingswood; and exceeding great are the blessings we have found therein: it has generally been an extremely solemn season, when the word of God sunk deep into the heart even of those who till then knew Him not. If it be said, "This was only owing to the novelty of the thing (the circumstance which still draws such multitudes together at those seasons) or perhaps to the awful silence of the night; I not careful to answer in this matter. Be it so: however, the impression then made on many souls has never since been effaced."¹⁶³

¹⁶³Telford, Letters, II, pp. 299-300.

This practice was usually with a large segment of the society, not just a class. Thus, the depth of "therapy" would not be so great according to modern group understanding. Yet the fact that there was an impact and that beneficial would seem to indicate that there was value here. Had the classes done this (and some of them may well have) the intensity of the interpersonal activity occurring would have thus been deepened in proportion the number absent. Sometimes a love feast was combined with this practice. this was a society-wide communion-testimony meeting and would play right into the hands of the Marathon kind of dynamics. Wesley had at least some idea of Marathon works among his people.

Leadership

In addition to the nine specific functions taught by Corsini and Rosenberg, and the tenth considered just above, another should be considered for comparison. That is the leadership of the groups. Was the class leader an acceptable group therapist?

In terms of personal needs there are those elements in a man's personality which may bring about anxiety attacks during the group sessions, and these conceivably could hinder the therapist's leadership functioning. Berger lists these. They are characteristics which lie within the therapist himself, or at least they might be there. One of these is his heritage as a therapist which might make him feel obliged to cure his patients. Thus he might possibly suffer crippling anxiety upon discovery of someone not being helped by his therapy. Another possible failure to be aware of is his own transference and countertransference problems which might possibly lead him to manipulate the group according to his own needs. A third might be his

own anxiety during the group's silent periods which would lead him to demand verbalization, destroying the very activity in the silence. Further, the therapist runs the risk of anxiously trying to retain his leadership function for personal need reasons and thus destroy the growing independence of the group as it matures. A need to impress the group with his skill as a therapist may lead him to overimpress the group with his ability to detect group pathological tendencies. His resistance to the growing ability of the group to give him insight into himself and his own neurotic elements might serve to break up the therapeutic atmosphere of acceptance. Lack of knowledge of the dynamics of groups would lead the therapist into anxious personal blind alleys. The therapist may show his unwillingness to meet with groups (and therefore his anxiety over them) by failure to meet on time, delaying the beginning and the like.

It is because of this kind of possibility that Redlich and Freedman hold that the therapist should be capable of satisfactory peer relationships. He should neither fear nor be anxious for authority positions among them but accept such relationships as they naturally arise. They say as well that the therapist ought to have as little need of authoritative behavior as possible and likewise little need of recognition.¹⁶⁵

Foulkes characterizes the good therapist as secure and reality-prone in his inner person. He must be immune to the temptation to play God with

¹⁶⁴Milton Berger, "Problems of Anxiety in Group Psychotherapy Trainees," Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 555-557.

¹⁶⁵Redlich and Freedman, Theory and Practice of Psychiatry, p. 297.

his group. He must love and respect his group and be willing to see them become cooperators with him as therapy wears on.¹⁶⁶

The implication from all this is that the leader of therapeutic groups ought to be self-possessed, at ease with himself, self-accepting, and able to feed himself with insights regarding his own shortcomings in personality without serious detriment to his whole emotional balance. Were such demands made of the class leader? "A class leader ought to be a father in Christ; a man of sound and deep experience, well acquainted with the workings of the human heart."¹⁶⁷ This and other descriptions of the nature of the class leader as they are given in Chapter X above serve to show how clearly the two offices parallel in the personal qualities of their respective occupants.

What of technical qualifications expected for the therapist and the class leader? Do they have a parallel? Needless to say the psychiatric profession has a high standard of education for its group therapists. They are expected ideally to become medical men, though the clinical psychologist need not undergo this discipline. They are put through extensive training in the results of laboratory psychological studies and the philosophy of psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis in particular. The latter of these should not be underestimated in its time requirement for therapy trainees. It is long and involved.

Difficulties arise for those who would help others but are not on the

¹⁶⁶Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis, pp. 64-65.

¹⁶⁷Church, Early Methodist, p. 166.

esoteric inside of the psychotherapy profession. If one questions some of the basic precepts of psychological philosophy, such as some of the holdings of Freud, his ability, his validity, as a therapist is virtually certain to be questioned. Yet Mowrer has with others raised serious and compelling questions in this specific area; namely, whether or not the philosophical interpretations of Freud and others are really entirely valid.¹⁶⁸

Beyond this hesitation to accept in toto psychological philosophy without question and, particularly, the need for a thorough knowledge of it in order to be a psychotherapist of groups, what other aspects of the group therapist's training are less important and which are moreso? Aaron Stein lists the results of a survey made among fifty-four members of the AGPA in this regard. All felt a thorough knowledge of the dynamics and psychopathology of mental and emotional illness was essential; that is, a knowledge of the difficulties into which people can get themselves (which includes, of course, the learning of the jargon associated with the infinitely detailed categories of such illnesses). Most felt that some experience in individual psychiatry, one-personal, was needed before group therapy should be undertaken. All agreed that it was useful and some held it for the aspiring therapist to undergo psychoanalysis himself before taking on groups. All felt that doing group psychotherapy "under supervision was the most valuable and necessary part of the training program and two felt

¹⁶⁸ Mowrer, New Group, pp. 38, 39, 155-156, and 180-181.

that this was the only important part of it."¹⁶⁹

Almost all those polled felt that participation as an observer in a group run by another, more experienced therapist was an important part of the training. Additionally about forty of those polled felt that participation as a patient in a psychotherapeutic group was an essential part of the training. This latter was for the purpose of helping the therapist to understand how the patient feels in the group.¹⁷⁰

The therapist, then, is to mainly be prepared, in addition to some doubtful philosophical learning and some absorption of jargon, by (1) sitting in the place of the disturbed for a while, (2) watching more qualified men lead the groups, (3) lead a group under supervision, and finally (4) take his own groups. This is perhaps an over-simplification. It may be that extensive medical training is needed, for surely some are very disturbed. If the profession wants an esoteric argot which discourages amateurs, this may be fine. However, quackery is never so easy as when the secrets of healing are partially obscured. If the profession chooses to require an extensive philosophical study program, this may be accepted as well. But, when all is said and done, it remains to be seen just how much of this is occult superfluity beyond practical experience in groups.

The class leader was no less to be prepared by experience. The typical upbringing of the class leader was conversion, often in the class, followed

¹⁶⁹Aaron Stein, "The Training of the Group Psychotherapist," Group Psychotherapy and Group Function, Max Rosenbaum and Milton Berger, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), pp. 570-571.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

by some years' experience in the class. During this time he fell under the teaching of the leader or minister regarding the need of the deeper life. A part of the reason of the need of this deeper life was the inner peace it would bring him, and which was so necessary in the class leader. He worked out this sanctification experience which helped put him on a self-accepting basis. He learned of and found for himself the victorious life, one which was victorious over himself mainly. William Carvosso, Henry Longdon, and others mentioned in Chapter X above disclosed this process with their lives.

The position of leader in both disciplines might be considered somewhat comparable at least. Lewin and Lippit studied the ability of three kinds of groups (plus leaders) to carry out problem solutions. These problems consisted in part in the construction of some objects. One group was dominated by the leader in a very authoritarian manner, an second was used democratically by the leader; i.e., he acted as advisor and consultant; and the third was left to itself without any instructions by the leader even as to the job to be performed unless the group insisted on knowing what to do.

The democratic group exhibited a greater sense of "we-ness" than the others and performed its task better and more completely as a group. The first two groups seem most applicable in the present case. The second therefore, is the one which really applies. The autocratic group contrariwise exhibited more selfishness on the part of its members, more of a sense of "I-ness." It likewise got itself involved in much more interpersonally coop-

erative and stable emotionally than the autocratically led group. ¹⁷¹

Before too much judgment is made of one or the other it must be remembered that the therapeutic group has different purposes than a mere problem solution in the sociological sense. The therapeutic group problem is internal within the individual members. The problem is the establishment of individual acceptability of the membership to themselves. Therefore the therapeutic group needs more of a sense of "I-ness" than the groups of Lewin and Lippit. Authoritarian groups are probably better also because of the higher interaction which seems to be inherent in them, and which is needful in therapy groups.

The authority needed for therapy groups is not tightly reining, but one which controls quietly and keeps the group guided in the direction of hidden feelings. Few groups like to take this direction voluntarily. The therapist is the "governor" who calls attention to the group having strayed by changing the subject, or hiding its hostility.

Foulkes points out the need of authority in the groups by saying that most actually prefer a leader to occupy the position of authority. They make him the representative of the ideals of the group. ¹⁷² Pederson-Krag says that the groups consider the leader "the one island of sanity; the one sound and adequate man." ¹⁷³ Cartwright and Zander indicate that

¹⁷¹Kurt Lewin and Ronald Lippit, "An Experimental Approach to the Study of Autocracy and Democracy: A Parliamentary Note," Sociometry, I (January-April, 1938), 292-300.

¹⁷²Foulkes, Therapeutic Group Analysis, p. 25.

¹⁷³Pederson-Krag, "Unconscious Factors," p. 187.

the leaders of more effective groups, "when asked to evaluate other people, give responses indicating that they characteristically maintain a greater psychological distance between themselves and other people than do the leaders of less effective groups."¹⁷⁴

While certain democracy did exist in the early Wesley groups, they were heavily autocratic, Christian love notwithstanding. This is inescapable as a conclusion. The leader was required to ask questions. The member was required to respond forthrightly, without reserve. There was interaction on a more or less structured agenda. This lent heavy autocratic elements to the class meeting. However, it would seem that these for the purposes of the class meeting should have been there, because, like the therapeutic groups, the class meeting was dealing with inner, personal problems. It was necessary that each individual be aware of himself, not submerged in the group as Jung feared the individual to be at such meetings.

The group leader in therapy is warned that one of the activities of members of therapy groups is to escape "into love." That means that the leader may be led to believe that love is felt and transmitted to others including the leader. The attempt will be hypocritical and will be a verbalization of what the member feels the leader and the group to expect from that member. It will be given in order for the member to avoid going deeper into himself. It will be his attempt to "buy off" the group or the leader

¹⁷⁴ Cartwright and Zander, Group Dynamics, p. 483.

from forcing him to probe deeper into himself. Redl terms this a means of "group resistance."¹⁷⁵

An example of this may be seen in the class meeting described on pages 123 to 129 in the case of "Sister Lee." Her blustering attempts to give the group the kind of testimony it would like to hear come to naught as the leader, dissatisfied with the ring of it, probed deeper. Another rejection by the leader of a testimony designed to hide the real problem is seen in the boy's testimony on page 155 above regarding his continual desire to go back to the world. The temptation to go back to the world might well evoke sympathy, whereas unwillingness to deepen one's Christian life would not look very tolerable to the others. The desire here is to elicit from the group, sympathy, encouragement, and, above all, no demand for a changed attitude or an advance in spiritual discipline. The leader's and the therapist's jobs are the same: ignore the facade and deal directly with the perceived problem.

Another interesting thing about the two groups, therapy and class meeting, is that the leaders of both groups are encouraged by experts in the fields to be concerned about the groups before they meet with them. The therapist is encouraged by Mullan and Rosenbaum to set aside a period prior to the group meetings to meditate on the dynamics of the group. This will help him to understand what is going on and to see movements better when

¹⁷⁵Fritz Redl, "Resistance in Therapy Groups," Human Relations, I (March, 1948), 307-313.

the meetings are in progress.¹⁷⁶

However, the class leader was encouraged by all to go directly from his "closet" to the class meeting. He was to pray for each member regularly and to be concerned about the membership needs outside of the group. He was not to be utterly forgetful of the group while apart from it. Particularly the period prayer and meditation on the group just before its convening was enjoined.

Size of the Groups

Did the class meeting conform to what has been discovered to be the optimum size for therapeutic groups? There seems to be some disagreement on what optimum size in the literature. The problem seems to be centered on the kind of therapy desired. Foulkes says that, when the group contains less than five members, there is not enough interaction for good therapy and if the group is above eight in membership there is not enough intimacy for it.¹⁷⁷ Elsewhere he says that a hospital ward situation allows a slightly larger average group running from seven to ten.¹⁷⁸ Wolf holds that, if there are less than eight, the group will not experience enough interpersonal activity and that if more than ten are present the therapist loses track of it.¹⁷⁹ Foulkes further says that with open groups, where members by prior agreement are free to be absent or to go and come as they please, the number may be

¹⁷⁶Mullan and Rosenbaum, Group Psychotherapy, p. 201.

¹⁷⁷Foulkes, Therapeutic Group, p. 66 ¹⁷⁸Ibid. p. 201.

¹⁷⁹Wolf, "Psychoanalysis of Groups," p. 276.

from ten to twelve. However, this latter kind of group is not a deep-searching kind.¹⁸⁰

Geller likely offers the best explanation of proper group size. His sizes are based on the kind of therapy which the group (or the therapist) wants. He offers four classifications. The first of these is the psychoanalytic level which requires a maximum of ten but an average of from four to six members. This allows close attention to be paid to detailed aspects of the interpersonal relations of the members. The next level is one which is based upon the analysis and alleviation of major problems only. It can have from eight to fifteen members. Geller holds the main difference between this level and the first one is quantitative; that is, in the degree of analysis; not in the approach taken to therapy. The third kind suggested is that size of group averaging from thirty to fifty running as high as a hundred. This group uses the repressive-inspirational approach, with lectures and exhortations. The largest groups are those, presumably, above one hundred which involves the most superficial therapy of all. It utilizes the guidance and orientation method. In this setting "theoretical and practical aspects of psychological functioning are presented to interested groups."¹⁸¹

What meaning does this have for the class meeting? First of all, the class meeting system concerned itself with what might be called the major problem approach. Its over interests were narrow, centering on the spiritual.

¹⁸⁰Foulkes, op. cit., p. 283.

¹⁸¹Geller, "Concerning the Size of Therapy Groups," pp. 411-412.

however, the ethical (and therefore practical moral) aspect of Wesley's ministry must be remembered. The class meeting dealt with moral life as will be seen from Wesley's expulsions of smugglers and the like. However, the class meeting was for the purpose of helping the spiritual-ethical lives of the converts of the rivals. Thus it would seem that a twelve member group (actually eleven if the leader is excluded) would seem well able to handle such problems. It was actually quite near the good size for analytical, even deeper, working groups.

A further factor notable is that it has already been pointed out that, where there were multiple, or "adjunct," therapists, the groups could be slightly larger. In the classes there have been shown to be the equivalent of the adjunct, or group member, leaders who helped out the leader in the class until they were able to form their own classes. These were the advanced Christians who were well settled within themselves and more able to help others than some of the other members. Thus the class leader had at his right hand some accomplished men (or women) some of whom themselves might be nearly ready to start a class. Ideally there were all stages of "therapeutic" accomplishment represented in the class members who continued for years on end in the classes. However, the psychotherapist is hampered in not having these in the beginning and may have to consume, for shorter lived groups, as much as half of the total life of the group before he can begin to really receive any help from the equivalent of the advanced Christians in the classes. For this reason the classes, which ran on and on, could be slightly larger and still have ample opportunity for dynamic balances to be handled. This is not to say that classes of twenty and more were to be desired just from this single factor, but rather classes of from

twelve to fifteen could probably operate with a good quality of "therapy" taking place.

Finally, in passing it is noteworthy that the smaller societies would qualify as therapy groups under Geller's classification system. It would be interesting to see just how close the parallel could be drawn for these. For that matter even the societies of more than one hundred still qualify under Geller's rules as "guidance and orientation" therapy groups. Their effectiveness in this area seems to speak for itself.

Composition

Finally, the matter of composition of the classes and the therapy groups needs to be considered. This is probably the single area where a striking difference between the two exists. Wesley's classes were strictly segregated according to sex at first. In addition the married and single women were segregated into classes as often as not. The married and single men were likewise separated but not as often as the women. Eventually, as the societies enlarged, the sexes and ages became more and more mixed, until Wesley's late years saw at least some mixture of the class groups.

Therapy groups on the other hand were mixed sexually and racially from the beginning. Wesley's classes were mixed racially, though there was not enough race variation in England to constitute a very high non-white class population. Some consider racial mixtures important in therapy groups.¹⁸²

¹⁸²Emory, Works, IV, p. 527

Even more important, therapy groups are preferred to be sexually mixed. Foulkes,¹⁸³ Wolf,¹⁸⁴ and Furst¹⁸⁵ all insist on this. Foulkes prefers men and women in about equal proportions. The reason for this is that it seems to mobilize greater emotional force and it tends toward a deeper therapy.

Furst speaks particularly about the advantages of heterogeneous groups. The first is that it tends to take the therapist, whether he likes it or not, deeper in levels of therapy. Character as well as symptom formation are influenced. Reality testing is more adequately done. Transferences are more easily carried out. Such groups are easier to assemble.¹⁸⁶ However, there are drawbacks. Recovery takes longer by this method, though (or perhaps, because) it tends to run the therapy deeper in the individual. Interaction tensions become magnified. Insight develops slowly.¹⁸⁷

Furst likewise lists some of the advantages of homogeneous groups. One of these is that group identification takes place quickly. Insight develops more rapidly than in heterogeneous groups. Length of treatment is lessened. Resistances and interactions of a more destructive nature are lessened. Recovery from symptoms is more rapid. Mainly the disadvantages are just about those expected from the foregoing material. Shallower interaction, difficulty in achieving transference and reality testing experiences, and the like are what one must expect if he deals with sexually homogeneous groups.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³Foulkes, Therapeutic Group, p. 283.

¹⁸⁴Wolf, "Psychoanalysis," pp. 275-276.

¹⁸⁵Furst, "Homogeneous," pp. 408-410.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 408.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

Redlich and Freedman argue that too much heterogeneity may hinder the therapeutic effectiveness of the groups. Here they speak of such factors as vast age differences, greatly different cultural backgrounds, and the like; not particularly sexual mixing.¹⁸⁹ Foulkes adds that the group primarily ought to be homogeneous according to syndromes exhibited. The individuals should not feel isolated in any significant respect.¹⁹⁰

What does this all mean regarding the class meeting? The segregation according to sex practiced by Wesley's classes should had, in the light of the preceding information and opinions, the following clear advantages: (1) It should have tended to put people together with common syndromes, or symptom systems. This mildly suggests segregation of the sexes would best, which the first classes practiced. (2) It would likely get down to business and "gain insight" spiritually quickly, if segregated by sex. Additionally, its shallower "therapy" level would allow a less technically trained leader to conduct the meetings and lead the groups. The Wesley classes were not interested, rightly or wrongly, in the minute details of one's past life. The Wesley "therapy" was largely carried out with no reference to this aspect of the class members at all. (3) It meant a fairly rapid recovery from the "symptoms" by means of unthreatening interaction and insight. (4) It meant, as has been shown, shallower therapy in terms of psychoanalysis. However, questions have been raised about this before. They need not be repeated here. If Mowrer is right in demanding a forum where the guilty can confess present

¹⁸⁹Redlich and Freedman, The Theory and Practice of Psychiatry, p. 293.

¹⁹⁰Foulkes, op. cit., p. 283.

feelings of guilt, the reasons for them, and need of forgiveness and acceptance from the members of the community and from God, then sexually heterogeneous groups are not necessarily required. The same would be true for the problem of transference, which would also be more difficult to effect in homogeneous groups. It is notable in this respect that Foulkes agrees with Wesley in prohibiting the mixture of married and single people.

A question naturally arises here. If mixed groups do get more involved, if they do go deeper in analytical levels, during the therapy, then why did not the Wesley groups not wind up in transference problems and other associated characteristics of deeper analytical work. And why did the groups not show the consequences of being mixed up in those factors without understanding them? Well, the answer in part is that it is not clear that these things did not happen. The literature only recounts the successes of class meetings, not their failures, though there probably were not that many. However, Wesley's groups did go to heterogeneity. It is quite likely that some real problems having the appellation, "carnality," issued from some of the earlier, smaller, mixed meetings. However, that very description suggests the more likely answer as to why there was not more trouble over heterogeneous classes. When the mixture of sexes began to occur, it did so principally because of a shortage of leaders. Thus when the classes became mixed, they also became larger. Therefore the danger of conflagration was lessened by the larger size. A class larger than twenty took on the aspects of a society. Furthermore, if it became mixed by sex, it likewise at the same time got mixed by age as well which would exercise a further diluting factor in the dynamics. The unfortunate part of all this was that very thing: the dynamics got diluted and the class meeting began to lose its power.

It seems then that the a great deal can be said for the psychological values of the Wesley groups. It is not believed that it is necessary to stretch the imagination at all to find considerable parallel between the Wesley class meeting and the modern therapy of groups. Jung suggested that groups submerge the individual and cause as a result astonishing cures, psychic changes, and conversions.¹⁹¹ Foulkes says that "by and large the group situation would appear to be the most powerful therapeutic agency known to us. I imagine it will become more and more the usual psychotherapeutic approach."¹⁹² It should not come as a shock by this time that when small groups get together things happen.

The class meeting has been shown to have exercised nine special dynamic functions outlined by the literature. It has further been shown to have similar size and leadership requirements to those of group therapy. The composition of the classes, ideally, has likewise good basis in group therapeutic literature. Thus Wesley the originator emerges more strongly than ever as a man keenly attuned to the needs of the spiritual and the un-spiritual man. "Common sense" was what Wesley would have called it. But then that is what so much psychological philosophy is with an interesting lingo for its system of terms.

The question naturally arises as to why Methodism dropped so obviously a fine tool as the class meeting system. That question and its answers, which are several, will be considered in the next section, IV, of this paper.

¹⁹⁰ Illing, "C. G. Jung," p. 182.

¹⁹¹ Foulkes, Therapeutic Group, p. 76.

SECTION IV

THE DETERIORATION OF THE CLASS MEETING

CHAPTER XV

DETERIORATING REVERENCE FOR THE CLASS MEETING

The class system failed essentially before 1900. Its demise was foretold by the prophets of the nineteenth century. They said that, if something were not done soon, it would be lost and with it would go much of the vitality and power of Methodism. It was nonetheless retired by both the clerics and laity of Wesleyanism. Why, when the institution had so proved itself, when it had been held in such high esteem by its founder for whom great feeling has always been held by Methodists of all kinds. . . why was it turned out to pasture? That is a question which the church has yet to satisfactorily answer. In the answer lies the key to Wesleyan power, the heart of Wesleyan revival.

One of the marks of deteriorating reverence for the class meeting is seen in the increasingly absent membership over the years. No matter what was done by those responsible for the spiritual welfare of the church, the membership in ever-increasing numbers neglected the classes. There were places where temporary surges of mass return to it occurred, but, by and large, the membership became increasingly wary of it and withdrew from it more and more. Such resistance to it existed even in the beginning as has been seen in Chapter VII above. While some seemed to swear by it and almost stake their spiritual lives upon it, others seemed only to curse it and, when put to the test on it, would take their membership elsewhere. This is why Walker could

say that the Congregationalists and the Baptists in England profited more from the Wesleyan revival than the Wesleyans themselves did in terms of numbers.¹

Wesley never seemed to get free from the problem of non-attendance and semi-attendance. Likewise in American Methodism, though the classes were often used to great advantage, the lack of interest in many quarters was still lamented by many. One reads the literature on the class meeting written in the first half of the century, especially in the second quarter, and easily perceives the sense of urgency in the authors as they relate story after story of the enlarging companies of those who seldom, if ever, darken the door of the class meeting. Typical is one correspondent to a Methodist periodical. He mourns over the neglect of the class which he notes in 1847 in the "far off West," adding, "It would take a more able pen than mine to describe the gloom and darkness that surrounds the Church, when the means of grace are neglected."²

One might expect that, when the laity resists a ministry which is somewhat dependent upon the good feelings of that same group, the minister would soft-pedal the unpopular item. This seems to have been the case to some extent, too. By 1856 there seems to have been considerable talk in heirarchical circles about the possibility of removing the condition of class attendance for church membership. Watson notes this attitude and anguishes

¹Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 469.

²Letter to the editor, The Nashville Christian Advocate, August 20, 1847, p. 1.

over the "almost universal" neglect of the class meeting in the prescribed form.³ Many groups were still being conducted which called themselves classes. However, these were not conducted in the way called for by the discipline of the church. Matthew Simpson acknowledged lack of support for the classes in 1882, twenty years after the Southern Methodists struck attendance at class from their requirements for membership.

They are placed among the means of grace, and are highly esteemed, and attendance upon them is specified as a Christian duty. They have been a peculiar feature of Methodism, and have accomplished a vast amount of good, both inciting higher personal experience and in accustoming the members to religious conversation and labor. They are agencies which develop earnest and active Christian workers . . . as a bond of union their influence can scarcely be overestimated. In many churches, however, the attendance is less regular or general than the Discipline of the Church requires.⁴

In 1902 Goodell, speaking after the requirement of the class had ceased among the northern Methodists, said,

While the church maintains that it has been the best means of grace to instruct the ignorant, to guide the inexperienced, to comfort the despondent, to restore the fallen, and to promote the fellowship of believers, very many do not attend it."⁵

He adds that this is really about the same attitude which was held by many before. "The opposition to the class was as marked then as it is now."⁶ The difference was that "now" it was no longer a requirement for Methodists and the resistance which the members felt toward it could be more overtly

³J. J. Watson, Helps to the Promotion of Revivals (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), pp. 76-77.

⁴Matthew Simpson, Cyclopedia of Methodism (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1882), pp. 228-229.

⁵Charles Goodell, The Drillmaster of Methodism (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902), p. 15.

⁶Ibid., pp. 44-45.

expressed in non-attendance.

Even before the requirement of attendance was dropped, hostility toward the class meeting could easily be seen in some of the excuses offered for absences. Some of these, more overtly hostile, were

"I do not wish to be a hypocrite." [The implication is, of course, that others in the class were and one would have to be one to talk the way many did in the meetings.]

"The class is not essential to true Christian character and salvation."

"It is the same old story from week to week."⁷

"It is not profitable to me."⁸

As with most factors in life these statements had their elements of truth in some cases. There were hypocrites in the midst. There were stereotyped meetings. There was unreal life in some instances. However, these excuses were often used and were finally persuasive in causing the requirement for membership to be set aside.

Irreverence for the classes was seen as well in the failure of the literature of Methodism to do much officially to eulogize it. Coke and Asbury in the 1820's had said it was good, effective, and desirable for Methodism, but this was faint praise compared to what was needed to keep it going. Moreover, other writers did not even go this far often. Literary praises for the institution were not forthcoming much at all after the passing of mid-century. Occasionally a correspondent to a periodical would reminisce wistfully upon it. About once every twenty-five years a plea would be made

⁷L. Rosser, Class Meetings: Embracing Their Origin, Nature, Obligations, and Benefits (Richmond, Virginia: L. Johnson Co., 1855), pp. 186-220.

⁸John A. Miley, Treatise on Class Meetings (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854), pp. 147-158.

for its return to prominence and practice. For example, Miley in 1854 said he could find no works which discussed the class meeting in any detail.⁹ Atkinson in 1874 said,

Only two or three small volumes and a few tracts, specifically devoted to this subject are extant in the whole range of American Methodist publications, and of those, scarcely any were written within the last two decades.¹⁰

Likewise, Goodell noted in 1902 that not much was published in the previous twenty-five years by the Methodist Book Concern on the Methodist class meeting.¹¹

Thus from Wesley's day to this there has been, at least in the background, hostility toward the class meeting on the part of many. In this day were one in the church to suggest that small groups meet within the church, led by laymen who were to ask the three searching questions according to the discipline, and that such meetings were henceforth to be required of all for membership, consternation would reign at all levels. So it was in the earlier days. While Methodism grew much and its healthful vitality grew out of its doctrine of sanctification and its class meetings to a large extent, it is likewise true its greatest growth came after these two important features of Methodism came to a downgrade of usage. That downgrade had been gathering for some time and the class meeting had not effectually been functioning in numbers of places, especially along the east coast before the 1836 and 1840 conferences. However, in these this resistance had its first effects. In the 1836 conference the wording of the ruling on trial

⁹Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁰John Atkinson, The Class Leader: His Work and How to Do It (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1874), p. 3.

¹¹Goodell, The Drillmaster, p. 5

membership so that it was a necessity to spend time in the class before being admitted on trial. The 1840 conference, as has been previously pointed out, changed the class attendance rules so as to permit transfers from other denominations with acceptable statement of doctrine and when the transferee had given satisfactory evidence of correctness of his own faith. These were the wedges which would eventually see the end of the requirement of the classes.

Stevens gives the growth figures for American Methodism from its inception to its centennial year. From 1766 to 1836 American Methodism grew from nothing to 650,103. In the next decade its growth was large indeed despite the split. Before the schism in 1846 the membership was 1,139,517. After the split occurred the membership in the northern church was 644,229. Ten years later in 1856 it was 800,327. Again at the centennial American conference in 1866 it was 1,032,184. This was the year the Southern Methodists dropped the class. No figures are available on their growth in the same period, but it can be assumed to be equivalent.¹²

The probable reason that the attendance matter came to a head in the 1836 conference is the great growth in the decade just prior to it, which was 289,303. With all these and the many more who would have joined but for the class, the leadership thought it necessary to relax somewhat their severe limitation upon membership. This they did in the next two conferences. While the growth of the northern church never quite equalled that of the 1826 to 1836 period, it seems clear that the combined growth of

¹²Abel Stevens, A Compendious History of American Methodism (New York: Eaton and Mains, n.d.). p. 607.

the two more than equalled this spurt in size. Thus letting down the bars, albeit slowly, was brought about by a great pressure from the outside by those who wanted in, and by an influence by those within to get relief from the discipline of the class. For the sake of enlargement the church acceded to the will of the people. It was a mistake, a serious one.

CHAPTER XVI

DETERIORATING GROUP DYNAMICS

The dynamic factors in the class meeting were what made much of the hostility and resistance to the class. Men fear the small group situation. That there was considerable resistance to the classes should not therefore be surprising. Modern group research has shown that people resist therapy situations of most kinds. The more intense the therapy, the more it will be resisted, and this is a general rule. Redl says that resistance is unavoidable in therapy groups because the part of the personality involved pathologically has an interest in the survival of the pathology.¹

Generally speaking, people, in the desire to build and maintain acceptable images of themselves will go to some length to hide what are termed deficiencies in their social pattern. Life for such people becomes a pattern of buttressing and enlarging the base of the false image. If it is based on a non-existent foundation, it is threatened at all times with collapse. Neurosis revolves around the individual's attempts not only to live this kind of false life, but even more to make himself believe that it is true. In groups there arises a pressure to be true to one's self. The nature of the group is such as to encourage this, at least, it is the nature of group therapy.

¹Fritz Redl, "Resistance in Therapy Groups," Human Relations, I (1948), 308.

The Wesleyan "therapy" classes were actually designed to deal with the false in the members by bringing it out, destroying it, and then keeping the member honest with himself as much as possible thereafter. Since they were designed to rebut false images, the classes frightened many, especially in the later days when imagery came to mean more to men in general. Not only did it try to reveal oneself to others but it went ever farther to the frightening extreme of revealing oneself to himself, the most difficult to accept revelation of all.

The Putneys say that when individuals are confronted with adverse emotional environments, they tend to go into a kind of solitary confinement. They shrink from candid intimacy more from fear of rejection than fear of prosecution for the revealed inadequacies.² Thus a person who has carefully built an image of himself which speaks of independence and purity will be anguished over the general revelation of actual dependence and impurity. It makes little difference that others in the group may have gone through the same anguish and are now encouraging him with promises of real peace on the other side. He fears to change, to open, to risk the rejection that is sure to come when his whole self is exposed.

The neurotic personality (and most are to some degree or other) fears any real change in the status quo. Having built an environment which tends to support to some degree at least, however unsatisfactorily, the wished-for self-image, the individual then tends to protect that image, not to endanger it by exposure to starkly true reality. However great the inner dissatisfac-

²Snell Putney and Gail J. Putney, The Adjusted American (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 75-77.

tion may be with the present self, one will still resist change or confrontation which threatens change. The individual's fear of the unknown, whatever promise it seems to hold, will cause him to resist any and all change. Man in the present culture and in the Wesleyan culture, especially later in the Victorian era when ideals were held so high, has avoided the image of sinner-failure. In the class, however, he had to project himself as both a sinner and a kind of failure.

Jesus recognized that man must find himself in his relation to reality. The only way to do so is to come to Ultimate Reality, the true measure of all things pertaining to reality. This means for man that God is to be approached and asked for an evaluation. However, Jesus told Nicodemus that men neurotically hiding from their own sin resisted this kind of comparison (John 3:19,20). Man's neurotic fear of his own sinfulness will keep him, if possible, from having it exposed.

Men are troubled by a sense of alienation from each other. Clebsch and Jaekle say that men are estranged from each other and consequently feel estranged from God.³ However, it is just the other way around. Men feel estranged from God, and as they glimpse the stamp of God in their fellows, they likewise feel separated from them. When the individual senses this division from God (and thus the falseness of his righteous self-image), he is likely to seek the company of those who will not call attention to this estrangement. One who disturbs his fellows in such company by hinting at their own masquerade

³William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle, Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 63.

will find himself quickly the object of their fear and hostility. This is why Christian persecutions have so raged over the centuries.

Before opening his life to Christ, the sinner, or the non-Christian believer, has real doubts about the whole basis of his life. His sense of worthiness is seriously challenged by the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit's ministry among men. Jesus said that part of the work of the Holy Spirit would be acquainting the sinner with the unhappy facts of his own state, of the righteousness of God, and of the judgment accomplished upon the sinner. After he has accepted this condemnation of his false, self-righteous, self-image, and accepted eternal life from God, his eyes are opened. He sees things, including himself, in a different light.

At the same time, however, the negative fact of his sinful state is not the only aspect of his life which the Spirit wishes to reach. There is a principle within the new Christian which still impels him toward a false life, and which after a while will try to lead him to hide from Christian reality by building once more a false image, even though this one is based on a real Christian experience. The crisis comes, if it does at all, when the sinner realizes that all is not well within and submits to God's work further in the destruction of that within which would have played false with himself.

Even beyond this experience the Christian is tempted to erect a non-real self-image. He will be tempted as many have been to say to himself, "I am alright now. Nothing further can go awry. I can really do no wrong."

This is a delusive belief that the Christian can fairly easily fall into. It arises out of the desire for security from the constant need for self-confrontation in the on-going Christian life. The Christian may well have problems in accepting himself as a person who falls short by his very nature, and cannot go unmistaken for very long. Society and upbringing impress upon him the need for right judgment of himself and his surroundings. He grows up with the feeling that he must not err. To do so looms before many a Christian as an unforgivable thing. He dreads this and shrinks from a life of continual adjustment to increased revelation of his failure to measure up. The literature of the church contains much in the writings of the saints which points to their quiet anguish over their own sense of shortcoming and imperfection. Luther, Augustine, and Francis of Assisi are notable examples of this feeling. However, let it be said that these found that even though they had difficulty in accepting themselves, they had a God who unhesitatingly, unreservedly accepted them.

For the Christian on the average, however, who seeks the deeper life, there is this discovery that he must go on confronting negative aspects of himself in this life. Hopefully, he will have gained the courage and the determination through the experiences of salvation and sanctification to permit the further revelation of his personal imperfections by the Holy Spirit, which are the closest things to sin that are in him ideally by this time.

However, even such people, experienced though they may be in the sanctified life, will shrink at times from these revelations. They will resort to a variety of means to assurance. One is the practical belief security in one's experience some years previous. This becomes the basis for a ritualized testimony. The person will express his apparent feelings of assurance, no matter how unsupported by daily life they appear to be. The individual becomes blind to himself.

An extreme example of this in this author's experience is the case of the pastor's wife in Texas who told some of the congregation that she had exorcised the devil from herself and could no more sin. It was plain from the attitude of the congregation that they felt she was the victim of a largely false self image. A class meeting session or two might have done wonders in destroying this image. But there was no chance for a real confrontation and eventually the pastor left the church under other circumstances than happy.

In the three levels of experience mentioned just above, the temptation toward unreality simply arises out of the various aspects of sin in the life. Some such as habits of thinking, memories, and the like may never be completely erased, though they may be reduced to near nothing. Others, such as the desire to be evil and false with oneself can be destroyed. But whatever the need may be, confrontation with it is always uncomfortable and usually painful. It makes one feel unworthy, degraded, and impure. It is more than can be borne. This is more evident today than ever before.

The class meeting had the terrible habit of asking each person, "What temptation do you have to add to the false qualities of your self image? What have been your activities to keep in touch with your real self? Are you still comparing your actual life with Christ's ideal for you?"

Men did not like this in the former days and they liked it less as time went on. Men like it least today. When people gather in therapy groups, they like the Wesleyans, are asking for the truth. The theme of the therapy group member is, as it was for the class member, "What is my true self? Whom am I truly. I don't care how frightening it is . . . I want to know!"

Jesus Christ is the Truth personified. If men seek it, they must ultimately find Him. That therapy groups do not wind up as born-again Christian affairs is not the fault of Christ. They stop short of the Ultimate, being satisfied with the small, sometimes temporary, gains of emotional release which may come along the way. These do give relief. However, the real goal, ultimate truth in Christ, escapes them because they do not finish their course.

In the class meeting men knew that Christ was their goal. They expected Him to be among and dealing with them. However, even here the old fear of rejection by Him and others because of sin made itself felt, mainly because it is the habit of man to do this in all his years. Wesleyan sessions, like today's group sessions were often ones which were dominated by feelings of great anguish of soul as the real made itself known to the membership. Brokenness, contrition, and humiliation were often the order of the day, just as they often are in therapy groups. Finding one's sinful self awaiting him in a breakthrough of the wall of resistance to truth is always a hideous looking thing.

It is only after one senses this awful reality and then experiences the forgiveness and acceptance of the group and of God that he can begin to appreciate the value of the group, or of the preaching, or whatever it was that brought him to this reality. Then it is that peace can come. In the therapy group it is the peace resultant from the uncovering and acceptance of this or that negative aspect in life, real or unreal or unreal thought it may be. However, in the Wesleyan class meetings it was a peace which was

ultimate because it arose in the source of all things; it was the peace of Christ, mysterious, glorious, and unexplainable. Those who broke through into it had the courage to seek it more. Those who had not were not so brave.

Redl says that for lasting effects in therapy, the resistance of a man to reality must be destroyed.⁴ A man must open himself to God and to others . . . and to himself, not just at a point in time, but continually. In the accepting presence of others who understand him the individual can do this. They understand because they, too, have his struggle, or have had it, and they wish for or have received the peace from inner accusation which he seeks. As the class went on year after year, the weekly discipline of open, unashamed introspection in the presence of God became a habit of life. It ceased to be a fearful thing, fraught with the possibility of rejection no longer, and the members found a joy unspeakable in the continual accomplishment. They became like James' "doer of the Word," continually looking upon the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25).

Jesus recognized this open quality of honesty about oneself and others as an absolute necessity for Christians. He prayed fervently for it in the upper room. He was not informing God of the need, but was rather choosing this way of telling the disciples to be unified by mutual acceptance and by mutual acknowledgement of each one's own sin.

And the glory which Thou has given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. (John 17:22,23 New American Standard Version)

Thus the Wesleyan class idea addressed itself directly to this resis-

⁴Redl, "Resistance in Therapy Groups," p. 307.

tance. It decided that all factors which hindered the member's relations with others and with God must go. It met the resistance headon. Various results of the encounter were manifest as time went on. One of these was the simple refusal to participate which already has been discussed in the previous chapter.

Another was retreat from the psycho-spiritual dynamics in the presence of the group. A member, for example, might just sit quietly and say as little as possible. In the smaller groups this was not possible. However, even if called upon, a member might answer in any of several stereotyped ways which would verbally be mild and noncommittal. If the leader did not choose to pick this signal up and deal with it, he might not. He might be the kind of leader which developed more often later on, who held the post as a matter of prestige and was not really interested in psychological bearhugs with the membership.

Hall says that this kind of activity is a sign of an immature group; that is, one which has not the capacity to help itself or its members. He says that such groups do not become involved. They stick to conversation on inconsequential matters, the form committees to deal with dangerous problems outside of the group, they may spend time in self-admiration, or they may vent hostility on some outsider or upon a straw man.⁵

Toward the end this is the kind of behavior which the class meeting membership displayed. Hostility toward social problems over which the group had not control, discussion (indicated by the list on pages 136 and 137 supra) regarding rather impersonal or semi-impersonal things and the like

⁵D. M. Hall, Dynamics of Group Action (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printer and Publisher, 1957), p. 174.

were ways in which the groups manifested this spirit as groups.

Individuals might resist by offering excuses for non-participation in the spirit of humility. These were more and more acceptable to the groups as time went on and were less and less called into question for fear of giving offense. Many of this kind of excuse bore the unconscious intent of "I-am-afraid-to-participate." Rosser lists some of these that were common in his day.

"I am ashamed to speak of my religious feelings before a company."

"I cannot speak of my experience before those who have more grace than I have."

"I am not worthy to meet the people of God in such holy fellowship."

"I cannot speak as well as others."

Perhaps the most honest of all was this one:

"I don't know why, but I can honestly say, I do not like the class meetings."⁶

All these clearly show unwillingness of the members to speak out and to get involved in the class. With integration by a capable leader, and honesty on the part of the member, it would not take long for some unsatisfying personal characteristics and attitudes to begin to come forth. This especially was disliked by latter day members.

What few people but Wesley could realize the value of honesty and openness in the class meetings to Christian vitality and discipline? The attitude he wished the membership to have, as far as the daily lives of the mem-

⁶Rosser, Class Meetings, pp. 186-220.

bers were concerned, was. "Mistakes are all right for a little while, but there comes a time when they are revealed by the Holy Spirit to the erring member. Then, by the power and grace of God, they are to cease." Thus the accepting atmosphere of the class was not entirely conducive to honesty and openness. It took courage to reveal things which were negative within oneself because this revelation was expected to be followed by repentance and revision of one's life. For many this prospect was simply too frightening, despite the cheerful encouragements of those who had gone before through the same dark valley of doubt.

This kind of interpersonal confrontation has been advocated by Mowrer (see pages 196-197 supra). His idea of confessing before significant others certainly has its merit as opposed to confession in groups where one is not known. The modern therapeutic practice of putting groups together made up of relative strangers has been challenged above as not the best for this reason. Mowrer's view has clear basis of validity in the class meeting. Of course, it must be recognized that, except for institutional situations, there is not always a choice for modern group therapists owing to the scarcity of willing persons.

Goodell recognized the effect of groups of the class meeting kind on an individual's fears and sense of self-accusation.

So far as the people are concerned, it is doubtless true that some have lost their first love and no longer delight to talk of spiritual things. They are ill at ease with godly men and women for their own hearts condemn them, and memory in the hand of conscience is a fearful scourge.⁷

Atkinson points out that in his day as well many had no relish for the class

⁷Goodell, The Drillmaster, p. 16.

and therefore did not attend it.⁸

The response of the classes eventually, and of the church as well, was a substantial surrender of the demand for this kind of honesty. The openness and consequent interpersonal dynamics with all their healing values went into discard at the hands of the leadership and laity alike in time. As if by an unspoken mutual agreement they began gradually at first but with rising momentum to fail to interact. They changed from a dynamic group in the classes, with personal, internalized goals centering around revision of the self toward the Christian ideal, to a secondary group with a relatively external, impersonal group goal. Such goals were the erection of the image of a spiritual group in the church, Bible study groups with high intellectual content, and elite social fellowships.

Such simple and primal things as honesty and openness to judgment, regular attendance at class meeting and at public worship are sufficient disciplinary demands. To these may be added supporting habits such as prayer, Bible reading, and tithing. But they ought not to be regarded as meritorious exercises or as substitutes for the basic discipline of the group.⁹

One old class leader remarked in 1874 on the change in attitude toward the openness and honesty engendered by the discipline for the class meeting, "Probably one of the most marked departures from the old and beneficial features of class meetings is the lack of directness and point which formerly so generally prevailed."¹⁰ This man's remark bears high significance. It shows excellent insight into the heart of the classes problems.

Thus the interpersonal activity brought about by the discipline was gradually set aside. The class meeting became, as will be seen in the next

⁸Atkinson, Class Leader, pp. 160-161. ⁹Emerick, Spiritual Renewal, p. 53.

¹⁰Atkinson, op. cit., pp. 204-205.

chapter, a rather non-personal action group with some kind of group goal. When it lost its personality, it lost its satisfaction, and its meaning to all but a few. Even these seem to have continued to attend mainly out of respect for its memory. However, these, too, eventually died and the classes, the last vestige of them disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII

DETERIORATING CLASS STANDARDS

It might be expected that once the process of retreat from interpersonal dynamics in the class meeting began in earnest it accelerated rather rapidly. In order to visualize the process involved here it is necessary to consider the possibilities of the humanity involved. One of these possibilities is the standard problem of children of believing or Christian parents. Not all children like to remain outside the fold which their parents inhabit. Often they will make a profession of some kind or other in order to gain the security of the fold. They fail to gain the reality of the experience professed, however, and later become defensive when threatening experiences occur. Thus children of sanctified parents are often sanctified themselves at an early age and then refuse to consider later on the possibility of the discontinuity of their former experienced, if indeed it occurred. They will react with hurt at the suggestion that they may need to update their Christian experience. When someone in the church, especially a member converted or sanctified recently, suggests a novel approach to church problems and one which tends to put the older Christians to a test, people with less current testimonies will resist. Their flanks exposed, they will protest that "we have not done this before," or "the old way is best," when the truth is that they have not even done it the old way themselves. The class would deal with such by enforcing honesty from them and bringing them to see their lives in the light of Christian experience as taught in scriptures.

Another possibility is that of the preacher. He comes at meagre salary to a parsonage to lead the congregation. He is under a superintendency on the one side and in a leadership position on the other. If he offends his congregation, they may protest to him or even visit the superintendent. The minister is obligated to see that the classes function properly and well according to the discipline. The congregation, however, may not enjoy the conditions of class which the discipline requires. Will the minister enforce a wholesale removal of the protesters from the church as Wesley did, dusting his hands and and comforting himself, as Wesley did, by writing in his journal, "The half is better than the whole"?

The congregation resists. They warn the preacher that he is making too many enemies. They tell him that the influential members are talking of leaving the church. If he is less than perfect, he may be tempted to ease off on the pressure to follow the discipline. If he is young and callow, he may frighten easily at the visions of a record of troubles in his churches and its effect on promotions later. He may settle for the good, quiet life.

Too, if he is not spiritually filled himself, he may fear it in others of his congregation who are not seminary graduates. He may therefore resist the spiritual urgings of members, not being willing to get honest and admit his own need to push deeper himself. To deny all these possibilities would be to make both preacher and parishoner less than human. With Wesley's steady fearless hand at the tiller of Methodism, the rocks and shoals of ministerial and lay carnality were essentially avoided. It took many years after his death

but the forces of liberalized standards had their way.

One of the first concessions made was the ruling mentioned in Chapter XV (see pages 310-311 supra) regarding trial membership in the 1836 conference. The the ruling of the 1840 conference in opening the restriction on entrants even more.¹ The rulings did not remove the requirement of continued attendance for continued membership, but they did effectively rule out trial membership for many new Christians. In addition many were not using the class and in many places it was not being enforced. In still more places it was not being run on the strong personal basis that it was originally intended to have. All of this was simply a deterioration of standards.

Many things developed in a rather unofficial manner. For example, the custom of receiving persons on trial was waived unofficially long before it became official practice.² Apparently it was with an attitude of something like, "Well, he was saved in our meetings. He seems to have really gotten through. Let's be good fellows and let him in. After all, nobody's perfect and we don't want to lose any more potential members than we have to." Rosser said that a characteristic of the age was an unwillingness to discharge the official duties of the church which were demanded by the discipline.³ This attitude took its toll. Hyde in 1889 noted that in American Methodism the class meeting attendance was never counted much

¹Robert Emory, The History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), pp. 197-199.

²Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 164. ³Ibid., p. 31.

as a criterion of exclusion.⁴ This attitude had impetus when in 1836 the discipline was changed to allow those excluded for non-attendance of class to be given a letter which stated that they were not excluded for moral reasons but for not keeping the discipline.⁵

Another change in the standard which was never made official, but which was grossly violated toward the end of the life of the meetings, was that of size. The discipline called for twelve, including the leader. Even in Wesley's day twenty or thirty often was the membership. As has been seen in Chapter XIV (see pages 297 to 300 supra) this was a critical feature in the success of the classes. Individual attitudes might be handled and alleviated in time. Eventually in small classes some kind of emotional fireworks would work to drastically change this factor. However, with enlargement the interplay emotionally would decrease. The leader would be tempted, as he often was, to call upon his most willing speakers, who often were dull and trite in their testimonies. Geller makes it clear in the pages cited from Chapter XIV that interpersonal activity can only be utilized and even achieved in smaller groups. Yet classes in the last century went sometimes as high as eighty in membership. Continued lack of rewarding experience would discourage anyone. And so it was that many grew bored. One writer noted that twenty to fifty was a common class membership and classes in the seventies were not uncommon.⁶ What could be expected under

⁴A. B. Hyde, The Story of Methodism (Chicago: John's Publishing House, 1889), p. 665.

⁵Emory, loc. cit.

⁶Simpson, Cyclopedia of Methodism, pp. 207-208.

the circumstances? A correspondent to a Methodist periodical noted that the class meetings had to be enlarged, despite Coke's and Asbury's declaration some fifty years before of twelve as the desirable number.⁷ One author saw the handwriting on the wall in 1841, however. He lamented over the large sized classes saying that the practice of enlarging them was ruining the class meetings.⁸

Why this would ruin the class meetings is not hard to see in the light of modern therapy group holdings. As will be remembered from the chapter on the psychological values of the class meeting, the ideal size of an ordinary therapy group ranges from twelve down to eight. Larger groups than this have been shown to limit the amount of interchange that can occur. Also, this helps the individual member remain anonymous for longer periods of time. In the larger class meeting groups the leader obviously could not question everyone in an hour. It might be weeks before a person could be touched by the leader and by that time the individual could usually think up some cover for his unsatisfactory life. In the meanwhile the chronic confessors would likely take up large portions of the time and both entertain and relieve those who should have, but would not speak out.

Moreover, this kind of class meeting did not give much experience because of this anonymity and thus it would be hard to get class leaders out of it, other than carnal fellows whose ambition was to lead classes because of ego needs within themselves. In not producing leaders larger classes were required by Methodism. However this, in turn failed to pro-

⁷Letter to the editor, Nashville Christian Advocate, XII (May 12, 1843), p. 1

⁸John T. McNeill, A History of the Cure of Souls (New York: Harper Bros., 1951), p. 283

duce leaders still more. Eventually there came to be an equilibrium where the classes could not get larger and there were just not enough leaders to go around. Some were then left out effectually (probably to their satisfaction). Ultimately the rational thing to do was just to leave optional to the "whosoever will's." The eventually was the rule, beginning with the southern Methodists in 1866.

Finally liberalization of other aspects of Methodist life found out the classes as well. Worldliness crept in slowly but surely until at the end it was a factor in the defeat of the class. Fitzgerald, writing in 1880, recounted the initial impact of the world and its subtleties on the class meeting. "The doctrinal standard lowered, and the practice of the Church sunk with it. A cloud of witnesses, living and dead, testify to this fact. When the theater, the ball, and the card-table came, the class-meeting went out."⁹

Davies likewise, writing at a later time, put it even more clearly because by his trend in Methodism had focussed itself very well.

With success and wealth went a certain loosening of doctrinal and disciplinary rigidity. Gradually there came over the theological scene in Methodism--as indeed in all the middle-class churches of the country--a haze of liberalism, not unmingled with sentimentality, and precision of dogmatic statement came to be regarded as something of a breach of taste. At the same time the class meeting slipped into obscurity, and the purely social activities of each congregation increased.¹⁰

As Wearmouth succinctly puts it, "By the end of the century the [Methodist] tide was losing its momentum."¹¹ Emerick correctly questions whether

⁹O. P. Fitzgerald, The Class-Meeting (Nashville, Tennessee: M. E. Church, South, 1880), p. 47.

¹⁰Rupert E. Davies, Methodism, (London: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 165.

¹¹Robert F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes: 1800-1850 (Leicester, England: Edgar Backus, 1954), p. 135.

Methodism could have had its enormous gains if it had not lost its rigid discipline regarding doctrine and the class meeting. However, the real question is: was it worth the loss that Methodism sustained in the long run? Did it trade its purity for size? Did it give its soul for wealth?

CHAPTER XVIII

DETERIORATING FUNCTIONAL PRACTICE IN THE CLASS

When the standards began to erode, the practice of the group meetings also came in for variance. Less rational, less understanding "experts" in the class meeting began to add their own innovations. Unknown to them or to their class members (for the innovators were usually class leaders) these innovations took the form of a retreat from the directness of the classical meeting form. That is why the old leader could remark on the lack of directness by the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Too many times individuals in the classes looked at their problems as a confrontation with God and not so much as a confrontation with each other. They thought that they could keep the directness toward the Lord and yet make the classes less public in terms of confession of personal "secrets" and problems. Thus they began to shut doors on each other within the classes without realizing clearly that they were shutting doors on God as well.

They must be forgiven because the church had not yet learned its lesson in this regard. Today some concern is being manifested for interpersonal relations in the church, but now the emphasis is upon these as the way to experience God. This neither is the case nor does it answer the need of the membership. Mere adjustment of interpersonal relations is insufficient. It takes a personal contact with God in a direct fashion for the greatest, most lasting good to be accomplished.

When they wanted to depart from interpersonal conflict and concourse

in the meetings, one of the things which they did, albeit unconsciously, was to turn the meetings into stereotypes of each other. A number of things got stereotyped in Methodism and the class meeting. The questions were asked of the class member in stereotyped fashion after a while. "How does your soul prosper?" is not the best approach after one hundred years of class meeting. Davies says that the reaction of evangelicalism to the Oxford Movement of the early nineteenth century, Methodism included, was to de-emphasize the sacraments and move more toward the preaching service. In Methodism the class meeting suffered in this as well. Anyway it is reported as having become by this time "formalized and a little artificial."¹

Fitzgerald says that the class meeting did not, or was not able to, change with the times and thus it became hackneyed.² This is not quite the case. The class meeting changed all too much. The difficulty was that in its change it moved away from the deepest need of the people it served. Some writers felt that to abandon the class meeting as a requirement for membership would be to let that membership fall into "lifeless formality."³ What they did not realize was that the class itself had fallen largely into that very thing.

As has been suggested above the formality, of the questioning became a stereotype which came to have a stereotyped reply. Miley said that it was possible for a leader to use the "modern, formal mode" of questioning

¹Davies, Methodism, pp. 156-157.

²Fitzgerald, The Class Meeting, p. 49.

³Miley, Treatise, p. 20.

to go for months without knowing "whether the members are really in the enjoyment of religion or not, whether or not they are faithful in performing the duties of religion."⁴ His plea was for more conversational language. He felt that this would more certainly bring up and keep up the subject of religion and the needs of the individual member. One thing is certain and that is that conversational language puts others at ease and more able to speak in terms of their true feelings. The class meeting lost this in the latter days.

One leader managed with one change to use up the hour of the class with a few favorites. He would read text for the following week at the end of a meeting. Sometimes including a line of texts associated with it. Following would come the topic for discussion. He said about this method,

The plan I found to work the greatest advantage is to have a free talk . . . With two or three persons of considerable experience there is no difficulty in occupying an hour [note the insecurity about time passage] in illustrating and enforcing a text from practical experience. . . . In a class of fifty, as my present one often contains, all do not have opportunity to converse, yet all acknowledge themselves profited. Frequently unconverted persons are present, and several quite regular attendants.⁵

It may be that the two or three advanced persons got some benefit, though if were the same two or three each time, it would benefit mostly their ego needs. However, those who most need to speak, the unconverted and the spiritually stagnant, would get no chance at all, nor would they be likely to ask for it.

Another ploy in the meeting would be to talk of things which were rela-

⁴Ibid., pp. 208-209.

⁵Atkinson, The Class Leader, p. 228.

tively inconsequential. Atkinson pleads for such things to be kept out of the class meeting "service." However, judging from the list of items suggested for discussion by Goodell it would seem that the latter day of the class meeting saw this as hard to do.

The most obvious way to render the class meeting null and void in terms of interpersonal work would be to conduct it in such a way as to render such activity minimal; that is, keeping the membership from participating on a free basis. In this category of methods is included the lecture method. There were many complaints toward the end about long-winded leaders who took up most of the time exhorting the brethren to move forward. In Goodell's day a recommended procedure of this kind (though not for the purpose above) was the Bible lecture. Here an accomplished person, the preacher or a layman would lead a group in Bible study. Sometimes the young people themselves even brought papers on certain subjects to read.⁶ History showed this to be short-lived in the Religious Societies. Atkinson notes that one leader tried this to no avail.⁷ Apparently it depended upon the leader and several factors unique to him.

One correspondent to a periodical tried to turn his class into a kind of tract society. "Believing the thought a good one, I resolved to test its practicability, and accordingly applied to the depository for a supply to carry with me." He reported his success in terms of potential: if all meetings, averaging fifteen members each, with a total of 4000 class meetings did

⁶Goodell, The Drillmaster, p. 74.

⁷Atkinson, op. cit., p. 92.

this, there would be a tremendous gain in tract distribution. This number of class meetings is the estimate for 1828 in America.⁸

Another pastor ran a class for young people as a literary group. The meetings opened with eight to ten short prayers. One young person read for five minutes or so on a religious or moral topic and another read the same length of time on his or her religious experiences. The number attending was forty on the average. Atkinson verbally wags his head, failing to understand why any came at all.⁹ The secret here was probably the mixture of the sexes. This last feature seems to have been much more common toward the end of the use of the class meeting. It is a kind of testimony to their tameness. The modern group therapists universally insist they like groups mixed by sex because it "deepens the therapy." That there were no runaway groups here seems to indicate that there was no energy freed for use in running away. Another question is how long this group successfully met.

Another said that he found that a class for young men does not work as well as a "club." This of course means a band of young men, not a heavy stick. At the club meetings such things might be discussed as the need in business life for honesty and truthfulness, Christian methods of advertising, can a businessman read a paper on Sunday, and other interesting topics. This pastor noted, too, that in his day modern prayer meeting methods were replacing the old classes, which somehow had lost their drawing power for the young.¹⁰

⁸Letter to the editor, [Boston] Zion's Herald, VI (Feb. 6, 1823), 1.

⁹Atkinson, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

¹⁰Goodell, op. cit., pp. 129-130.

With topics such as those described, any needful, perhaps disturbed, young man would be very safe from exposure and healing.

Goodell likewise points to the relative success of the then recent Epworth League movement. Some editorials of the day had suggested that this had taken some of the attraction of the classes, even some of its functions. Goodell insists this is not so.¹¹ It remains to be seen, however, whether or not this theft of attractive power did occur. Certainly its less threatening atmosphere would have drawing power for it. Further, the classes were probably pretty boring because of stereotype by this time in many places. The Epworth group was more social, more activity-oriented, which would likewise have appeal.

Goodell offers further interaction-killing approaches to the class meeting sessions. Members sending their testimony by mail when they could not attend was one of these. A social service with refreshments in private homes was another one. This idea looks forward to the ultimate in Hogan's year round schedule of class meeting party ideas in 1959.¹² This idea does not stack well with the class meeting "fathers" who felt that members should come and then depart quietly, meditating on what they have experienced. Goodell continues. There might be a question box night, a missionary night, this latter having reports from the field. The mission field is far enough away from the group to be safe. This calls to mind this author's experience while leading a student class-like group last year. At one point the writer

¹¹Ibid., p. 121.

¹²Bernice Hogan, More from Your Class Meetings (Nashville: Abingdon, 1959), pp. 1-108.

showed the group that it was near a crisis of interpersonal confrontation. The group became silent for a moment. Then someone began to ask if the group had read about the astronaut who had been in orbit a few days before. The unconscious power of the mind to draw one's attention away from the here and now is amazing indeed!

Other suggestions are a temperance night, a good citizens' night, a city evangelism night, charities and hospital (what are we doing for the poor) night, schools and colleges night, benevolence night, a night with the great hymns, and a night with the founders of Methodism.¹³ The latter course is most proper of all for this kind of class meeting because the founders of Methodism were all dead, too. Every one of the subjects or topics for discussion above display just how strongly in the mind of Goodell was the sociologically secondary nature of the class meeting group. For him it was a secondary, group a group with an external goal, just as a man with a fistful of tracts wished to escape the interpersonal pain of the 1828 classes by turning the classes into tract societies, so Goodell would have them as some kind of religious civic action group, which would upon the attainment of its external goal sit back, eat its cookies, drink its lemonade, and sigh satisfiedly (and safely).

Numbers of the deviations from the regular, prescribed functioning of the class meeting were suggested, adopted, discarded quietly, and pitied by the later leaders of class meetings. Where a few personalities were able to hold things together a little longer, credit was given in all humility to their techniques and innovations rather than to their personalities. For

¹³Goodell, op. cit., pp. 74-76.

the most part though from the singing which might be done inappropriately to the testimonies which in stereotype were too often tales of the devil's buffeting and not enough stories of having walked with God, the standard, formal, facade function came to be the rule. The leader seemed to say too often to the member, "Let us support each other's false images and we'll both overlook the way we reek with problems. That way there will be no pain." The member took him on the proposition on the average after a while. It did not work, though, for the class meeting died.¹⁵

¹⁵James Ellis, Ventures in Fellowship (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 39.

CHAPTER XIX

DETERIORATING CLASS LEADERSHIP

Rosser points out that the Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church for 1854 gave as the first duty of the class leader to "inquire particularly into the inward state of each member in his class 'to inquire how their souls prosper.'"¹ The classleaders, for whatever may have been the reasons failed in time to keep on doing this. As long as they did, Methodism prospered. But they began to fail and Methodism, with the class, suffered for it.

Leadership, like everything else about the classmeeting got a habit and the leader got casehardened. One wise writer said that the work of the class leader was like that of a farmer, which did not so much consist of the amount done, but rather it consisted of the manner in which it was done.²

Atkinson told of a society which in the winter of 1842-1843 admitted a large number on probation, but were afterward dropped for not meeting in class. These never received a visit from either leader or preacher.³

More often the leader's mode of conducting the class was the weak element in his ministry. Goodell noted that it was the custom to change the minister every five years or so, yet the class leaders often held their classes as long as twenty-five years. These were businessmen often without time to prepare properly.⁴ Fitzgerald said much of the failure of the class

¹Rosser, Class Meetings, p. 258.

²Letter to the editor, The Nashville Christian Advocate, XI (July 30, 1847), p. 1.

³Atkinson, The Class Leader, p. 293. ⁴Goodell, Drillmaster, pp. 17-18.

was due to the leader failing to keep the standards of his position

In many places it was not the class meeting, but the class leader, who broke down. He broke down because he became a fossil when a living, growing man was needed. a chilling frost of carnal-mindedness stunted the growth of this tree of God's own planting, and the short-comings of the keepers of the vineyard enhanced the damage.⁵

Noting that the church had ceased to train old-fashioned class leaders, Goodell longed for the caliber of person who could lead an oldtime class. He, too, remembered the dull ones.

I distinctly remember that some leaders were dull and profitless in their remarks; that some members arose, turned their faces to the wall, and repeated, in a dismal, sanctimonious tone--very different from that used in town meeting or in trading horses--a pious lot of platitudes which meant nothing to them or to us. "here was the sister who was "but an unprofitable servant," "living at a poor, dying rate," and "meant by the grace of God, to continue;" the bluff, full-faced farmer who talked like a consumptive about the "waste, howling wilderness of this unfriendly world;" and Simon Go-Softly, who spoke of his poverty as the dispensation of the Lord to purify him," and that he would patiently bear his Lord's will--the lazy lout! I remember these, and many others like them, whose pet phrases I had heard so often that I could give their testimony verbatim before the meeting began.⁶

Barnlund and Haiman suggest, in their discussion of sociological small group work, a possible psychological trick which a leader might play on his group. They say that a leader might be ratherless interested in the group's goal than in the enhancement of his own prestige. They say further that, if a group senses this, they should bring it up.⁷ Apparently the classes never or seldom were able to effectively do this.

⁵Fitzgerald, The Class Meetings, p. 51.

⁶Goodell, Drillmaster, pp. 139-140.

⁷Dean C. Barnlund and Franklin S. Haiman, The Dynamics of Discussion (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1960), p. 206.

Hall succinctly enumerates the sins of the class leaders over the years without meaning to do so. He lists the following under the heading, "How to Wreck a Group."

1. Never prepare in advance. Speak spontaneously--it keeps things on a superficial level.
2. Always take your responsibilities lightly. This reduces your anxiety and increases the frustration of the others.
3. Never try to understand the purposes of the group--this guarantees that you'll accomplish nothing.
4. Always do the lion's share of the talking. None of the others have good ideas anyway.
5. Never give credit, hog it all for yourself. The rest just love a braggart.
6. Always speak of your years of experience. This compensates for your lack of ability.
7. Never tell anyone how you do it else you may lose prestige and position.
8. Always encourage the formation of cliques. The group can't last long when they begin to fight amongst themselves.⁸

While the leaders were not entirely to blame, they did play their part. However, the preacher who appointed the bad ones simply because they had wealth or wanted position, or because they were willing, or were older, or any of the other invalid reasons were to blame as well. Those who avoided the rules knowingly to avoid an exposure of themselves were to blame. In the end almost all were to blame, because the abandonment was a delicate intercooperation between clerics, leaders, and members.

⁸D. M. Hall, Dynamics of Group Action (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printer and Publisher, 1957), p. 228.

CHAPTER XX

DETERIORATING SOCIAL ATTITUDES

All the foregoing is certainly prominent in the influences which saw to the destruction of the class meeting. However, there is a larger, more general factor which might be accused of giving rise to them all. It is not peculiar to Methodism alone. It was and is a characteristic of our society during much of the life of Methodism.

This characteristic is one uncovered by William Warren Sweet.

The Churches which have the largest membership today are those bodies which in the past have profited most from revivalism, a type of religion that is dominantly personal. Revivalism tends to disappear when the impersonal becomes dominant over the personal. Charles Sumner once remarked to Julia Ward Howe, the author of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," that he no longer was interested in individuals, but only in causes. To that Julia Ward Howe replied, "God Almighty has not gone that far yet." It would seem that in a democracy the personal emphasis in religion would naturally find its largest development. And so it has been, and it would seem that it should remain so. The emphasis in our American democracy upon the freedom of conscience gives personal religion its opportunity, and the great evangelical Churches are living witnesses to what extent that opportunity, has been appropriated. One of the principal reasons why revivalism is on the wane among all the larger evangelical Churches is because of strong impersonalizing trends that have been in process for more than a generation.

In the last fifty years the great American Churches and their leaders, like Charles Sumner, have grown less and less interested in individuals and more and more concerned with the advancement of causes.¹

This factor it is, running like a great undercurrent, not strongly at first, but ever gaining strength, has been pulling at society like a giant

¹William Warren Sweet, Revivalism in America, Its Origin, Growth, and Influence (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1944), pp. 177-178.

vacuum. It has pulled men from each other and persuaded them to hide from one another in emotional boxes. On these boxes have been painted images, ideal ones, and life is spent in each man trying to convince the others (and himself) that the painted images are real. We seem to be playing a game of give and take with ourselves: "I'll believe your image, if you believe mine." Society has become a tangled network of arm's length dynamic patterns in which none get to know others but pretend they do. The trend today to de-emphasize difference and exalt universals among men. Some have broken away from this pattern and attempted to live for themselves and moment, only to find themselves not very worth living for and the moments not particularly happy or peaceful. Others have tried to break out of the cultural mold by therapy groups with some measure of success. Even here, however, one may not be particularly religious. In fact it seems better if he be non-religious or at best a member of a formality cult which has no relevance to life.

The class meeting failed not because men did not carry out its original design. It suffered demise because men lost the desire to attain its original goals. The goal of the class meeting was an individual man, a heart-unified member of a group, born again with all believers, and yet unique in the sight of God. Somewhere along the line the church decided that it did not want this any longer. It was attracted by the idea of the sheep and the sheepfold. Sheep are not very involved with each other. Neither did the Church any longer really wish to be. To stand before one's peers and speak candidly about his spiritual and psychological blemishes, his false ideals, as well as his aspirations and hidden feelings in general is more than most

can bear today.

The class meeting failed then simply because men were withdrawing from intimacy with one another. The great Pentecostal forces of the Wesleyan revival pushed them together more than they ever had been for 1700 years. The trials of the nineteenth century, in American border life and English labor reform, held the members together for a time, but when Society thickened once more, the distance and suspicion set in. Today we, more than ever, have secrets from each other. Men can stand by while genocide is practiced and contemplated and still choose not to get involved. It is small wonder, really, that in society such as this, the class meeting folded its tent and crept away into the descending shades of interpersonal night.

The Church prides itself on its rationality today. And yet, if a suggestion of individual emotional expression appears in her halls, she goes into a kind of nervously insecure state. The charge of "emotionalism," as the last thing desirable to the church is hurled frequently and hard as the closest thing to a curse which the church can utter. That is why Sweet says,

Emotion has been so completely squeezed out of the present day Protestant worship that the people are becoming emotionally starved. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why moving pictures are so popular; there, one can be as emotional as one pleases, for it is dark and tears are not noticed.²

It is hardly surprising that the Putneys picture the average American as using others to prove his image of himself to be true. Every other person has become to such people a mirror whereby they hope to prove to themselves that they are what they would like to believe they are.³ Suddenly we are

²Ibid., p. 181.

³Putney and Putney, The Adjusted American, pp. 63-74.

aware that it is unpopular to be small, ignorant, dependent, sinful, and lost. So we try to get others to accept us as great, intelligent, independent, and saved. The price for that acceptance is the reciprocation of it for similar others. However, we continue to fail prove ourselves to ourselves. Others may vote for us, but somehow we always cast the deciding vote against ourselves.

Among the last islands of individualism are therapy groups such as they are. One cannot approach denominations today in modern Protestantism without seeing them as borne down with inhibiting stereotypy which originally was created in the name of individuality. Even in the more emotional sects one is not considered to have achieved unless he has exactly fitted to his or that experience pattern and even had the same feeling as the rest. The ticket for acceptance is a stereotyped testimony which, sounding exactly like those of others in the sect, warrants the admittance of another initiate.

Maybe this picture is too sharply focussed. It is true that Wesley was a disciplinarian and insisted that men have a certain basic experience. Too, he insisted that men submit themselves to a certain discipline which included the class meeting. However, this was a tried affair which resulted in men who were able to stand alone, ideally. It was Methodist missionaries and circuit riders who had the courage to brave the dangers of the world to carry the gospel to points unheard of. It was Methodism which produced men who were able to stand without swaying toward violence or slavery on the question of the laboring classes of England. Wesley, whether by inspiration or by keen insight, saw this. The class's greatest testimony to its validity and usefulness in the church was that worldly men arose and overthrew it.

SECTION V

THE DENOUEMENT OF THE CLASS MEETING

CHAPTER XXI

SOME MODERN NEC-CLASS MEETINGS

Did the class meeting really die? Or did its form merely submerge itself to await rejuvenation in changed form? The irony of the appearance of the first therapy simultaneously with the last of the class meeting groups has been mentioned. It is still more ironic that these first therapy groups were called classes.

However, in the last few years groups have sprung up here and there in the church. These have the appearance of fellowships of seekers after the deeper life. One of these is called "Growth by Groups." Discovered accidentally in a church youth organization, this system of group work utilizes a discipline of Bible study, serious attempts to apply the Bible in private study to oneself, and then a community of effort in this respect periodically as the group shares the result of its study. The groups usually run about ten weeks and are renewable. Emphasis on prayer and sharing is the character of the group meetings. No deep therapy, no extremely personal probing by a leader is done. Leadership of the group is administrative and it rotates each week normally. The size of the groups is recommended to be six with an upper limit of ten. Meeting places can be homes or churches or anyplace else convenient.¹

¹Lyman Coleman, Prologue to Growth by Groups (Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania: Christian Outreach, Inc., 1965), pp. 3-12.

Another method called "Prayer Therapy" was initiated as the result of some studies made beginning in 1951. In this study three groups of fifteen patients each were given the following "treatment": Group I received just psychotherapy (individual, presumably) ; Group II were instructed to pray each night before bed without any instruction as to how to pray; and Group III were given psychotherapy and additionally were instructed to pray with specific instructions given for the performance of the prayer time. In the first two groups no significant improvement was noted, but in the third there was a seventy-two percent improvement.²

This prayer therapy method is now used in homes, YMCA groups, and the like along the lines of that used with the successful Group III. The success of this system has not been enumerated by Knowles. This method has been adopted by some Yokefellow groups which are a part of a movement founded by Elton Trueblood. The west coast strength for this movement came from a group of ministers who joined themselves to it in 1957. This group makes use of a kind of spiritual personality test, based on tests like the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the California Test of Personality. Slips are provided which are filled out by the membership periodically, revealing the degree of spiritual growth.

Knowles holds this dangerous in that it may produce a "power of positive thinking" kind of emotional healing program (which Knowles seems to feel to be unworthwhile) and the membership may fail to get the emotional insight it needs to effectively deal with the interpersonal problems of each person

²Joseph W. Knowles, Group Counseling (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), pp. 60-63.

in the group.³

A further group operation suggested by Robert Raines consists of Bible study, deep sharing of faith and life, prayer, and holy communion. Bible study is held essential to this kind of group for the following reasons, according to Raines: (1) history record revival only after re-appropriation of the Bible message, (2) the Bible is a center outside of the self which hinders self-centeredness and morbid sentimentality, and (3) the Bible is better as a basis for study than the use of prayer because often many beginners in the groups do not know how to pray. These groups Raines terms "Koinonia" after the New Testament word for "redemptive fellowship" in the early church.⁴ Clinebell feels that these are safer than the prayer therapy kind of groups because they take on a less psychotherapeutic aspect.⁵ This lessening of therapy he considers good in the hands of laymen.

The danger of such groups, according to Clinebell, lies in the unconscious activity which is not visible to untrained "therapist." Such activity might include either or both of the following: (1) intimate sharing of feelings over extended periods produces strong bonds among group members which sometimes lead to sexual pairing." (Sexual pairing can be avoided, or limited to the less likely homosexual relationships, by sexual segregation of the groups.) (2) "Powerful transference reactions" may occur during which there may be hostile "acting out." "Acting out"

³ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴ Howard J. Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), p. 260.

⁵ Robert Raines, New Life for the Church (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961), pp. 65 and 80-85.

is the acting out in somewhat symbolic form transference feelings which an individual may experience during the therapy session.⁶ It might, for example, involve one member heaping hostility felt toward a parent upon the leader of the group or upon another member of the group who is trying to be a leader. It would take some training to be aware of the possibility of such feelings, and to be able to sit under exposure to them. However, this is not an impossible task, even for a knowing layman. Clinebell makes a point of insisting that only skilled (trained) leadership can reduce the risks in therapy. However, he goes on to say that any group situation in the church and all counseling situations in the church entail some risk. If there is no risk, he says, there is no therapy.

It would seem that Wesleyans simply took more risks and insisted in the ideal case upon a better than average trained leader. Leadership training counted heavily in the minds of those who were concerned enough to write about the class. The attributes of a leader, especially his fatherly "wisdom" amounted to little more than the ability to recognize acting out and put up with it to some degree for the sake of catharsis. No group will indefinitely put up with acting out behavior from a member but will confront him with it eventually. That is the value of the groups. Even more recent individual therapy leans in this direction. Mowrer has made a strong case for confrontation of the sinner with his sinfulness. Clinbell says that the counselee is entitled to a confrontation of himself

⁶Ibid., p. 212.

with his shortcomings.

The counselor who is always accepting and permissive, and never acceptingly confronting, is unwittingly guilty of "cruel kindness." A counselee's awareness of his guilt and alienation is his doorway to help. An omnipermissive counselor's behavior is something like the cruel kindness of an alcoholic's spouse who prevents him from becoming open to help (i.e., "hitting bottom") by over protecting him. People do not change until they experience pain in their present adjustment. Confrontation exposes them to the pain which is resulting from their irresponsible behavior. . . .

Acceptance is the key to effective confrontation. A person will be more apt to experience self-confrontation (the most effective kind) if he knows that the truth is spoken in love . . . Honest confrontation within the context of acceptance will usually strengthen a relationship, not weaken it.⁷

This is what the Wesleyan groups did. It was no shame for a member to finally admit he was a sinner after some time in the class. It was, however, to go on insisting he was not in the face of evidence contrariwise. The same was true for the need of sanctification. The class was to put up with the needy for a season and then he was to be given an ultimatum regarding the matter of change of his life. Wesley's exclusions of smugglers is a good case in point. He did not long put up with those who refused to see smuggling as sin. He made them to know it was sin and pinned the label on whom it applied.

The member who was not willing to speak of his "experience" was questioned and prayed for. He was required to speak some of his inner feelings. These feelings were not the experiences of hearing last Sunday's sermon or of spending an hour or so in prayer and Bible study. They were to be those

⁷Clinebell, Basic Types, pp. 226-227.

resulting from having met God in His majesty, in His love, in His joy, and such things. The love the member felt for Christ was to be expressed in the class and projected upon all, including the leader. The Wesleyan leader was (when at his best) an experienced therapist in that he knew what acting out was, what resistance to the group was, what deep personal needs were. He also knew how to deal with them. This is the only reason for the history of healing behind the class meeting. Supper socials, standard prayer meetings, revival meetings, and preaching sessions seldom produce the real good accomplished in tight, honest little groups like the Wesleyan classes and therapy groups.

Other groups have sprung up in the church in the last decade. Small prayer groups have appeared at times, usually in association with a small-scale, temporary revival. Many are like mushrooms, though, for they spring up in the darkness and then, with the coming of light in revival, they often die. A friend found such a group springing up in the wake of revival in his small church recently. It just fell apart and died after a few weeks of enthusiasm and power. He did not know what to think about it. He did not know why it failed. The chances are that, with a little training in what to expect, the group could have been made to last a bit longer, at least. These groups merely are an expression of the hunger which lives in the human breast for Christian, intimate Christian, fellowship. As long as there is a group of born again believers on the earth, there will likely be little groups springing up at times trying to fill this hunger. They will not be successful in spreading or living unless they take on some of the purpose and compulsion of the old class meetings.

CHAPTER XXII

AN EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AT TOCCOA FALLS INSTITUTE

In connection with a course in counseling class at Toccoa Falls Institute this past year some experimental group work was attempted with some interesting results.

The method of the groups was generally to have evening group sessions. There was one for about ten girls and one for eight boys, all of college junior and senior ages. The groups met once weekly for an hour and a half for about six weeks. Then each group had a single session lasting twelve hours on a Saturday afternoon. After this three more weekly evening sessions were convened. The groups were for all taking the class in counseling. The boys and girls were all students, evangelical in attitude, professing a new birth experience. One member of the group was aged thirty and two men and one of the girls were married.

The evening sessions consisted of the members of the group sitting in a circle on straight chairs and speaking about any subject they chose to. The single rule was "no long personal histories." The leader, who was this writer, merely sat observing in the circle, not answering questions, but making observations in somewhat cryptic fashion regarding the group dynamics.

The results were beneficial for most. There was much interaction between several strong personalities among the girls with several displays of pretty frank hostility in the first six sessions. The boys' early sessions were dominated by essentially one individual who worked hard to keep his "agenda" before the group. The twelve hour sessions were not

attended by all and were not required. Five girls participated in theirs (with all the strong personalities absent) and five of the boys came to theirs with the single strong man coming in this case. The two sessions had a surprisingly similar pattern of dynamics. The first four hours in each were consumed with talk concerning first fear, then death, and finally a confused disintegration into cliques which talked at the same time. Then after about three and one-half hours, almost to the minute, each of the groups fell silent and sat for five or ten minutes with lips pursed tensely. After a supper break in each case the leader injected an identification of the leaders of the afternoon's work into the group thought. Immediately each group began strong questioning of the leaders as to motive and giving of the group's opinion as to why the leaders acted as they had. Each case saw the leader break down in tears under this treatment. In each case the groups seemed to feel the hurt being caused and tried to communicate acceptance without abdication of its former hostile stand. In both groups one by one each member (except for two boys, for whom there was not time) came under this same kind of scrutiny, criticism and extension of acceptance from the groups. Each was shown in a negative light according to what the group considered his personality blemishes. As it came each member's turn less emotional response was elicited from the "victim." This seemed to be due in part to the expressions of vast relief which came from those who had gone through the process. The next day the members all said they felt like new persons. Their outlooks toward others on the campus seemed changed to a warmer, more accepting attitude. In the subsequent weeknight meetings those

who had been absent were then given the same treatment by the "veterans" who felt that they should be brought into the fellowship. The boys were able to accomplish this to a considerable degree. The girls ran into difficulty when several of the absentee girls refused to accept the group's offer of it's love. One in particular made no secret of her unbelief as to the genuineness of the experiences in the twelve-hour meeting. Another refused to accept the love of the others as it was offered claiming that she felt they all loved her all along and that this demonstration (which came with criticism of her attitudes) was not necessary. One girl seemed to have never been attended by the group, due to time limitations. The refusal of the girls to accept the group norms put the veterans into confusion and eventual frustrated inner hostility. By the last meeting after some quandary the "veterans" were able to accept the main resistor's confession that she had a hard time either expressing or accepting affection and that she was just not able to give what they seemed to want from her. She did express her appreciation for what she felt the group was trying to do for her.

This group and the boys showed all concerned some of the factors involved in dealing with group feelings. All felt that what they had experienced in the twelve hour session had been a kind of real Christian fellowship. Some said they had never felt this before and they said they had a new understanding of what the love of God meant because of what they had experienced toward and from each other in those meetings. Interestingly, all confessed (who did confess) that their problem seemed to be related to lack of parental acceptance. Each expressed surprise at the end that their problem seemed so commonly held by others in the group. It seemed to have helped them all feel less isolated.

The idea for this group arose out of the reading of Bach's results from his Marathon sessions. Particularly in the area of lowered group resistance due to emotional fatigue (after about three and one-half hours) and in the quality of honesty during the latter part of the session there seems to be a comparison. Further, the group spirit seems remarkably similar to the attitude of Alexander the morning after her session (see pages 268 and 269 supra). In the early hours of the morning after twelve hours of being together, there was a sense of group peace and mutuality such as this writer has not experienced for some time. Even now, some two months and more after long sessions, the esprit de corps created those nights can be seen among those still on campus.

This approach is very worthy of considerable study by the church. The only thing like it might be the long nights of prayer and the "watch nights" of the early Wesley times. There is a beneficial result. Bach seems to be right and the church, the evangelical church most of all, should take the ball and begin running.

Further work is planned in this connection for next spring. The twelve hour session will be required for all members of the class. This time an assistant, a student from this year's class, will be on hand as an observer. He will take notes on the dynamics of the group correlating them with time. A post session conference with the writer will be used to settle the unconscious motivations of the groups if possible.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAN THE CLASS MEETING BE RESURRECTED? .

This is the real question for the church today. That the class is a potentially beneficial thing has been fairly well shown. That it follows sound psychiatric principles has also been shown. That its loss was something of a disaster for saint production, and therefore the spiritual power of the church, seems clear. That it is needed as never before would likewise seem obvious. The only question is, really, can it be reinstated?

To answer that question it is necessary to review some of the factors which made it so useful. One of these factors was its demand for openness and honesty. This is wholesome to the individual and helps him to keep himself in full view. If he is continually seen, then knowing what he really is, he can make proper alignment with what he really should be.

Another value is the intimacy of fellowship required. One cannot hold back and be a law unto himself in the class meeting. It is ironic that in the age of independence men in the class meeting openly acknowledged their dependence upon each other and upon God. By contrast in our day of widespread dependence of all kinds, men deny that they need anyone. It would seem that Methodists were freer when they admitted their lack of freedom.

Still another useful factor is the ideal of the class meeting: Wesleyan sanctification. This was a high standard. It gave men something to strive for. This was a whole doctrine tending to produce whole men. There was the impulse to forge ahead, not only from the point of initial sanctification at the new birth, but also, on beyond the so-called "second work of grace," or entire sanctification, into the area where growth in sanctification

which is the area Jesus prayed for in John 17:17. Whatever stage of this experience a man found himself in, there was still something ahead. Far from discouraging him, the class and the doctrine encouraged a man to go, move upward to gain these higher goals of cleansing, infilling by the Spirit, and submission to God.

Also there was the training which the class gave for eventual full-time Christian work. This was the idea: to build strong Christians who could go on their own and lead other classes and congregations to Christ and the sanctified life. When the class meeting became a haven for the bedraggled, half-defeated of the church who did not wish a change in their state, it ceased to perform its designed function. Just as television was hoped to become a means of opening the minds of many and enlightening people in new ways, and has instead merely put more to sleep in front of it, so the class was used increasingly by those who wanted to escape and feel holy for a while before they went back to lose out to the world some more. Eventually it did not even do this much for them.

Most important of all, however, was the factor of compulsion. Methodism said, "If you will be part of us, you will enter via the class meeting, there undergoing catharsis." This was the stumbling block. The world saw and wanted Methodism's experience of peace and joy, but it did not want to pay the classes' price of pain and sorrow. It managed, after a time, to rule out the class meeting with its pain and sorrow. What those worldly elements failed to realize was that they also had ruled out the very

things they had sought to gain from Methodism, its joy, which came only after its sorrow, and its peace which came only after its pain. The joy it has today is a hesitant one; its peace, a faltering thing. The reason is in part because it does not know what to do with its brother; it cannot take him to its bosom, yet it dares not thrust him away. The requirement of attendance made the class meeting work. Cutting this off was the incision of its spinal cord. Its body was paralyzed.

What is needed more than anything else today is the class meeting in the church, the whole evangelical church. Orthodoxy alone is not working well any longer. Men need a forum, a hall of mirrors, where they can continually, like James' effectual doer, courageously observe themselves in God's perfect law of liberty and see themselves as they are. Orthodoxy alone has not won the world. The teaching of sanctification by itself has not held Methodism to an evangelical line. Today's orthodoxy is a coexistent one whose days are numbered. The history of the church is that coexistence with un-orthodoxy and with the world is intolerable and cannot last. Today's orthodoxy is a kind of lawless grace which is un-Biblical and barely able to stay afloat. While the Bible, especially the New Testament, has many commands for Christians (He himself gave 106, according to one count), the evangelical church seems paralyzed with the fear that it is going to obey one and thereby violate the definition of grace. In many church circles soldiers of Christ are to be found acting more like draftees, unwilling, using every excuse to escape the conflict and yet not be dishonorably discharged.

The Methodist class meeting uniquely enabled man to conquer himself. Its genius for this enablement stands in the light of church history in contrast

to the lack of understanding in so much of the Church's history as to the needs of individual men for the discipline of the Christian life. Monastics tried and failed to regulate themselves for Christ by withdrawing from society. The Reformation Church managed to settle for the time being question of orthodoxy for a time and even hit on small groups for a shorter time for the maintenance of Christian discipline; viz., the family. However, it had come in Wesley's day to depend upon an intellectual acceptance of orthodoxy as interpreted by the Church as the only true way for man. That was failing miserably by his day. The immorality widespread in the early part of Wesley's ministry has been recounted.

It was the Wesley brothers and Whitefield who restored the idea of an instantaneous religious experience for the changing of lives and it was John Wesley who gave this movement its discipline for the those who would keep their lives changed.

Both of the aids which Wesley placed in the hands of the believer put a great deal of responsibility for the believer's life in his own hands. Sanctification as Wesley taught it, and even more greatly, the class put the believer on the spot. If he really wanted fellowship with God and man, he would submit to the class meeting and receive from God the best available and in turn by his own openness toward his fellows give and receive that blessing in constant interchange. Using these tools believers now began to break through into spiritual experiences many thought did not exist in the realm of possibility. Like colts in spring pastures they reveled while a first disbelieving and then envious world looked on. As the believers'

demonstrated the truth of what Wesley was saying the world decided to follow and a whole culture was uplifted.

In the early days of the class people went through the pain and sorrow of the class because they were used to it and it was perhaps easier for them to endure. But as the world grew prosperous in the wake of the Wesleyan revival, it tried to insulate itself from the difficulties which classes raised. It began to repeat history by objectivizing its realities into rituals. The world is good at this. Changing the spiritual into the material for the sake of easy handling is old among men. The Roman church objectivized sin from a spiritual state of life into a series of overt acts which were more easily dealt with by ritual. It objectivized the atonement into a kind of drama which could be turned on and turned off at will. Even Protestantism has objectified some of its truths. Being a Christian seems today to be a matter of knowing the right jargon, holding the right eschatological viewpoint, dispensationalizing away the right passages of scripture rather than trying to obey Christ in the life.

Likewise men objectivized the ideals of the class meeting into a series of ritual questions and answers which grew more and more meaningless as they were more and more frequently used. As long as the outward formalities were taken care of, the inward aspects were not carefully scrutinized. The result was, as with any ritual, men got bored at its lifelessness.

What the Church has difficulty in seeing, however, is that people are hungry for subjective satisfaction in their religion. That is why the literature can report the springing up of so many small group movements. It is not likely that those reported in this paper as recent will ever become very widespread. They are too demanding of the individual member. Without compulsion for attendance they will last only until the members feel the emotional pinch and then the group will sidetrack itself to avoid confrontation. When this nears, the members will lose their original enthusiasm for the group and now will feel vaguely distressed that group "isn't doing just what I hoped it would do for me." This has been this writer's experience with a number of small groups of this kind. We would do well for a few meetings in establishing rapport and group spirit. Then, just when we seemed to be coming to trust one another a little, some dangerous material would begin to come near the surface of group consciousness. The groups always seemed to sense this. We would get restless, dissatisfied, with group progress. Some would come late and then some would become absentees chronically. Finally the groups would just dissolve in disinterest. This seems to have been the testimony of friends who have likewise been involved in groups.

Groups must have the courage to go on through this danger period, through the pain of confrontation with reality, when it occurs, on into the peace of openness and honesty. Therapy groups offer at best only a temporary release, because, while they drain the individual of unconscious negative things, at least in part, they have little positive material to offer. The result for such members is impermanent peace. Where Christian experience is allowed to occur, however, there is something new to go on, a new basis for life. Emotional healing can occur and results can take on a longer lasting aspect.

Returning to the original question now, can the class meeting really be resurrected? The answer seems to be a qualified "no." It could be legislated back into existence by the major Wesleyan denominations by a requirement of attendance for membership. However, this would be difficult to do since so many in Methodism could not handle classes today. There would be no leaders available. Further, and probably decisive, the people would not accept this now. Just as Whitefield found in his later days that his people would not accept the classes once his chapels were established, so it would not be taken back into the societies which threw it out fifty to seventy years ago. A denomination would have to accept the likelihood of being split seriously if the classes were to be required once again.

What then would it take to have the class meeting once more? The answer to this is that it would take, just as it did in Wesley's day, a whole new denomination, oriented toward Wesley's doctrine for maximum influence of the membership toward the deeper life, beginning from scratch with a little society of dedicated believers whose purpose now in the light of history would be to never permit the class on the one hand to swerve from the interpersonal dynamics which it seeks to promote and on the other to never permit stereotyped, ritualistic classes to occur. It would have to have its head on its shoulders, its hand carefully in God's, and its eyes on Christ and not upon worldly acceptance.

Such a denomination would have to have Wesleyan courage to move upon itself at times, to sever some from its membership--even many if need be, and say to itself, "Ah well, the half is better than the whole." It would have to have the fortitude to be rigid in the face of a relaxing world. It

would have to face difficulty, resentment, and slanders on many sides as the Wesleyans first did.

It should expect to experience strong pressure for relaxation as Wesley's groups did. It should expect jealousy from other denominations from which it would draw many. It should not expect, yes, it should not try, to grow too large, as Wesley's groups did not comparatively speaking. It should expect temptation to objectify success into numbers of members. It should expect the temptation to have a denominational pride, a party spirit which would become the rallying point for members instead of the class and Christ. It should expect to always appear mean and lowly in the world's eyes. It should expect to gain its greatest adherents from the poor, not the rich. It should expect to smart under sting of charges of being low in education, intellect, scientific understanding and the like.

It should expect to have to train each new generation of leaders carefully and experience each in class leadership, salvation, sanctification, and continued love in spiritual advance. It should expect revival to follow it all the days of its life. It should expect to warm the lives of many who huddle in this world before its spiritual fire to find heart peace. Most of all it should expect to see God's blessing and the reward of obedience for its members--the crown of life.

Can the class be resurrected? The answer is "yes" if men can be found who will brave the world to begin again, to learn the mistakes of the past, and to determine to glorify God. Would God that another John Wesley might arise in our day to make that beginning! Amen.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

FACSIMILIES OF CLASS MEETING TICKETS

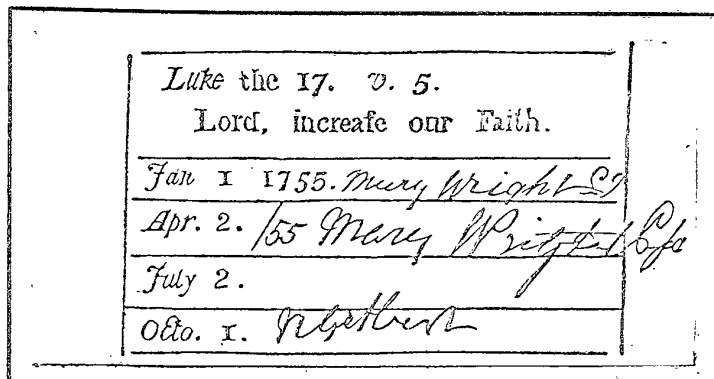


FIGURE 1. A Quarterly Ticket Showing All Quarters of 1755.*

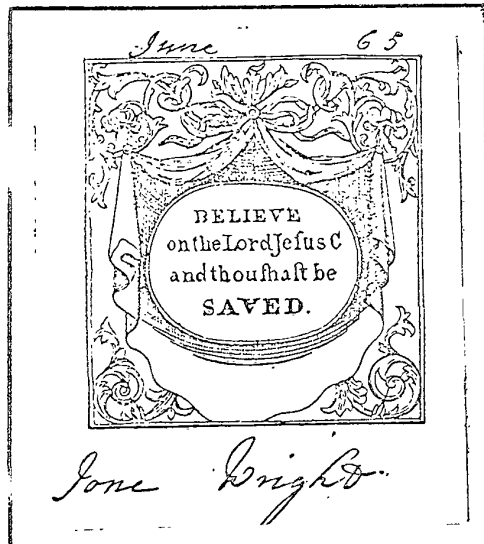


FIGURE 2. A Quarterly Ticket from The Third Quarter of 1765.**

* (Anonymous "Methodist Preacher"), John Wesley The Methodist (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1903), p. 123.

** Ibid., p. 126.

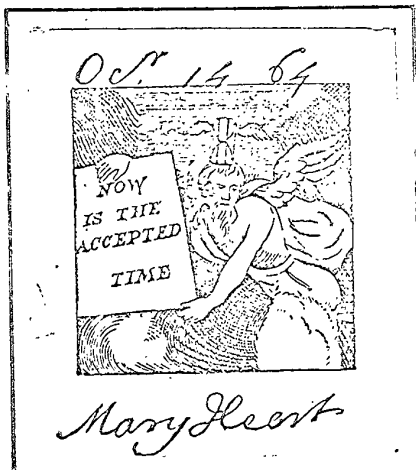


Figure 3. A quarterly ticket from the last quarter of 1764*

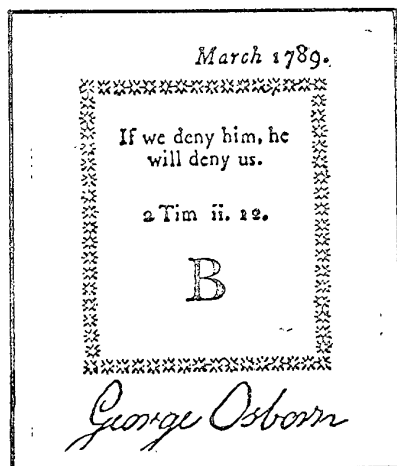


Figure 4. A quarterly ticket from the second quarter of 1789.**

*Ibid, p. 125.

**Ibid., p. 127.

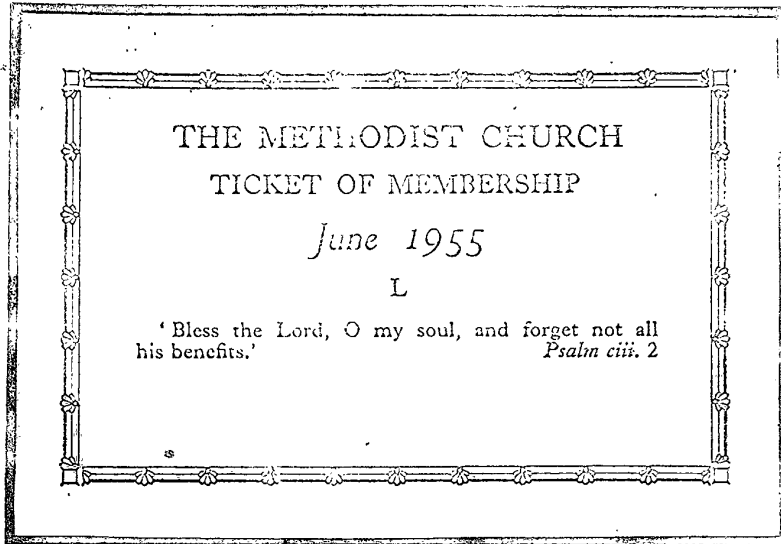


Figure 5. A second quarter ticket for modern British Methodism (adult).

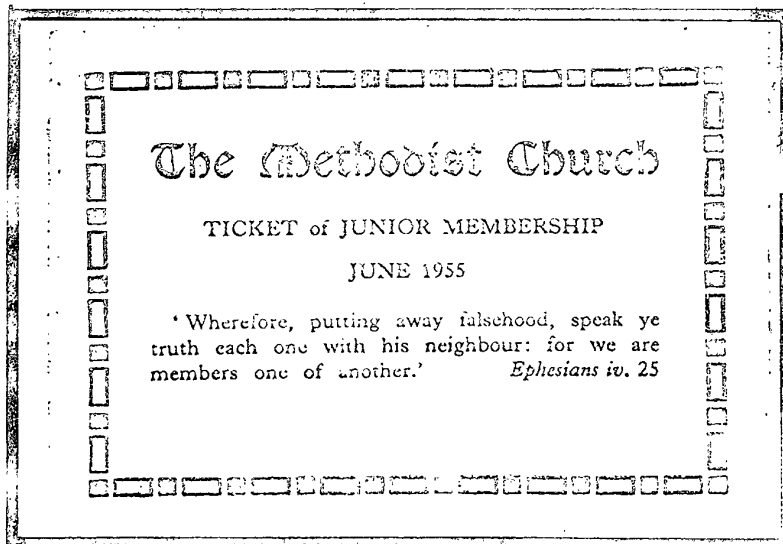


Figure 6. A second quarter ticket for junior membership (youth) in modern British Methodism.

APPENDIX II

Following is a copy of a letter, dated August 3, 1810, written by a Mr. John H. Keys of Jericho, North Carolina, to Rev. Edward Dromgogle, who was then a respected, 68-year-old local preacher of the Methodist Church in that area. It involves an alleged misinterpretation of the rules and a lack of tact on the part of a young preacher, Reverend John Early, who later became Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Believe me, brother, when I inform you that I had nothing more at heart than to conform to the advice you had given me; that is to speak to Early before preaching to request, that he would lay the business before our next [quarterly] conference, and in the interim proceed no farther. But when he made his appearance in the house, his countenance exhibited so many marks of passion and ill humor, (tho' perhaps nothing more than the man's natural looks) that I was deprived of all my former resolutions, and determined with myself to let things take their course. However, just as he entered his pulpit, brother John Mayfield called him out; and, as I have been since informed requested him not to bring the business forward, but to lay it before the Conference, that such was y[our] request & . . . informed him, that as for his part, he would not consent to turn Mrs. Keys out for such a cause no did he suppose any of the class would do so & cet. But so far was the message sent him, or the advice of bro: Mayfield from having any good effect upon him, that he appeared to get doubly charged with, I fear, the spirit of the evil one, and said, that he w[ould] go on, and if it went against him, as respected the class, he w[ould] appeal [.] After the sermon, to one he appear'd to express with a degree of accimony [sic]; and in the class meeting he behaved to my wife with a great degree of disrespect; and in a very authoritative manner asked her if she had laid aside her ring & ca. I saw her embarrassed situation, and requested I may be heard upon the occasion. I read him the article upon dress in our discipline, and Mr. Westley's [sic] fuller explanation thereof in the fourth volume of his sermons page 100 & ca. I observed, that Mr. W[esley]'s language was by way of advice, not a positive command.-- that he was a man of too much good sense; too well versed in the knowledge and spirit of the word of God, as to make that a cause, in his discipline, of expulsion from the church here below, that wou'd not exclude from the kingdom of glory--that it was possible that a woman may die with 20 gold rings upon her fingers, and still be possessed of living faith--that all the church has to do was, in such cases, to curtail a member

of some of the privileges; such as tickets & ca. When, however, I found nothing w[ould] answer, and that he was bent on expulsion, I desired that we may no longer be considered members of the society, and to take our names off the society, and to take our names off the class paper. I told him I was exceedingly sorry he had ever come amongst us. Now brother, it might be said, that I was rather hasty. Perhaps it may be so. But before a man can be a good judge of any case, he ought to understand it thoroughly--he ought to put himself in my place. Now what place was that? I will tell you, brother. On the one hand stood my wife, in as plain attire as any woman cou'd appear in, wreathing [sic] under the last [sic] of an ignorant, stubborn, coxcomb; whose place would be best filled at the tail of a plough, than as a guide and director of civiliz[e]d people; then on the other hand stood our spiritual guide (oh, perversion of terms!) as swoln [sic] as big as the frog in the fables, and exercising an authority as he had no right to exert, and looking as big as an Eastern Nabob.--Tis among us who are acquainted with the rules, and the feelings of mankind. And tis also a great pity to give the management of a circuit to a man no better acquainted with his rules than he appears to be. I am told that he said, that he was informed of my wife's ring long before he came into the circuit, and that it hurt a great many of the society! Why, to be sure, their sensibility was extreme; but it appears; their ignorance was moreso. Is not this, bro: something like straining at gnats and swallowing camels? Perhaps those who felt so exceedingly unhappy in the contemplation of my wife's wearing an innocent ring, that injured no man, w[ould] not feel themselves equally unhappy and miserable in the possession of property illegally acquired, or under the idea of having destroyed the peace and happiness of an innocent neighbor. Brother, unless there be some steps taken to lop the extravagances of young preachers, (for the old, almost to a man, have left us) the sober and sensible part of our societies will get disgusted, and others will be prevented from coming among us. Should there not be a day, or a part of a day set apart, at every yearly conference, for the benefit especially of the young and inexperienced preachers? Shou'd the rules not be read and explained to them, and not suffer every man to put his own construction upon them? I have long thought, and a note that I made in our book of discipline in the y[ea]r 1800 will say so: I have long thought I say that circuit preachers were no advantage to us, & that there is much more good done by our local preachers.

Brother I have 10,000 things to say, but it appears the more I have to say the less I can say, for I have a man at my elbow hurrying me along to see a patient, so that you'l please excuse the incoherent manner in w[hi]ch I have dictated and wrote this letter. You request my attendance at y[ou]r camp-meeting. I will if I can do so, but consider it will be a sickly time. Therefore, if I don't attend, don't blame me. o, brother, I am mortified, that I can't really call you brother; and, tho hard judgment,

can't help thinking and saying, that I believe Early an instrument in the hands of the . . . to draw Mrs. Keys and myself from a people of God,--from a people with whom we wished to live and die and with whom, of all Christian people upon the earth, we shou'd elact to cast our lot in this world and the world to come. I have given y[ou]r love and comp[animent]s to my wife, and desire I may return them twofold. Rem[ember] me to sister Dromgoogle and the family

Am, brother as usual Y[ou]r friend and brother,

James H. Keys*

*William Warren Sweet, The Methodists, (Vol. IV of the Religion on the American Frontier series. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), pp. 189-191.

Appendix III

A Listing of Class Statistics
 Foundry Society - 1742

<u>Class Leaders</u>			
Men			19
Women			<u>47</u>
Total			66

<u>Classes</u>	<u>Day</u>	<u>Hour</u>	<u>Number Classes</u>
Men	Monday	8:00 P.M.	11
	Friday	8:00 P.M.	5
	Thursday	8:00 p.m.	1
	Sunday	8:00 P.M.	1
Women	Sunday	2:00 P.M.	1
	Monday	6:00 P.M.	2
	Monday	8:00 P.M.	11
	Monday	4:00 P.M.	1
	Monday	5:00 P.M.	2
	Monday	7:00 P.M.	1
	Monday	4:30 P.M.	1
	Tuesday	4:00 P.M.	1
	Tuesday	5:00 P.M.	1
	Tuesday	6:00 P.M.	1
	Tuesday	8:00 P.M.	1
	Wednesday	8:00 P.M.	7
	Wednesday	7:00 P.M.	3
	Wednesday	6:00 P.M.	4
	Wednesday	5:00 P.M.	1
	Thursday	Morning	1
	Thursday	4:00 P.M.	2
	Friday	4:00 P.M.	2
	Friday	6:00 P.M.	1
	Friday	7:00 P.M.	2
Saturday	5:00 P.M.	1	
Saturday	8:00 P.M.	1*	

*George Stevenson, City Road Chapel: London and Its Associations
 (London: Author, 1872), pp. 28-29.