Liberty and Equality in British Methodist Thought:

From John Wesley to the Present Day.

Submitted by **David John Speirs** to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Masters by Research in Theology and Religion in September 2019.

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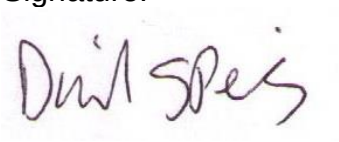

28th September 2019

Abstract

From its genesis the Methodist movement, which would become the Methodist Church, has had a deep concern for the values and ideas of liberty and equality that comes from its theology and practice; sharing the gospel message amongst the poor and disadvantaged. However, there have been times when the Methodist Church has struggled to develop a theological ethic on human rights that is fully integrated with its theology.

Through an exploration of the teachings of John Wesley, the Eighteenth Century leader of the Methodist societies, and particularly those that concerned liberty and the anti-slavery movement and the American Revolution, it is possible to determine key theological tenets in his thought: Wesley's teaching is that all people have been endowed with liberty by their creator; the liberty of conscience being preeminent among these. Furthermore, that all people should have the integrity of their liberty respected, slavery being an afront to this principle. That in God's salvation love, being for all people, is recognised when we conceive of people being made by the creator in the natural and political image of God.

From this starting point, in Wesley's theology, it is then possible to explore one of the most significant issues of liberty and equality, or rights, in the 20th century, connected with the 18th century struggles: Racism in society, that permeates into the Church. In examining the Methodist Church's response to racism, it can be determined to what extent it has endeavoured to implement a radical theological ethic. Moving into the 21st century, examining recent commitments by the Methodist Conference to forge an 'inclusive church', with new resources such as the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit, it can be confidently stated that there is a commitment to engaging with a theological approach to liberty and equality issues, that can draw much from our Wesleyan theology, practice and heritage.

Acknowledgements

I am immensely thankful to all the people who have helped me on the long journey to complete this thesis. First and foremost a huge thank you to my thesis supervisor, Professor Esther Reed, whose support and immense patience have enabled me to reach the stage of completion and without whose help I could not have done this.

My immense thanks are also offered to the administrative staff in the PGR Office and the Department of Theology & College of Humanities, whose grace and assistance have enabled me to complete this work whilst going through the process of being selected and trained for ordained ministry as a Presbyter in the Methodist Church.

I am grateful to the staff at the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham and my Circuit Superintendent Ministers, the Revd Dr David Perry and the Rev Leslie Newton, for affording me study time to work on the thesis.

I am also thankful for the assistance given to me by the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History in the early stages of my research and in particular Dr Peter Forsaith for giving me access to the archives.

Thanks also to the Rev Dr Jonathan Pye, former Principal of Wesley College Bristol, who started my journey into theological study, encouraged me, and was the assisting minister at my ordination.

Finally, a note of thanks to my father, John Speirs, and sister, Jenna Yeates, who have been a great support. Also, my niece, Ella-Rose, who has brought joy to us all.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mother, Gail Speirs, who has seen God's face and now dwells with the saints in glory.

Contents

Thesis Introduction

On 10th December 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This document was to be hugely significant in shaping the thinking on rights and liberties throughout the rest of the century and beyond. For Christians, the adoption of the declaration was an opportunity to celebrate their influence on bringing about this revolutionary document. Yet at the same time questions still remained as to how the churches both recognised and justified their commitment to human rights within their own theological traditions. Since conceptions of 'rights' and 'liberties' always emerge within a context, it is vitally important for each Christian tradition to gain an understanding of the context in which an understanding of rights is based.

The Methodist Church, born out of John Wesley's spiritual concern for the poor and disadvantaged of the Eighteenth Century, must interpret its own rights tradition, in relation to matters concerning liberty and equality, in a manner that is consistent with the doctrines, beliefs, practices and history of the Church. It is only by doing this that Methodism is able to embed its theory of rights into its Christian Ethic. However, a considerable amount of groundwork needs to be undertaken before the Church can formulate an integrated and comprehensive ethic on human rights. To even begin a task of such magnitude it is necessary to examine various tensions and inconsistencies that can be found not only in John Wesley's thoughts but also in Methodist rights thinking across the Twentieth Century.

The first part of the thesis explores the political background and context of John Wesley's politics through an examination of his family upbringing and his early ministry. This provides the backdrop to Wesley's later writings and enables a degree of understanding when trying to bridge the differences between Eighteenth and Twentieth Century environments, as well as flagging up the various influences in Wesley's formative years that would have impacted on his thoughts and ideas in later life. This is immediately followed by a detailed literature review that examines how liberty and the related concept equality have been researched and understood by Methodist scholars.

The second major part is a more detailed examination of Wesley's writings on politics and, more specifically, the concept of 'liberty'; relating this to his other theological and ethical writings. This involves an analysis of specific case studies on Wesley's works on slavery and his perspectives on the American War of Independence. There is then an engagement with Methodism and human rights issues in the mid-late Twentieth Century. This entails an in-depth study of historical records (including conference papers, *Methodist Recorder* articles, and Church publications), in order to critically assess some of the ideological conceptions held by the Church concerning rights and liberties, and the various tensions that have arisen over time. In particular, the analysis focuses on the Methodist Church's reactions to racism and considers them in relation to the abolitionist principles of the early Methodist Movement, having regard to whether Methodism has held true to its Wesleyan roots. This thesis therefore integrates a historical study with a theological and ethical analysis relevant to modern Methodism.

This historical and ethical approach enables Methodists to relate their contemporary approach to Wesley's doctrines and beliefs. However, some caution is necessary since Wesley's thinking on these issues was not always systematic and significantly differs from widely accepted Twenty First Century principles of good governance, particularly democratic systems of election. However, despite this there is a strong argument that Wesley's concern for liberty and its foundations within a theological perspective has an enduring relevance for contemporary Methodism.

The final part of the thesis therefore examines how ideas around liberty and equality have been understood in the discourse during the Twentieth Century, with particular attention being given to Methodist approaches to racism. It then goes on to explore how, in the Twenty First Century, the emphasis on equality, diversity, and inclusion within Methodist thought and practice is not merely a reaction to 'secular developments' and the emergence of new rights legislation, but is at the heart of Methodist theology, rooted in its Eighteenth Century genesis and the thoughts and teachings of John Wesley.

Chapter One: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter investigates two broad ranges of literature relevant to accounts of the meaning of ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’ within British Methodism. The first examines British Methodism within the political and historical context of its life-span to date. The second focuses on the theological and ethical substance of Wesley’s teachings and their subsequent interpretation. It is necessary when considering the political-historical literature to review briefly the biographical work that has been conducted on John Wesley. This is because a range of scholars have interpreted Wesley's politics in different ways, with implications for his understanding of liberty and equality. The chapter then explores the 'three waves' of scholarship on John Wesley's politics in order to provide a sense of how academic understanding has changed over the years. This establishes the current status of Wesleyan historical scholarship and how John Wesley's works are currently interpreted. It is worth noting that much of the research that is being conducted in Wesleyan Theology is in a US context and therefore removed from the context facing British Methodists. Although both British and American Methodism find their origins in John Wesley, there have been historical and cultural divergences as both churches have operated in very different contexts. After exploring the political-historical literature in this way, the chapter then looks at the theological-ethical work that has been conducted in Methodist studies which seeks to provide contemporary theological and ethical guidance for the Methodist Church today. It is here that the issue of 'liberty' in Methodist thought has been explored, in a somewhat limited fashion, with reference to John Wesley. Particular attention is paid throughout to the

concepts of ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’ within changing historical-political contexts and within diverse theological frameworks within this field of literature.

Two warning notes may be sounded. First, the categories historical-political and theological-ethical are not exclusive and the boundaries between them are fluid. A piece of literature may fall primarily within the theological-ethical camp and still have strong historical-political elements within it. Indeed, it would be surprising if a theological-ethical text has not engaged at all in political-historical methods; it is helpful, perhaps, to view theological-ethical literature as flowing out from the historical-political grouping as an extended category. This chapter will therefore explore the political-historical literature before moving on to work that has a more substantively theological-ethical focus, whilst noting that scholars have often adopted a historical-political approach to Methodist studies without considering the theological-ethical context. Second, it is necessary to appreciate the dangers entailed in an overly ‘Wesley-centric’ approach. British Methodism is a rich and varied tradition that has its own development that is different from the American context. A failure to adequately appreciate these differences, and how they have influenced the development of the theological discourse, will lead to an incomplete understanding that does not fully reflect the tradition.

Many of the historical examinations of Methodism provide useful material that can be integrated into this project as well as providing a springboard for further scholarship. Since Methodism has had a major impact on the social history of England, there are a number of studies which have been published seeking to explain and quantify the influence of Methodists in public life. However, as this

review will make clear, there are gaps and deficiencies in the current scholarship. Many of the historical studies within this field lack a theological dimension and thus fail to appreciate fully the ideas and motivations that stand behind Methodist public engagement. As already noted, many of the more recent studies have been written in the United States from an American perspective that fails to appreciate contemporary British context and is not that relevant to the Methodist Church in Britain today. As previously explored, cultural context plays a significant role not only in the conceptualisation of liberty and equality, but also how the concepts translate into policies and outcomes. The focus on the US context has meant that connexional reports and documents that have been produced by the Methodist Church in Britain over the last hundred years, particularly on human rights issues, and the work of the Joint Public Issues Team has largely gone unexamined. A project that engages with this literature is needed in order to fully comprehend the church's approach to human rights over the last century.

Political-historical Literature

Much of the historical literature examines the 18th century period, beginning with John Wesley and his ministry. Some notable exceptions which examine Methodism in the Twentieth Century are also examined within this literature review chapter. Much of the historical-political work in Methodism focuses on the period from John Wesley's founding of the movement in the Eighteenth Century through to the early Twentieth Century, with varying degrees of focus. A significant grouping of this material examines Methodism in its specific Eighteenth Century context, some of which focuses on particular figures such as John Wesley. This material can be considered to be either fully or partially

biographical in nature; for example, Maldwyn Edwards', *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century - A study of his social and political influence* (1933);[1] Maximin Piette's, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (1938);[2] V.H.H. Green's *The Young Mr Wesley* (1961).[3] are all texts which have sought to examine the beliefs of Methodism's most infamous historical figure. These authors are often found to be constructing an image of Wesley which is not only favourable but also reflecting the bias of the particular author. There has been, of course, more recent literature published on John Wesley, but the focus of this work has been more theological-ethical in its character than purely historical, and for this reason I have included these works in another category. These recent studies relate to historic Methodism; specifically, to the contemporary concerns of the Church, often in response to social, economic and ethical questions. However, it is notable that much of this material is written with particular concerns for American Methodists and their unique context. One of the problems with much of the contemporary historical research conducted by Methodist scholars is the omission to apply it to some of the contemporary ethical issues facing the British church; attempts to redress the paucity of British Methodist scholarship in this area are noticeable by their absence. Regarding historical-political scholarship that relates to John Wesley, there appears to be three separate waves of scholarship which require further explanation.

[1] Edwards, Maldwyn. *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century - A study of his social and political influence*, (London, George Allen & Urwin), 1933.
[2] Piette, Maximin. *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*, (London, Sheed and Ward), 1979.
[3] Green, V.H.H. *The Young Mr Wesley*, (London, Edward Arnold), 1961.

Wesley's Politics: Three waves of scholarship

The scholarship on Wesley's politics may be divided into three distinctive waves. It should be emphasised that these waves only directly concern the scholarly interpretation of John Wesley's political stances rather than the wider historical-political literature that examines Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Methodism. However, these waves of scholarship can have an indirect effect on how later Methodist history is interpreted in relationship with John Wesley. This is particularly important in relation to the schisms that took place within Methodism during the Nineteenth Century. Many of these occurred due to differing visions of Wesley's legacy and were political since they concerned power, order and governance within the Methodist Church. Understanding how Wesley's politics can be interpreted is therefore helpful in the examination of later periods.

The First Wave

The first wave, which encompasses most of the work that was written up until the early Twentieth Century, seeks to affirm John Wesley's high Tory politics. Wesley's politics were, at the very least, in sympathy with the conservative ideologies relating to divine non-resistance and were possibly fully Jacobite and non-juror in character, with support for the concept of a 'divine right of kings'. As Maxim Piette argues, Wesley was "entirely on the side of extreme conservatives of the high church party."[4] Wesley's decision to study the works of William Law

[4] Piette, Maximin. *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*, p.282-83.

and his contact with prominent non-juror Dr Thomas Deacon convinces Piette that "Wesley, not satisfied with fighting in defence of the Methodists, took up a very definite position...in favour of the Stuarts."[5] This conservative non-juror Jacobinism is held by these first wave scholars: Historians such as Maximim Petite[6], Elie Halevy[7], JH Plumb[8], ER Taylor[9] , M Edwards[10] and EP Thompson[11] have all sought to interpret Wesley politics portraying him as a straightforward Tory with some Jacobite sympathies.

The Second Wave

The second wave of Wesleyan scholarship, produced in the mid to late Twentieth Century, began to advance the opinion that while Wesley may have held these opinions in his youth, they were dispelled later in life and replaced by a more liberal ideology. The notion that Wesley may not have been an extreme Jacobite, as labelled by some scholars, had been mooted previously. Maldwyn Edwards argues that it "was always to the House of Commons and of Lords that John Wesley looked for the true government of England."[12] Second wave scholarship sought to emphasise John Wesley's Jacobite leanings during his Oxford days, yet also affirmed that he became an emerging liberal thinker later in life. Two notable pieces of literature within this category include Bernard Semmel's *The Methodist Revolution* (1974)[13] and Leon Hynson's PhD thesis

[5] ibid, p.290
[6] Piette, Maximin. *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism*, (London, Sheed & Ward), 1979.
[7] Halevy, Elie. *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Chicago, Chicago University Press), 1971.
[8] Plumb, J.H. *England in the Eighteenth Century (1714-1815)*, (London, Penguin Books), 1969.
[9] Taylor, E.R. *Methodism and Politics (1791-1851)*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 1933.
[10] Edwards, Maldwyn, *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century - A study of his social and political influence*, (London, George Allen & Urwin), 1933.
[11] Thompson, E.P. *The making of the working class*, (London, Penguin Books), 2002.
[12] Edwards, Maldwyn. *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century: A study of his Social and Political Influence*, (Epworth Press, London), 1955. p.37.
[13] Semmel, Bernard. *The Methodist Revolution*, (Heinemann Educational Books, London), 1974.

Church and State in the Life and Thought of John Wesley (1971).[14] Both affirm that in his Oxford days John Wesley was a Jacobite espousing a fundamental belief in the "divine hereditary right with its correlatives of passive obedience and non-resistance"[15]. However, Semmel and Hynson assert that after reading William Higden's *A view of the English Constitution* (1733), Wesley underwent a dramatic conversion in which he adopted Higden's political views and began to endorse a theory of government based on limited constitutional monarchy that enshrined rights and liberties. As Hynson argues; "One thing is certain: Wesley had been an adherent to divine right; he later became committed to the benefits of the limited monarchy"[16], and he goes on to claim that Wesley did not oppose democratic forms of government[17] and was a liberal as "his primary commitment was to civil and religious liberty for the nation."[18]

The Third Wave

The third wave of scholarship, which this thesis affiliates to, seeks to discredit the notion that John Wesley was a Jacobite and/or non-juror during his youth and that the paradigm shift in his political thought was much less dramatic and pronounced. This is the position adopted by Theodore Weber who, in his important work *Politics in the order of salvation* (2001)[19] which bridges the political-historical and theological-ethical divide and will be explored further later in this review, argues that rather than changing Wesley's view, Higden's work

[14] Hynson, Leon Orville, *Church and State in the thought of John Wesley*. PhD Thesis, University of Iowa, 1971.
[15] Hynson, Leon. 'Human Liberty as Divine Right: A Study in the Political Maturation of John Wesley', Journal of Church and State, 1983. p.71.
[16] ibid, p.69.
[17] ibid, p.81.
[18] ibid, p.82.
[19] Weber, Theodore. *Politics in the Order of Salvation – Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics*, (Nashville TN, Kingswood Books) 2001.

simply strengthens and affirms Wesley's existing understanding.[20] He thus affirms Wesley as a 'Tory Constitutionalist' rather than a liberal thinker, explaining:

> "Wesley's political thinking in this period proceeds in terms of the ancient constitution, an organic and historical concept that contrasts with liberal constitutional models, which tend to be rational, contractual, and even mechanical...John Wesley's early political thinking never showed the absolutist tendencies that historic Stuart divine right formulations implied. His later public affirmations of rights and liberties never escaped the organic context of the organic constitution."[21]

According to Weber, John Wesley then was neither an absolutist monarchist or a modern liberal, but a believer in an evolving and balanced constitutional order where power was shared between the Crown and Parliament, governing for the good of all, and derived from divine authority.

This thesis will proceed on the basis that Weber is broadly correct in his interpretation of Wesley's political stance. Yet there are some key questions which require further exploration. The extent to which John Wesley was a 'natural rights thinker' is still ambiguous in Weber's analysis. This may in turn be due to Wesley's failure to be systematic and consistent in his own reasoning. Alternatively, it may be that insufficient attention has been given to the development of Wesley's thought and how it relates to his wider writings.
An additional deficit in Weber's work is his failure to fully explore how Wesley's

[20] Weber, p.59.
[21] ibid, p.68.

social ethic integrates with his theology and his 'organic constitutionalism' [22] which recognised the development of certain historic rights in relation to the constitutional order. While Weber does touch on this, he fails to illuminate how radical some of Wesley's opinions are; particularly his ethic of property and wealth in relation to the widespread poverty and exploitation that was present in the Eighteenth Century. While Weber chose to write a considerable amount on repudiating scholarship that suggests Wesley's Jacobite tendencies, he gives little attention to Wesley's fervent desire to abolish the slave trade instead focussing his attention on 'war and peacemaking' in Wesley's thought.[23] Thus there is further scope to explore the extent to which John Wesley's arguments against slavery relate to contemporary arguments on racial justice.

Warren Thomas Smith's book *John Wesley & Slavery*[24] is a key text which seeks to provide an overview of Wesley's campaign against the slave trade, although the wider consequences of Wesley's thinking on his social ethics and the ethics of the Methodist movement are not explored by this work. Similarly, the extent to which the spirit of abolitionism has influenced Methodist theology and Methodist practice beyond the campaigns of the 18th Century have not been fully researched. In particular, the Methodist approach to race and racism in the Twentieth Century and its association with the civil and human rights movement is of particular interest. Also, with the exception of two studies conducted by the Church itself[25], there is very little literature which examines Methodism and racism. However, these two studies did not seek to explore the

[22] See ibid, p.107-110.
[23] ibid, p.353-388 'Chapter 11: War and Peacemaking'.
[24] Smith, Warren Thomas. *John Wesley and Slavery*, (Nashville TN, Abingdon Press), 1986.
[25] See Holden, Tony. *People, Churches and Multi-Racial Projects*, (Nottingham, Russell Press), 1984. and Walton, Heather. *A Tree God Planted - black people in British Methodism*, (Nottingham, Russell Press), 1985.

historical approach of the Methodist Church to liberty and equality inherent in its theology. Thus, while providing useful source material for this thesis, the latter works do not provide much assistance in the contemporary discourse on human rights.

Theological-ethical Literature

The central category of literature relevant to this project is theological-ethical in nature. This is the newest field of literature as, historically, Methodist scholarship has quite often failed to integrate historical and political methods with theological approaches. Literature in the theological-ethical category is often intended to produce guidance for contemporary Methodism via an examination of Methodist theology through an ethical lens and by a historical analysis that can only be described as Wesley-centric; that is, focused almost entirely on John Wesley rather than a broader range of Methodist figures and sources. Examples of the type of literature include Theodore Jennings', *Good News for the Poor* (1990)[26] and Manfred Marquardt's, *John Wesley's Social Ethics - Praxis and Principles* (1992),[27] which will be explored in more detail later within this review. Both scholars seek to portray Wesley as a radical figure committed to principles of social justice and holiness. In addition to the radical studies, a new category of literature is emerging which is ethical in focus and faithfully expounds the tensions, problems and inconsistencies within Wesley's thought.

[26] Jennings, Theodore. *Good News to the Poor*, (Nashville TN, Abingdon Press), 1990.
[27] Marquardt, Manfred. *John Wesley's Social Ethics - Praxis and Principles*, (Nashville TN, Abingdon Press), 1992.

Stephen Long - John Wesley's Moral Theology -The quest for God and Goodness

One of the most interesting and recent studies in this field is Stephen Long's *John Wesley's Moral Theology -The quest for God and Goodness* (2005)[28] which seeks to argue that Wesley owes more to the moral theology of the virtue tradition, in particular the work of Thomas Aquinas, than that of 17th and 18th century enlightenment philosophers such as Locke and Hume. Long begins his book by highlighting some of the problems in contemporary Methodist scholarship, in particular how:

> "The Methodist tradition of ethics assumes that rights, justice, or values are more universal categories than the Christian doctrine of God. This is not a shift within Wesley's theology, nor is it merely making his work relevant for today. It represents a repudiation of Wesley's moral theology."[29]

The root of this problem lies within the tendency amongst Wesleyan theologians to place Wesley within the frame of "Lockean empiricism"[30] when, instead, Wesley "continues the medieval and Anglican sacramental world that assumed the ancient metaphysics of participation."[31] Long argues that Wesley's moral theology, which was significantly rooted in sacramentalism and the sovereignty

[28] Long, Stephen D. *John Wesley's Moral Theology -The quest for God and Goodness*, (Nashville TN, Kingswood Books), 2005.
[29] ibid, p.31.
[30] ibid. p.13.
[31] ibid.

of God, makes it very different from our contemporary ‘ethics’, stating that Wesley; "did not make well the passage from medieval sacramental to [a] modern epistemological world...".[32]

Of course, we should not completely dismiss the influence which enlightenment figures had on Wesley. To do so would be a failure to recognise the influence that Reformation thought was continuing to exert on many enlightenment figures, which sprung from a deeply theological perspective. Instead, it is important to recognise that Wesley’s primary theological perspective is rooted in a much older sacramental tradition despite Methodism’s apparent embrace of more modernist understandings. This appreciation for Wesley’s sacramental theology is something that becomes very clear within Long’s book. Long seeks to dissuade Methodists from unquestioningly adopting the concepts and language of contemporary secular ethics and reading them into Wesley’s thought. The failure to understand ‘ethics’ as being rooted within Christian theology is a fundamentally un-Wesleyan approach. As Long states:

> "Knowledge of God and knowledge of ethics, love of God and love of neighbour, are wedded together in Wesley, and divorce is impossible."[33]

There does appear to be some confusion, however, whether Stephen Long accepts the case for ‘Methodist ethics’ or whether Methodists should talk purely in terms of their moral theology. For Long, contemporary ‘ethics’ represent a "mathematisation of morality on a priori humanist grounds"[34]. From Long’s

[32] ibid, p.35.
[33] ibid, p.51.
[34] ibid, p.15.

perspective the development of the "liberty of indifference"[35], where "freedom is more basic than God"[36], is that which results in the rejection of fundamental theological doctrines.[37] This seems to be a particular issue within American culture, where freedom and individualism are seen as having that 'sacred' quality which often trumps notions of the common or corporate good. Yet this is also a trend which is seen more widely across western society. Long does not directly comment on the problem of rampant individualism and self-centredness in contemporary western society, but the criticism is implicit within his own argument. However, what is unclear is the extent to which ethics can be claimed by the Methodist tradition. Long's argument suggests that Wesley, as a moral theologian and not an ethicist, should be the template for Methodists and therefore a recognisably Methodist approach would be to shift the focus from the language of ethics to the language of moral theology. Long does not explain how this would enable Methodism to engage in the wider public discourse concerning ethics. Furthermore, there seems to be an under appreciation for how Christianity, and specifically moral theology, has shaped ethical thought in the western world. Contemporary ethics are not shaped in a manner that is so alienated from Christian theology; indeed many contemporary ethical principles and understandings find their origin within Christianity. Most significantly for this project, Long's argument does have important implications for the understanding of 'liberty' within the Methodist tradition. By placing it in a much wider theological framework, Long had offered a possibility of embedding the concept of liberty into a distinct Methodist understanding; an idea which is worthy of further exploration.

[35] ibid, p.26.
[36] ibid.
[37] ibid, p.30.

Theodore Weber - Politics in the Order of Salvation

In addition to Stephen Long's work, Theodore R Weber's *Politics in The Order of Salvation*[38] , published in 2001, is another significant example of recent theological-ethical literature in Methodist studies. It is difficult to place Weber's book simply into the theological-ethical category since this piece of literature also has a strong historical-political element as well. Weber seeks to examine Wesley's politics and then from that provide some guidance for contemporary Methodists in forming a distinctly Wesleyan political language in a Twenty First Century context. It is probably fair to say that Weber's text falls primarily into the theological-ethical camp since most works of literature within this category engage in some degree of historical-political.

Weber's emphasis is not on providing a historic record but rather focuses on the continuing ethical relevance for the church today. For this reason, it is best placed within the theological-ethical category. Weber's work represents the newest 'third' wave in Wesley studies which seeks to demonstrate that Wesley was neither a straight forward Tory monarchist with Jacobite traits (first wave), nor a developing liberal (second wave), but a conservative who believed in a form of balanced constitutional government that had evolved over time, derived its power from divine authority, and sought to protect various liberties.

Weber's book attempts to explore and outline John Wesley's politics with particular regard to his approach to rights and liberties, as well as a general

[38] Weber, Theodore. *Politics in the Order of Salvation – Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics*, (Nashville TN, Kingswood Books), 2001.

theory on government, as part of Weber's quest to forge a Wesleyan political language. In this respect, Weber's work aligns with the aims and objectives of this thesis which seeks to provide contemporary guidance for Methodists engaging in political discourse in the Twenty First Century. His work therefore, whilst being a historical study, enters into ethical waters. However, his lack of theological engagement with Wesley's wider works is quite possibly the weakest aspect of Weber's book. Furthermore, his North American perspective limits the usefulness of the text for British Methodists due to his focus not being on writing to their context.

Yet despite the problems associated with Weber's book for British Methodists, his attempt to create a 'Wesleyan political language' is a commendable and much needed task. Weber explains the problem that many Methodists face by having:

> "no common symbols of discourse deriving from their own theological tradition with which to think and speak as *Wesleyans* about the meaning of political reality and responsibility."[39]

This perceived lack of symbolism presents a problem for a church which is seeking to explore its unique identity and how that identity should forge its approach on public discourse. Weber believes it is possible to use John Wesley's own theology to construct a Methodist political language, arguing that Wesley is the most appropriate individual for this task as he "is the only specifically Wesleyan source common to all branches of the Methodist family'.[40]

[39] ibid, p.17.
[40] ibid, p.27.

Not convinced that Wesley's thoughts are outdated for the 21st Century, Weber argues:

> "there are resources in John Wesley's theology - largely unnoticed by Wesley himself - that allow and enable the transcending of the limits of his eighteenth century politics in the formulation of a political ethic and method dependent on Wesleyan theology itself and not on the contingencies of political currents and conditions."[41]

It is therefore somewhat ironic that Weber does not choose to engage in an in-depth theological analysis of Wesley's writings but instead remains very much a church historian in his methodological approach. For Weber, the notion that Wesley's thoughts remain relevant to the contemporary Methodist Church relies on two essential tenets; that his unique status in Methodism makes him the most appropriate figure to rely on when determining Methodist theology and secondly, that his perspectives have an enduring value that transcend his own context and continue to have relevance for us today. However, this overreliance on Wesley, which will be termed 'Wesleycentralism', occurs at the expense of other individuals and influences on the Methodist movement , particularly in British Methodism. This includes figures in the Nineteenth Century, who present a vast potential area of research and scholarship that lies beyond the scope of this particular thesis, and the more recent and highly relevant influences on British Methodism that have occurred in the Twentieth and Twenty First centuries, which will be explored.

[41] ibid.

‘Wesleycentralism’ has also contributed towards one of the reoccurring problems that occurs throughout Wesleyan scholarship; that John Wesley has been venerated to such an extent that there has been a ubiquitous reluctance to criticise his approaches and to dismiss inconsistencies in his thought. While Weber does not labour under the illusion that Wesley is in anyway a systematic theologian, he does not examine the extent to which Wesley’s views may have changed as his ministry progressed. In his attempts to show Wesley as an ‘organic constitutionalist’ and disprove the liberal conversion theory argued by Semmel and Hynson which form the second wave of scholarship in Wesley studies, Weber is inclined to assume that Wesley’s politics remained static and unchanging in their nature throughout his life, arguing that his views were consistent and ‘frankly conservative’.[42] Whilst there is evidence to support Weber’s analysis that Wesley was never a Jacobite or non-juror, the notion that Wesley’s views did not develop and evolve seems to be a somewhat naive assumption on Weber’s part. There is, for instance, clear evidence to suggest that Wesley’s theology developed and evolved, through his sermons, as his ministry progressed. It would seem strange if, in contrast, his political views remained static, especially since religion and politics were so intertwined in Eighteenth Century thought. Wesley’s politics do not fit neatly into our modern conceptions. While Wesley may have been conservative in his understanding of political authority and suspicious of republican forms of democracy, his emphasis on ‘social holiness’, suspicion of the hoarding of wealth, and puritan appeals to a plainer simpler way of life, seem to suggest a radical heart within a conservative political framework. Wesley’s ‘conservatism’ is not one which advocates laissez-faire capitalism but instead places a considerable

[42] ibid, p.419.

responsibility on the person, state and society to enact a form of social justice. Furthermore, Wesley did change and adapt his views over time; his outlook was often motivated by pragmatic opportunism shaped by a desire to spread the gospel message. This explains his openness to novel and innovative methods in ecclesiastical practice and the associated developments in his political thought which sought not only to protect his new and growing movement, but to justify its existence within the life of the church.

Despite providing an impressive contribution to a field of scholarship that requires much further research, Weber's analysis arguably falls short in several areas. As previously mentioned, much of Wesleyan scholarship is written in the USA and is thereby influenced by US cultural and ideological suppositions. Wesley's criticism of the American Revolutionaries and his opposition to Republican democracy is more problematic for American Methodists than their British counterparts. Weber's attempt to construct a Wesleyan political language has a distinctly American dialect focused heavily on constitutional questions concerning the relationship between the individual and the state. Yet in the British context, concerns about 'liberty' and 'equality' go far beyond the vertical relationship between state and individual and include those horizontal relationships that exist between citizens and their communities.

Weber's concentration on the individual's relationship with the state and his neglect of issues relating to equality and social liberties suggests that he is far more motivated by American than British concerns. This may be understandable due to the context within which Weber finds himself and the importance that Methodism has had in the USA, where it is facing identity

issues similar to those currently experienced in the UK. However, the British context, being so culturally different, necessitates a revaluation of some of Weber's emphasis and conclusions in the light of the unique historic influences on British Methodism which remain entirely separate from American Methodism. One of the significant areas under explored by Weber is the theology of stewardship that emerges from a Wesleyan political ethic particularly relevant to the British context. In addition to these concerns, Weber places too heavy an emphasis on John Wesley when forming this 'political language' for Methodists. For British Methodists this is somewhat problematic since Wesley, while being a significant figure within the Church, has not necessarily been the most influential part of the movement. This is why it is necessary to examine other influences on the movement in order to gain a full understanding of how a Methodist political ethic might take shape. One of the most interesting ideas furthered by Weber is the need "to bring Wesley's politics into the order of salvation delineated in his evangelical theology"[43] which, Weber argues, can be achieved through the "recovery of the political image of God"[44]. This concept is worthy of further exploration as it has great potential within Methodist political theology. Furthermore, God's role as creator & the relationship between God, people and land has received only superficial consideration by Weber and therefore merits more detailed exploration. The reason for this is that in the political discourse of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, 'liberty' was often conceived in relationship to privileges tied to 'land' and 'property' and the responsibilities that came with the management of resources. John Wesley not only wrote about the management and stewardship of resources but also developed within his theology a rich understanding of redemption in relationship

[43] Weber, p391.
[44] ibid, p.392.

to God's creation, which crucially involved the land. It therefore has a contribution to make in the debate on 'liberty' and 'equality.'

Howard Synder's and Joel Scandrett's - Salvation Means Creation Healed

The importance of 'the land' as a gift tied with the salvation of the Jewish people is a constant reference within the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, for the Jewish faith it was difficult to understand the covenant relationship without some reference to the land. In the New Testament the redemptive process is understood as extending beyond the people and the land to include the whole of creation. This is particularly important for Wesley, a point he makes in his sermon on The General Deliverance, Part III which addresses Romans 8:19-22:

> "The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that subjected it: Yet in hope that the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now."[45]

In this sermon, liberty, the image of God and the creation are all tied together in a way that has not been fully explored in Wesleyan scholarship. A significant piece of work that has touched upon this subject is Howard Synder's and Joel Scandrett's book *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and*

[45] Wesley, John. *The General Deliverance* at http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-60-the-general-deliverance/ (accessed 1/11/18).

Grace - Overcoming the Divorce between Earth and Heaven (2011).[46] Here, the two authors set out to explore and demonstrate that the relationship between God and his people also incorporates the creation. Making numerous references to John Wesley's own theology of creation and healing, the authors advance a convincing argument that the creational element within and alongside the relationship between God and humanity has been neglected by the church, thus leading to an individualistic and at times dualistic theology. Incorporating Synder and Scandrett's creational perspectives into Weber's developing Wesleyan political language is a vital exercise with implications for Methodist political theology which extend much further than simply developing a distinctive Methodist approach to ecological concerns. Indeed, it has the potential to significantly inform the Methodist understanding of 'liberty' and 'equality' by rooting it within a rich theological understanding, countering many of the individualistic assumptions made by some contemporary scholars. Furthermore, since Wesley himself makes connections between 'liberty' and 'creation' and that land and property played a significant role in Eighteenth Century politics (and beyond), the text would seem very relevant.[47] The book's greatest strength is that it has been written not only as a piece of academic theory but as a practical guide for the Church in the Twenty First Century. Thus, it forms part of a growing body of work which seeks to equip Methodism to tackle some of the significant issues of contemporary times and strengthens the field of literature upon which this thesis draws and develops. Wesley's own position on 'natural rights', which is often unclear and confused, merits further study and research in order to clarify his position.

[46] Synder, Howard and Scandrett, Joel. *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace - Overcoming the Divorce between Earth and Heaven* (Cascade Books, Eugene OR), 2011.
[47] See Dickinson, H.T. '*Liberty and Property - Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain'* (Methuen, London), 1977.

Manfred Marquardt - Wesley's Social Ethics

Manfred Marquardt's seminal work *John Wesley's Social Ethics - Praxis and Principles* (1992)[48] provides a broad overview of John Wesley's social ethic. This book was intended to give some theological guidance on social and economic issues for continental European Methodists, who have closer links to the United Methodists in the US than their British counterparts. The text appears to justify Methodist support for social democratic policies and, while generally faithful to Wesley's theology, it is conceivable that some might misread Wesley as being a socialist thinker. This may derivate from a wishful attempt to read their own political philosophy into Wesley's works. However, while Wesley's theology may occasionally appear to be socially radical and counter cultural, it is crucial to remember his context and background; an Anglican Tory Constitutionalist ministering in the Eighteenth Century. Attempts to paint Wesley in a liberal or socialist light using Twentieth or Twenty First Century lenses will undoubtedly lead to an inaccurate portrayal of his politics. Methodism may have had a profound influence on working class social and political movements of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, but attempts to read in political theories that have their origins after Wesley's death should be viewed with some scepticism.

Historical investigation into the political and social activities of Methodists in the Nineteenth Century, most notably by Elie Halvey, have sometimes sought to establish that the movement effectively served as an antidote to political

[48] Marquardt, Manfred. *John Wesley's Social Ethics - Praxis and Principles,* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN), 1992.

revolution during a time of great social upheaval. Marquardt's work, however, continues to play an important role within Wesleyan scholarship; while Wesley cannot be considered to be a Nineteenth Century socialist thinker any more than he can be considered a Twenty First Century neo-liberal, or for that matter an Eighteenth Century Jacobite, his concern for the poor and the alleviation of their poverty through radical societal reforms would suggest that Wesley's theology and his social understandings have to be seen as an integrated whole in order to understand its conservative and radical elements. Marquardt attempts to build a systematic ethic from Wesley's theology, although this is a construct since Wesley himself was not a systematic thinker. Yet what is most surprising about Marquardt's book is his failure to adequately consider Wesley's abolitionism, which serves as bridge between his emphasis on liberty and equality. This may at first appear to be an unfair criticism since Marquardt does choose to dedicate a chapter to 'John Wesley's Battle Against Slavery'[49]. However, this rather brief exploration remains somewhat descriptive and under formed. Marquardt's argument revolves around the idea that Wesley considered the African slave to have a 'soul' created by God and for this reason opposed their enslavement.[50] Unfortunately Marquardt fails to unpack this any further and fails to explore the wider implications this might have on Wesley's thought. Furthermore, Marquardt does not seek to fully address why Wesley, in his early ministry, did not publicly oppose slavery despite having encountered slaves on a number of occasions. Marquardt speculates that:

> "In spite of all the reforms he initiated, perhaps he was still too much a captive of political conservatism, the ecclesiastical tradition, and an

[49] ibid, p.67-75.
[50] ibid, p.73.

> uncritical attitude towards the law, for he protected these throughout his life. Yet such a conclusion cannot be drawn with certainty."[51]

This would seem to be a notable omission in a text which seeks to analysis Wesley's social principles, particularly when considering the importance of rooting Wesley 'radicalism' within a profoundly conservative ethos which is formulated within his theology. Marquardt does make some attempt to analyse how Wesley's theology impacted on his social principles, emphasising the importance of the corruption of humankind by sin and the effect of prevenient and renewing grace for Wesley.[52] Crucially, according to Marquardt, Wesley:

> "emphasise[d] equally the doctrines of justification by faith alone (against Anglican legalism, which accused him of fanaticism) and the necessity of good works (against any mystical or pietistic quietism). It is through this synthesis that Wesley laid the foundation for his social ethics".[53]

This requirement of justification by faith and the necessity of good works springing from faith lead to Wesley deriving his understanding of 'social holiness' which is central to Methodist Theology. However, while capturing Wesley's essential motivations that lie behind his understanding of 'social holiness', Marquardt's analysis falls short in its failure to fully explore the importance of other theological considerations that may have influenced Wesley's theology; most notably the importance of the love that derives itself from prevenient grace. While Marquardt also recognises that Wesley's

[51] ibid, p.72.
[52] ibid, p.89-101.
[53] ibid, p.101.

"theology of creation" played an important part in his rejection of slavery[54], he does not expand on this any further, which seems to be a missed opportunity to explore a potentially interesting and relevant aspect of Wesley's thought. Marquardt's work remains a seminal study in Wesleyan scholarship and serves as a useful introductory text for any scholar seeking to understand Wesley's social stances. However, the brevity of the text has an unfortunate consequence in that many of Wesley's approaches and attitudes are not explored in any great detail. Although occasionally Marquardt does make fleeting references to some of the influences on Wesley, there is an insufficient engagement with his theology, with the text having a primarily social-scientific focus. This is somewhat problematic when Wesley's theology plays such an important role in the formation of his social views. This is not to say that Marquardt does not give Wesley's theology any attention. In his seventh chapter, 'Presuppositions of Wesley's Social Ethics',[55] Marquardt explores how prevenient and renewing grace play a central role in underpinning Wesley's social ethics, although he fails to develop the importance of love within this framework. Furthermore, while concentrating on these limited elements Marquardt neglects other important aspects of Wesley's theology, for instance his sacramentalism and creation theology. These omissions sadly mean that Marquardt does not fully engage with the richness of Wesley's theology in developing his systematic analysis of Wesley's social principles and for this reason Marquardt's work, whilst remaining an important foundational text, needs to be expanded and built upon.

[54] ibid, p.72.
[55] ibid, p.89-101.

It has been previously noted that very few attempts have been made in recent years to examine Methodist Theology in relation to contemporary issues facing this Church, particularly when it comes to questions concerning Human Rights. Kenneth Williams' *Methodist Theology* (2011) observes that:

> "Methodism is remarkable for its determination to explore the liberty into which it believes humankind has been delivered through Christ, and the consequent openness to and excitement about the world of God's creation."[56]

William's understanding of Methodist theology seems to suggest that it would be open to engaging in human rights discourse, in part due to the practical emphasis of its theology, its concern for social holiness and its willingness to engage with contemporary issues. Furthermore, Methodism's concern for the individual and for freedom of thought and expression seems key to the movement. One of the most important expressions of liberty referred to in secondary literature is the 'liberty of conscience"; that is the liberty to live out a life in accordance with one's ethical and moral values while maintaining integrity of thought and action.

More recent scholars tackling rights based questions have struggled in translating Wesley's theology and political thought into a contemporary context which incorporates the notion of human rights. This may be because Wesley's

[56] Wilson, Kenneth. *Methodist Theology* (London, T&T Clark) Kindle Edition, 2011. p.45.

theology contains some irresolvable tensions for Methodists living in the Twenty First Century.

John English, in his *John Wesley and the Rights of Conscience*[57], whilst affirming the importance of the liberty of conscience in Wesley's thought, accuses him of failing to form his ideas into a coherent whole. In particular, English believes that many of Wesley's responses to particular political situations or legal attacks on Methodists do not tally with his pastoral and theological writings, and in particular his published sermons.[58] Furthermore, English suggests that while Wesley had a very broad conception of religious liberty, he continued to work within a very narrow interpretation defined by the established Anglican church.[59] English goes on to identify further inconsistencies between Wesley's definition of 'religious liberty' and his description of 'conscience' which he ascribes to a failure to delineate the role of reason in relation to these concepts. English asserts that:

> "Wesley's thought does not form an integrated whole. Other issues raised by his description of conscience include the relationship between divine grace and human freedom; conscience and the 'spiritual senses'; and conscience and the divisions of faith, assent, reliance on God's mercy, and assurance of present salvation".[60]

[57] English, .Donald .'John Wesley and the Rights of Conscience' *Journal of Church and State*, 37 (2), 1995. p.349-363.
[58] ibid, p.350.
[59] ibid, p.351.
[60] ibid, p.352.

Due to these perceived contradictions and inconsistencies in the detail of Wesley's understanding of Liberty, some might conclude that an in-depth study is a venture which is bound to highlight further inconsistency in Wesley's thinking and that it is enough to affirm that Wesley valued liberty and, most of all, the liberty that came through the freedom of religious expression. However, the fact that Wesley roots his understanding of liberty within 'conscience' is highly significant when we consider how Wesley's theology can relate to contemporary questions on liberty and equality in a human rights context.

English's scholarship clearly demonstrates that Wesley locates liberty within God's act of creation rather than a subsequent development within human history, making it distinct from those civil and political rights which he goes on to explain. Furthermore, Wesley also seeks to argue that this right is "indefeasible...[and]...inseparable from humanity"[61] thus very much a 'human right', a point which English does not explore in any significant depth. English's argument is confusing when he claims that Wesley believed the Glorious Revolution was the starting point for English Religious Liberty while also arguing that Wesley believed they had an ancient origin which long preceded those events. In stating that Wesley believed the revolution secured and guaranteed existing rights rather than sourcing them, he would seem to imply that the latter position was the correct position regarding Wesley's view. English goes on to examine the narrow scope of Wesley's understanding of religious liberty which he clearly believes has been compromised by an Anglican establishment mentality in relation to Catholics and dissenters. Wesley has no problem with these non-conformist expressions of the Christian faith being practised but

[61] ibid.

seeks to defend the exclusion from public office of individuals who refuse to adopt Anglican discipline. Wesley's views on liberty are thus problematic for Methodists living in the Twenty First Century and a simple transition from an 18th Century context, that ignores over two hundred years of history, is simply not possible. Methodist theology has continued to develop beyond Wesley and within a specific British context. This centrality on 'conscience', which English identifies in Wesley's thought, seems to have been an important thread that can be traced from Wesley to the present day. By examining the importance of 'conscience' in relation to the conceptualisation on 'liberty' and 'equality' it may be possible to begin to construct an approach to human rights that has a distinctly Wesleyan emphasis.

Conclusions

It is clear that there is a good selection of literature providing some historical background for a thesis which seeks to examine political concepts in British Methodism and how they relate to theological concepts. However, the weakness in the current literature is a lack of theological focus, the dominance of North American perspectives which do not address the contemporary British context, and a failure to engage with the contemporary public issues that the British Methodist church is tackling. This, in essence, encapsulates the problems that are evident in the majority of scholarship relating to Methodism which can only be rectified by new Methodist scholarship that seeks to be as theological as it is historical and applies to the various problems the church is facing in its British context. While there has been some limited work which examines Methodism's historical influence on politics in the late Nineteenth and

early Twentieth Century, there is a paucity of material on the continuing relevance of that influence today. Most disconcerting is that the church, in an endeavour to engage in public discourse, utilises a language of rights without a full appreciation of its rights ethic, which is a direct result of the lack of literature on the subject. There is consequently a significant need for further literature, underpinned by new research, that can provide guidance for the church on its theological heritage; with particular regard to Methodism's own understanding of 'liberty' and 'equality' that has been worked out over the last two hundred years. This lack of literature has arguably constrained the Methodist Church from constructing a human rights 'ethic' that is faithful to the theology of the church and its longstanding traditions. This thesis will make a distinctive contribution to the scholarship in this area, yet it must be acknowledged that there is a much wider, fruitful field for research that lies beyond the limited scope of this study.

Particular care must be taken when engaging with literature that has been produced within an American context. Not only is this literature hugely 'Wesleycentric', it also makes assumptions which are driven by American cultural concerns and perspectives. The generally subtle, and occasionally gaping, differences between British and American cultures should not be underestimated. These differences which permeate Methodist theology, due to the church's distinct and separated history that begins with a schism that starts with the War of Independence, must be recognised. Conversely an under appreciation of the importance of American Methodist theologians and their influence on British Methodism is also a danger. These scholars dominate contemporary Methodist scholarship and their works are hugely influential. Furthermore, Methodism is essentially a 'connexional' church with British

Methodism forming part of a worldwide fellowship. A failure to engage with the vast scholarship that exists beyond the British Isles would be a great folly.

When engaging with the historic approaches to John Wesley, it is vital to recognise the extent to which historians and theologians have attempted to portray him sympathetically and in keeping with their own preconceptions. This is particularly true when Wesleyan scholars have sought to define Wesley's political philosophy, with varying degrees of engagement with his theological works. Any attempt to engage with Wesley politically or theologically must be preceded by a number of important understandings. Firstly, that Wesley was deeply theological and any engagement with his political ideology must also explore the theological origins and rootedness of his political stances. Secondly, John Wesley was a man of his time; a high Anglican Tory living in Eighteenth Century England. Whilst familiar with the significant political and theological literature of his age and influenced by it, Wesley also had a great appreciation for medieval sacramentalism. Indeed, attempts to portray Wesley as an enlightenment figure rooted within the tradition of John Locke is an attempt to place Wesley within a political culture to which he is not well suited. Wesley was not a radical democrat or a liberal in his thinking, or a Nineteenth or Twentieth Century conservative who embraced laissez faire capitalism, or a socialist who wanted to see political power transferred to the people. Attempts to portray Wesley as a Jacobite non-juror, whether in his youth or at any point his life, lack sufficient evidence in order to justify this claim. Instead a more reasonable explanation would be that Wesley's Tory allegiances led him to have a critical perspective in relation to the Whig administration during his time at Oxford. Neither did Wesley experience a dramatic conversion from authoritarian

Toryism to an embrace of liberal conservatism. Wesley, from the outset, was as Weber states, an ‘organic constitutionalist’ who saw authority being derived from God, not the people, and Parliament ruling in partnership with the Crown. For American Methodists, like Weber, Wesley’s anti-democratic tendencies, combined with his criticism of the War of Independence, presents some significant challenges when constructing a Wesleyan political language. This is also true for British Methodists although to a lesser extent. Crucially this thesis, in combining theological-ethical and social-historical approaches, remedies the common failure in Methodist scholarship to conduct its historical and political analysis within a theological framework. Methodism and its social impact must be understood in relation to the theological beliefs and processes which form the basis of church practice. If Methodists in the Twenty First Century wish to better understand how ideas on ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’ can inform the church’s engagement on public issues, particularly on the subject of human rights, an engagement with Methodist Theology is essential. For these reasons this limited project can make a significant contribution to the current field of scholarship.

Chapter Two: John Wesley on Liberty

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of John Wesley's beliefs on liberty and place them in relationship with his theology. By doing this it will be possible in subsequent chapters to determine how Methodists have interpreted and applied Wesley's beliefs on liberty in the following centuries. In order to understand Wesley's beliefs, it is important to have some engagement with the political-historical issues of the Eighteenth Century, in which John Wesley was living. This begins with Wesley's formative family and childhood experiences; in particular, the influence of Wesley's parents. By exploring the political views of Wesley's parents, it is possible to understand the backdrop against which John Wesley's own political opinions emerged and appreciate the tensions and conflicts which had influenced him. After exploring his family background there will be a brief examination of the young John Wesley and his years at Oxford University, in order to determine the formative influences on him. Scholarly claims of Wesley's supposed Jacobite tendencies are investigated alongside arguments that he went on to adopt a more liberal ideology in later life. Following this is an analysis of Wesley's ideas applied to ecclesiastical and civil forms of government. This analysis provides an illuminating insight into some of the inconsistencies within Wesley's thoughts on liberty, the significance of which for Wesley's contemporaries and future generations of Methodists is examined in later chapters. This is followed by a further exploration of Wesley's beliefs in relation to social contract theory, governmental power and the liberty of conscience. Upon establishing John Wesley's political stances, in particular the

importance of 'the liberty of conscience' within his thought, two case studies will be analysed; Wesley's abolitionist attitudes regarding the slave trade and Wesley's reaction to the American War of Independence. These two cases provide an insight into how Wesley applied his thinking on liberty in relation to his theological and political beliefs.

The Wesley Family and Politics

During Wesley's lifetime, views as to how the English Constitution should be interpreted broadly fell into three camps; firstly, a decreasing number who were still supporting Jacobite absolutism; secondly, a large proportion who favoured a balanced constitution between Crown and Parliament (with Tories generally advocating a stronger role for the Monarchy and Whigs favouring the supremacy of Parliament); and thirdly, radicals ranging from those whose desires focused on an extended franchise, through to those who argued for the complete abolition of the monarchy to be replaced by a republican democracy. Wesley, instinctively a Tory, was in the second camp, although some scholars have unconvincingly attempted to portray him as either a Jacobite absolutist or a liberally minded democrat with radical leanings, at different times in his life. A commonly held tenet during the Eighteenth Century, which even some republicans (notably in the North American tradition) shared with John Wesley, was that the power and authority of the state derived from God, even if there were differences of opinions as to how civil governors should be appointed to office. This was a view that emanated from ideas rooted in the interpretation of the 'ancient English constitution' and the liberties guaranteed by it. In order to determine how John Wesley came to these conclusions it is necessary to explore the political wrangling that occurred within his own family in his youth.

During the early half of the Eighteenth Century the question of Hanoverian Succession dominated discourse surrounding political allegiances. These divisions were evident within the Wesley family through the differing opinions of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel was the grandson of a dissenting clergyman and received part of his early education within dissenting academies before enrolling at Exeter College, Oxford as an Anglican. He was known amongst his parishioners as being a High Anglican Tory, a position which led to threats, demonstrations by villagers and a suspected arson attack on the Epworth Rectory.[62] Susanna Wesley came from a similar background, growing up in the household of a non-conformist clergyman before converting to Anglicanism when she was thirteen. But while Samuel and Susanna had similar religious heritages and also shared a support for the Tories, there were significant differences in their religious and political views, including a fundamental disagreement on the matter of the succession to the crown.

Following the death of Queen Anne in 1714, the issue of Hanoverian succession became a major issue. George I, Elector of Hanover, succeeded Anne and although he was in the line of Stuart succession as the great grandson of James I, there were other supposed heirs higher in the Stuart line of succession. Parliament had, on several occasions, used its powers to block the direct successors of James II from taking the throne.[63] The Jacobites, who considered the Stuarts to be the rightful rulers, failed in their uprisings of 1715 and 1745 but the deep divisions about the line of succession continued to fester and were reflected in the Wesley household. Samuel was a loyal supporter of

[62] Stone, Ronald. *John Wesley's Life and Ethics*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press) p.37.
[63] See Weber, Theodore. *Politics in the Order of Salvation: New Directions in Wesleyan Political Ethics*, (Nashville TN, Kingswood Books), p.42-43.

the Hanoverian monarchy who, in his commentary on Job, apparently commented favourably about William III, describing the king as "the fittest hero".[64] Both Adam Clarke and John Newton conclude that Samuel's reference to the King when writing about Job is somewhat irrelevant, albeit remarkably sincere.[65] Susanna, in marked contrast, considered William to be a usurper of the Stuart throne. She makes her opinion clear in a written meditation where she reflects on the 1688 Revolution:

> "Whether they did well in driving a prince from his hereditary throne, I leave to their own consciences to determine; though I cannot tell how to think that a king of England can ever be accountable to his subjects for any maladministrations or abuse of power: but as he derives his power from God, so to Him only must he answer for his using it."[66]

These remarks by Susanna Wesley not only reflect a belief in Stuart succession but an endorsement of the Jacobite philosophy that underpinned it, i.e. a belief in the divine Right of Kings and the non-accountability of the monarch to his/her subjects. Almost inevitably these opposing perspectives led to tension between Samuel and Susannah, evidenced by the occasion when Susanna omitted to say "Amen" following a prayer for the King by Samuel. This was noticed by Samuel who, according to Susanna:

[64] Clarke, Adam. *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, (London, Kindle Edition from Amazon.co.uk), 2010, p.3252.
[65] Ibid, also see Newton, John A. *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism*, (London, Epworth Press), 2002, p.86-87.
[66] The Wesley Banner, IV, 1852, p.283 cited in Newton, John A. *Susanna Wesley*, p.87.

> "retired to his study and, calling me to him, asked me the reason of my not saying Amen to the prayer. I was a little surprised at the question and don't well know what I answered, but too well I remembered what followed: He immediately kneeled down and imprecated the divine vengeance upon himself and all his posterity if ever he touched me more or came to bed with me before I begged God's pardon and his, for not saying Amen to the prayer for the king."[67]

It is, however, illuminating to examine John Wesley's later description of these events, (which occurred before he was even born), which may indicate his own political sympathies:

> "'Sukey' said my father to my mother one day after family prayer, 'why did you not say *amen* this morning to the prayer for the king?' 'Because,' said she, 'I do not believe the Prince of Orange to be King.' If that be the case' said he, 'you and I must part; for if we have two kings, we must have two beds.' My mother was inflexible. My father went immediately to his study; and, after spending some time with himself, set out for London, where, being *convocation man* for the diocese of Lincoln, he remained without visiting his house for the remainder of the year. On March 8th in the following year, 1702, King William died; and both my mother and father were agreed as to the legitimacy of Queen Anne's title, the cause of the misunderstanding

[67] Letter of Susanna Wesley to Lady Yarborough (7th March 1702) cited in Weber, Theodore. *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.43.

> ceased. My father returned to Epworth, and conjugal harmony was restored."[68]

Although John's account appears both vivid and detailed, it may be inaccurate. As Newton observes, "[John] Wesley's account has on the one hand exaggerated the length of the quarrel, but on the other hand seriously underestimated its gravity".[69] Evidence from letters written by Susanna that came to light in 1953 indicate that following his disagreement with his wife, Samuel was seriously considering re-joining the Navy as a Chaplain and would thereby be living and working away from the family home.[70] However, a conversation with an unknown clergyman and, most notably, the occasion of a fire at the Epworth Rectory, apparently resulted in his return home.[71] Yet perhaps one of the most significant aspects of John Wesley's account is the reference to his mother being "inflexible". It does seem to imply a bias towards his father and thus his father's stance on the matter. This would seem to suggest that John Wesley was not only unsympathetic to the Jacobite cause but also appeared to be critical of his mother's principled stance. It is important to emphasise that Susanna Wesley's opposition and resistance to Hanoverian succession was an issue of conscience. As Weber observes, "The mother [Susanna] held clearly and firmly to all elements of divine right, and therefore the legitimacy of the Stuart monarchy only. However, she kept her opposition to the realm of conscience and did not engage in active resistance".[72] Alternately Samuel, while still believing in the divine source of authority and passive

[68] Clarke, Adam. *Memoirs of the Wesley Family*, p.2653.
[69] Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, p.88.
[70] ibid, p.90
[71] ibid, p.93
[72] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.46-47.

obedience to the monarch, supported the rule of William and Mary and "[t]herefore he abandoned (implicitly if not explicitly) the essential notion of indefeasible hereditary divine right."[73] It therefore appears that John Wesley's sympathies in relation to the constitutional settlement of 1688 were more in line with his father's supportive attitude than the non-juror objections of his mother. This is a significant factor to consider when piecing together John Wesley's views on the related issues of the English Constitution and liberty, which tends to refute the assertion that he was essentially a Jacobite.

John Wesley the Jacobite Non-Juror?

Despite evidence to the contrary there have been numerous attempts by Wesley scholars to identify the young John Wesley as Jacobite during his time at Oxford University. Weber notes that "[t]he broad consensus of writers on this aspect of Wesley's life and thought is that is that he was "Jacobitish" to one degree or another."[74] Some scholars, such as Elie Harvey, declare unequivocally that "John Wesley, at Oxford , was a Jacobite."[75] In contrast, V.H. Green believes that Wesley's "High-churchmanship carried with it a dislike of the Hanoverian regime which suggested an inclination to flirt with Jacobitism, but his inherent sense of loyalty and dislike of Roman Catholicism would never have made him a Jacobite in fact."[76] However, it is remarkable how little evidence there is for Wesley's apparent Jacobite leanings while studying at Oxford. Wesley's Diary does make reference to one occasion where he may have made a criticism of the King George I. After a conversation with a friend on

[73] ibid, p.47.
[74] ibid.
[75] Halevy, Elie. *The Birth of Methodism in England* trans and ed. Semmel, Bernard. (Chicago, Chicago University Press), 1971, p44.
[76] Green, V.H.H. *The Young Mr Wesley*, (New York, St Martin's Press), 1961, p.78.

14th December 1725, one year after graduating from Oxford with his BA, Wesley spoke "against King George". However, the diary also records that he made a resolution on the following Saturday that he would never do so again.[77] Moreover, the manner in which Wesley criticised the king is not clear,[78] and it did not necessarily relate to the issue of succession.

The government of the time, under Sir Robert Wadpole – generally considered to be the first Prime Minister of Great Britain - was a Whig administration that had sought to promote its party interests by appointing sympathetic Whig figures to both civil and ecclesiastical offices at the expense of the Tories. It seems likely that Wesley, as a loyal Tory, would have resented this favouritism towards the Whigs and thus any disgruntlement that he expressed with regard to the monarch is more likely to have been in the nature of a Tory objection to a Whig dominated Cabinet and its policies than an expression of Jacobite tendencies. Oxford was by its nature a Tory stronghold and Christ Church College, where Wesley was enrolled, particularly so. Anti-Whig sentiments were commonplace amongst contemporary scholars, but this did not necessarily equate to supporting the Stuarts, even if the Whigs attempted to paint the Oxonian Tories with a Jacobite brush.[79]

The conspicuous lack of primary evidence for Wesley's alleged support for the Stuart cause lends little credence to the notion that he was a Jacobite. There is similarly little evidence to indicate that Wesley was involved in any political activity during his youth. At Oxford, Wesley's time was dedicated to the

[77] ibid, p.202-3
[78] See Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.49-50.
[79] See Rack, Henry. *Reasonable Enthusiast – John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (London, Epworth Press), 2002, p.63 & 69.

activities of the Holy Club, whose members lived pious lives dedicated to charitable activities. As Weber observes:

> "at no time did they give themselves a particular political identification, express political motivation, or use their corporate existence for political purposes…Their motivations, self-definition, and activities were strictly religious. They stayed out of politics, including the politics of royal succession. Whatever they may have thought politically, they apparently did not do anything political."[80]

Despite the lack of political activism on Wesley's part while at Oxford, some commentators have highlighted a sermon preached by Wesley which allegedly contained material of a Jacobite character. Luke Tyerman states that on 11th June 1734 "Wesley preached before the university what his brother Charles called his 'Jacobite sermon' for which he was 'much mauled and threatened'".[81] It was assumed that this sermon had been lost, although Richard Heitzenrater believes it was the sermon entitled "The One Thing Needful," that was transcribed by Charles and published by his widow under her husband's name.[82] Yet as Weber observes:

> "There is nothing of explicit Jacobite character or reference in the text…It is a non-political, evangelical sermon on Wesley's central theme of the recovery of the image of God."[83]

[80] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.51.
[81] ibid, p.52.
[82] ibid.
[83] ibid.

However, it is arguable that there is a political undertone within the sermon where it questions whether “riches, or honour, or power” could be proper ends for mankind, or whether pursuing these goals in order to gain “preferment” was justified. Irrespective of whether this sermon was originally composed by John or Charles (and whether or not it was indeed the so-called ‘Jacobite sermon’), it might be possible to interpret part of it as an indirect attack on the Whig administration, but this is not conclusive evidence of either brother possessing Jacobite sympathies.[84] If Heitzenrater is not correct in identifying this lost sermon then the ‘Jacobite’ label remains something of a mystery, although may have been attached because the sermon implicitly criticised the Jacobite position. The fact that it was ‘mauled’ by fellow Oxonians would seem to suggest this was the case. The politics of Oxford University was predominantly Tory, with some elements of non-juror sympathies, and generally anti Whig. A controversial sermon which was unsympathetic to the Jacobite or Non-Juror position may have led to such an outburst. However, without firm and conclusive evidence of the sermon’s content it is difficult to ascertain why it was criticised. In any case Charles’s labelling it ‘Jacobite’ is far from conclusive evidence that John was expressing an opinion against Hanoverian succession.

In addition to accusations of Jacobite support, it has also been suggested that John Wesley may have been a non-juror. Whilst Wesley may have had connections with non-jurors, and may have admired their moral discipline together with their structured lives, there is little evidence of any meaningful engagement with non-juror political life.[85] As V.H.H Green points out, although many Oxford High Churchmen like Wesley may have found themselves in

[84] ibid.
[85] ibid, p.54.

sympathy with the theology of the non-jurors, that did not necessarily mean that they endorsed their political views.[86] Bernard Semmel asserts that Wesley was not only a Tory and a Jacobite but also "like his mentor William Law, he had even been a non-juror."[87] Semmel even suggests that "These were the politics of the entire Wesley family",[88] although this contention is countered by the evidence of entrenched political differences between Susanna and Samuel. Furthermore Semmel's apparent evidence, based on a definition of a non-juror cited by Wesley and taken from the German scholar J.L Mosheim, proves nothing in itself.[89] In contrast Mosheim believes that the clergy who refused to take an oath to William III possessed a "mistaken notion that James II, though banished from his dominions, remained, nevertheless, their rightful sovereign."[90] Thus Wesley's decision to cite Moshiem's work can in no way be construed as advocating support for a non-juror political perspective.[91] Furthermore there is no evidence to suggest that Wesley refused to take an oath when ordained by John Potter, Bishop of Oxford.[92] Thus while it is evident that John Wesley's experience in Oxford with the Holy Club had a significant and lasting effect on his religious views, there is very little evidence that contact with any Jacobite or non-juror scholars resulted in him adopting their political opinions.

[86] Green, V.H.H. *The Young Mr Wesley*, p.28.
[87] Semmel, Bernard. *The Methodist Revolution*, (London, Heinemann Educational Books), 1974, p.57.
[88] ibid.
[89] See Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.55-56.
[90] Mosheim, Johann Lorenz. *A concise ecclesiastical history, from the birth of Christ, to the beginning of the present century – Volume Four*, (London, J. Paramore, at the Foundry, Moorfields), 1781, p.115 accessed at Eighteenth Century Collections Online: http://0-find.galegroup.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW117376764&source=gale&userGroupName=exeter&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE (accessed: 1st July 2018).
[91] Weber agrees when he states that this evidence "In no sense can it be used to identify John Wesley as a non juror" see Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.56.
[92] ibid, p.56-57.

John Wesley and William Higden

Both Leon Hynson and Bernard Semmel believe that John Wesley was a Jacobite and non-juror in his early life, holding fundamental beliefs on "divine hereditary right, with its correlatives of passive obedience and non-resistance."[93] However, they also believe that later in his life Wesley became a political liberal. Hyson notes that between 1725 and 1734 Wesley read a number of political texts including George Berkeley's *Off Passive Obedience*, John Jackson's *The Duty of Subjects Towards Their Governors*, Gilbert Burnet's *History of His Own Times*, and William Highden's *A View of the English Constitution.*[94] In Hynson's view, Higden's work was "one of the important factors of change"[95] in Wesley's political thinking. Higden's work is primarily a defence of his acceptance of the political results of the Glorious Revolution. In his book Higden advanced the notion that the monarch wielded legitimate political authority whether he/she held the crown *de jure* or by *de facto*.[96] As Higden explains:

> "I begin with the…Kings *de jeur*, who cut out their way to the throne with their swords, and the Destruction of the Rival Kings *de facto*, and yet the most unlikely to acknowledge them; and yet we find their Authority as much acknowledged by these kings *de jure*, as that of any of their ancestors of the clearest Title".[97]

[93] Hynson, Leon O. 'Human Liberty as Divine Right: A Study in the Political Maturation of John Wesley' *Journal of Church and State*, Volume 25(1), 1983, p.57-85 at p.71.
[94] ibid, p.66.
[95] ibid.
[96] ibid, p.67.
[97] Higden, William. *A View of the English Constitution with Respect to the Sovereign Authority of the Prince, and the Allegiance of the Subject. In Vindication of the Lawfulness of Taking Oaths to Her Majesty by Law required.* 3rd edition (London, S.Keble), 1710**.** p.8-9.

Higden utilises both statute and common law to justify his argument that de facto monarchs had to be submitted to in the same manner as monarchs de jure. As a result "Higden supported hereditary succession, but he also supported the monarch who comes to power, even if by revolution".[98] Higden further evidences his argument by citing Deuteronomy 17:15[99] and arguing that while the Jewish people had been forbidden from placing non-Israelites on the throne, they still submitted themselves to foreign rulers at certain times. Furthermore, he cites Jesus' command to "render to Caesar what is Caesar's" as further evidence which suggests that Jesus did not "resolve the Lawfulness of their subjection to Caesar, into his Right to the Government of Judea, but into his Possession of it".[100] Higden's final argument is that government is instituted for the people, and if the king is removed from power and cannot provide the "Benefits of Government," then "it is not reasonable that they, for whom Government was instituted, should lose all benefits of it."[101] Thus Higden affirms "that Government was made for *Man*, and not Man for *Government*."[102] Although this does not provide a justification for a revolution or resistance to the sovereign in itself, Higden does recognise the ability of people to form new government:

> "that after they have done what they can do to preserve their *Prince*, they are at Liberty to *preserve themselves*, under a new government, when

[98] Hynson, Leon O. 'Human Liberty as Divine Right" p.68.
[99] "you may indeed set over you a king whom the LORD your God will choose. One of your own community you may set as king over you; you are not permitted to put a foreigner over you, who is not of your own community." (Deuteronomy 17:15) *The Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, (London, William Collins), 2018.
[100] Higden, William. *A View of the English Constitution*, p.91.
[101] ibid, p.99.
[102] ibid.

> the Prince can neither defend himself, them, nor his Government over them."[103]

Higden therefore pragmatically recognises that when a sovereign can no longer provide security for himself or the people, a new government could be formed.

There has been some debate amongst scholars as to the extent of Hidgen's influence on Wesley through his thesis which John first read in 1733. The significance that has been attributed to it stems from a comment Wesley made in a letter to James Brewer dated 22nd February 1750 in which he wrote: "With disregard to my political principles, I have never had any doubt since I read Mr Higden's *'View of the English Constitution'* which I look upon as one of the best-wrote books I have ever seen in the English tongue."[104] Hynson believes that this statement is clear evidence that "indicates Higden made a major contribution to Wesley's political maturation."[105] Hynson regards this as evidence of Wesley's conversion from Jacobitism to a form of liberal constitutionalism. However, Weber disagrees, arguing that Higden's book "confirmed Wesley's existing political principles; it did not precipitate a shift of loyalty from the Stuarts to the Hanoverians."[106] Weber argues that an item of correspondence between John Wesley and Samuel Wesley Jnr, dated 22nd May 1727, indicated their understanding of the monarch's subservience to the rule of Law. In it John asks: "What you understand as spoken of rulers, I expressly say of private men: 'As well every ruler as every private man must act in a legal

[103] ibid, p.112.
[104] John Wesley to James Brewster 22nd February 1750 in Telford, *Letters*, 3:32, cited in Hynson, Leon O. 'Human Liberty as Divine Right" p.69.
[105] Hynson, Leon O. 'Human Liberty as Divine Right" p.69.
[106] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.60.

way'."[107] This would appear to confirm that John Wesley did believe that sovereigns were subject to the rule of law and therefore placed him within the constitutionalist camp. While Wesley clearly respected Higden's thesis, this does not substantiate some form of political conversion akin to Wesley's religious conversion during his Aldersgate experience. Instead, Wesley may have taken note of Higden's pragmatic approach to government; a pragmatism which was to emerge in Wesley's own thinking when he was subsequently endeavouring to organise the Methodist Societies.

John Wesley – The Contractarian?

Although scholars may differ about when Wesley became a liberal constitutionalist, the majority of them endorse the belief that at some point he was one. Yet affirming this point does not in itself illuminate the type of liberal constitutionalism to which Wesley subscribed. When seeking evidence in this connection, it is appropriate to assess Wesley's attitude to Locke's views about 'social contractarianism' and whether this appears to have influenced Wesley's thoughts on rights and liberties.

John Locke (1632-1704) was arguably one of the most influential political writers of the Seventeenth Century whose '*Two Treatise of Government'* (1689) was a rejection of the absolutism of Sir Robert Filmer and Thomas Hobbes. As Peter Lassett notes, Locke effectively challenged the interpretation of "the texts of the Old Testament which Filmer had used to justify patriarchal kingship"[108] demonstrating that they could not apply to the contemporary sovereign. More

[107] Wesley, John *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume X (New York, J&J Harper), 1827. p.456.
[108] Laslett, Peter (ed). *Locke – Two Treatises of Government*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press), 2010, p.69.

significantly, Locke believed that political authority can only be derived from a social contract and as "Men being…by nature all free, equal and independent, no-one can be put out of his estate and subjected to the political power of another without his own consent."[109] It cannot be underestimated how influential this work would transpire to be within western political thought, but the key question is to what extent it influenced Wesley's thinking. Fredrick Dreyer considers that there was a form of "silent agreement" between Wesley and Locke rather than "open endorsement."[110] The basis for this agreement is that Locke and Wesley "both subscribe to a doctrine of natural rights and a doctrine of contract."[111] While there is debatable evidence to substantiate the former assertion, Wesley repudiated 'social contractarianism' in civil government, declaring that the idea that political authority derives from contract was "utterly indefensible…[even]…though Mr Locke himself should attempt to defend it".[112] Instead Wesley saw political authority emanating from above as part of a hierarchy.[113] However, Dreyer suggests a nuanced interpretation here, arguing that "in denying contract, Wesley did not deny the theoretical premise that prescribed contract as a necessary assumption to account for political authority." Dreyer seeks to support his somewhat fragile distinction simply by reference to what he sees as a fundamental inconsistency in Wesley's thoughts: "How Wesley could consistently admit natural right premises and reject social-contract conclusions, is not at all clear".[114] However, Wesley was not renowned for being an entirely systematic and consistent thinker and his

[109] Laslett, Peter (ed). *Locke – Two Treatises of Government*, p.330.
[110] Dreyer, Fredrick. 'Edmund Burke and John Wesley: the legacy of Locke' in Crimmins, James (ed). *Religion, Secularisation and Political Thought – Thomas Hobbes to J.S Mill*, (London, Routledge), 1990, p.118.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Wesley, John & Jackson T (ed). *The Works of John Wesley – Volume X1*, (Grand Rapids MI, Baker Books), 1979, p.104.
[113] Wesley, John *Thoughts concerning the origin of Power* (Bristol, W.Pine), 1772, p.3.
[114] Dreyer, Fredrick. 'Edmund Burke and John Wesley: the legacy of Locke' p.118.

theology tended to be situational and contextual.[115] Moreover, by his own admission he did not claim to being an intellectual philosopher:

> "I design plain truth for plain people…of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate reasoning's; and as far as possible from even the show of learning." [116]

Wesley's inconsistent thoughts confused John Fletcher, one of Wesley's compatriots, who, when defending Wesley against his critics in 1774 and 1775, made three separate attempts to define Methodist thought on political authority in order to come to the 'correct' Wesleyan conclusion. In his second piece of writing Fletcher wrote that God-given power was only operative if the government 'retains the consent of the majority.'[117] However, it wasn't until his third attempt that he successfully described Wesley's views as where:

> "the consent of the majority is necessary to support civil government, as is the consent of soldiers in the army. It is a tactic, not a formal act of consent, and it is not the source of authority, merely the requisite without which authority could not be exercised".[118]

Thus, it would be reasonable to deduce that while Wesley recognised the operation of consent, and perhaps a form of contractarianism within civil government, he did not consider it to be the source of political authority, which

[115] Yrigoyen, Charles. *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism*, (London, Bloomsbury T&T Clark), 2014. p.453.
[116] Wesley, John. *The Works of the Rev John Wesley in Ten Volumes*, (New York, J&J Harper) 1826, Vol 5 p.3.
[117] Fletcher, John. *A vindication of Mr Wesley's Calm Address…*, 1776 cited in Hole, Robert. *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England 1760-1832*, p.24.
[118] ibid.

was derived from God. This explanation would seem to be congruent with both Dreyer's and Hempton's belief that Locke's contractarianism played a more important role in Wesley's understanding of ecclesia, or more precisely the Methodist Societies, than it did in civil government.[119] For Wesley, the relationship between priest and congregant appears to be one of consent:

> "I took upon me no authority...than any steward of a Society exerts by the consent of the other members. I did neither more nor less than declare that they who had broken our rules were no longer of our society".[120]

This suggests that Wesley did not interpret his role as a Priest within the Methodist Connexion as meaning that he had supernatural authority over and above its constituent members. Wesley saw his authority as leader of the Methodist people as relying on the consent of the membership. As Wesley explained, "All I affirm is…the people who choose to be under my care, choose to be so on the same terms they were at first."[121] Thus Wesley believed he was acting as "one whom that Society had voluntarily chosen to be head of them" which implies a form of contractarianism. Dreyer observes that the term 'society' was used with "evident deliberation" to ensure that Methodists were nor regarded as a separate Church from the Anglican Communion.[122] Dreyer emphasises Wesley's conviction that the consent of believers was essential to

[119] See Dreyer, Fredrick. 'Edmund Burke and John Wesley: the legacy of Locke' in Crimmins, James (ed). *Religion, Secularisation and Political Thought*, p.118 and Hempton, David. *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, Yale University Press), 2005, p.51.
[120]Wesley, John & Jackson T (ed). *The Works of John Wesley,* p.239.
[121] Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, Volume V, (J Emory and B Waugh, New York), 1831. p.221.
[122] Dreyer, Fredrick. 'Edmund Burke and John Wesley: the legacy of Locke', in Crimmins, James (ed). *Religion, Secularisation and Political Thought*, p.119.

underpin the authority of the Church[123] and Hempton also supports this conclusion:

> "Wesley's conception of the church was based not upon apostolic authority, confessional orthodoxy, or state coercion, but rather on the free consent of individuals to form voluntary association."[124]

Closely linked to this was Wesley's belief that every man had a right to private judgement:

> "every man must judge for himself, because every man must give an account of himself to God. Consequently, this is an indefeasible right; it is inseparable from humanity".[125]

While this certainly did not amount to an outright rejection of Episcopal authority exercised by Anglican Bishops, it seems that John Wesley's overriding concerns for his developing movement were laced with pragmatism. It was through various debates with his Anglican critics who claimed various 'irregularities' in the way Methodism organised itself, that Wesley came to the opinion that order in the church should, in Rack's words, "simply be what is expedient and necessary for sustaining the preaching of the gospel and fostering its fruits."[126]:

[123] ibid, p.120.
[124] Hempton, David. *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, p.51.
[125] Wesley, John. *Thoughts upon the origin of Liberty*, London, 1772 p.10.
[126] Rack, Henry. *Reasonable Enthusiast – John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (London, Epworth Press), 2002, p.237.

> "I think [Bishop Stillingfleet] has unanswerably proved that 'neither Christ nor her [sic] apostles *prescribed* any particular form of government, and that the plea of the divine right for diocesan episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive church."[127]

This indicates that Wesley's attitude was one of openness to new opinions and was informed by his own practical experiences. However, it would be wrong to assume that this meant he had changed his views on the importance of ordained clergy presiding at the sacraments, even though he came to accept the role the laity could play as class leaders and as preachers. While Wesley may have encouraged consent and contractarianism within his Methodist societies, he certainly did not extend this to bring about a form of spiritual democracy. As Wesley himself declared in 1790:

> "As long as I live the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists. We have not and never had any such custom. We are no republicans, and never intend to be".[128]

Evidence for Wesley's views of his authority within Methodism can be garnered from the Conference held in 1766 which debated a complaint that Wesley had too much power.[129] Wesley's response was an account of how, in November 1738, he had been asked by a group of people to pray and advise them. He also outlined how various Methodist preachers had done the same. Wesley also

[127] See the *Arminian Magazine*, 1779, p.598-601. Cited in Baker, Frank. *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London, Epworth Press), 2000. p.146.
[128] Wesley, John. 'A letter to John Mason' (3th January 1790) in Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of The Reverend John Wesley*, Volume VII, (New York, B Waugh & T Mason), 1835. p.98
[129] Rack, Henry, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.247.

explained that the Conference had been called to advise him, not to govern the Connexion. He concluded by stating that "To me the people in general will submit, but they will not submit to any other."[130] As Rack observes, this statement is both 'revealing' and 'ingenious'. Wesley is emphasising that nobody is compelled to accept his authority, but if they do, they must submit to him on the terms on which they started with him.[131] This is a form of contract theory, but it is one that relies on an autocratic form of leadership, where authority is invested in Wesley and not shared. In this sense Wesley was profoundly undemocratic and this was a concept which he saw as applicable to civil government as well as the Church.

In summary, Wesley's declared attitude towards contractarianism was confusing. He repudiated the theory of the social contract when applied to government and civil society but implemented aspects of contractarianism in his consensual approach to organisation within the Methodist societies. This confusion was inevitable due to Wesley's failure to reconcile his insistence that all authority derived from God with a theory of social contract which appears to have been applied within Methodist Societies. This tension will be further explored when considering John Wesley's views on government and, more specifically, democracy.

Wesley on Governmental Power

Political authority, in John Wesley's view, was authority to govern that came from God and not from the people. One of his most significant writings

[130] See ibid.
[131] ibid.

concerning the issue of governmental authority derives from his "Thoughts concerning the Origin of Power"[132]. He began by defining his terms:

> "By power, I here mean supreme power, the power over life and death, and consequently over our liberty and property, and all things of an inferior nature".[133]

Wesley's concern with the origin of power indicates a belief that power requires some form of authorisation. Wesley vehemently believed that all power was ultimately authorised by God, who is its ultimate source. However, this does raise the interesting question articulated by Weber, namely: "Whether there is any supreme power that is not authorised, or whether the existence and possession of such power constitute *prima facie* evidence of authorisation."[134] Wesley does not appear to address this question, which leads to the presumption that in his thought God "ordains whatever power achieves supremacy by whatever methods." [135] This is hugely problematic if we are attempting to portray Wesley as a liberal, as it would seem to suggest that he is quite content to recognise the authorised power of a tyrannical or oppressive government. Absolute monarchies were included in Wesley's descriptions of supreme powers that he considered were divinely authorised[136] and as Weber highlights: "Their absolutism apparently has no bearing on their status as authorised powers."[137] Wesley's justification for this position he derives directly from Romans 13, yet it should not be seen as a specific defence of absolute

[132] Wesley, John. *Thoughts concerning the Origin of Power*, (Bristol, W Pine), 1772.
[133] ibid, p.3
[134] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.205.
[135] ibid.
[136] Wesley, John. *Thoughts concerning the Origin of Power*, cited in Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.206.
[137] ibid.

monarchy. Wesley appears to accept the authority of democratic republics e.g. the Dutch United Provinces where Wesley saw power derived from God being vested within the constituent states.[138] There is, as Weber observes, a potential contradiction here:

> "Wesley could concede legitimisation to a form of government dependent on authorisation from the people governed…while insisting, without sense of contradiction, that its authorisation came from above."[139]

This contradiction could have been overcome if Wesley had been arguing that God was authorising the government via the people, i.e. that in a democracy, God may work through the people in order to bring certain governors or elected representatives to power, but Wesley does not develop his argument along these lines. Instead he cautioned against ideas which would legitimate the concept of power being derived through the people as this could lead to arguments that the electoral franchise should be extended to all people (including women and children), a proposition which he confidently believed his readership would reject outright.[140]

Despite his underlying concerns about democratic forms of governance, Wesley remained a constitutionalist in his thinking. For in his tract "*Some Observations on Liberty*", Wesley refers to both king and Parliament being "the supreme power of my country."[141] Thus, as Weber observes, "If the supreme power is the

[138] ibid.
[139] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.207.
[140] Wesley, John. *Thoughts concerning the Origin of Power*, p.5-7.
[141] Cited in Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation,* p.209.

king and Parliament together, it cannot be the king alone."[142] However, Weber also notes that Wesley's affirmation of this constitutional set-up is inconsistent with other statements which refer to monarchs legitimately holding supreme power.[143]

Weber highlights the fact that Wesley did not refer to limited monarchy as an example of government in his "Origins of Power" tract and believes this was because Wesley's "efforts were consumed with refuting the arguments of the Lockeans, not with making his own position truly consistent and coherent".[144] While Wesley's theory of sovereignty may be compatible with a system of government based upon constitutional limits on power, it is still not a comprehensively liberal theory in the modern sense. As Weber observes, Wesley's:

> "general theory of authority served, therefore, as a limiting principle for his constitutionalism, confining it essentially to the supremacy of law and the reciprocity and balance of royal and parliamentary power, and excluding the need for greater diffusion of participation and control."[145]

The importance of this will become evident in the following chapter. However, it is important to stress at this point that Wesley was not a liberal constitutionalist along the lines of Thomas Paine or other radical thinkers of his era. Wesley was not a democratic thinker, and although many of his social ideas may have had egalitarian undertones, he was determined to defend the constitutional

[142] Weber, *Politics of Salvation*, p.209.
[143] ibid.
[144] ibid.
[145] ibid, p.210.

settlement of 1688 against any of the new liberal ideologies regarding civil and political rights. The need to accept top down rather than bottom up forms of government was fundamental to Wesley's philosophy due to his fervent belief in divine authorisation. Wesley was not, of course, advocating that government could enjoy a carte blanche mandate to pursue any policies, and he made it clear that in order for there to be good government, fundamental liberties must be protected because government itself is subject to the divine will.

One further interesting aspect of Wesley's political thinking related to the accountability of members of parliament. As government did not gain its authority from the electorate but from God, Wesley regarded Members of Parliament as accountable to God rather than their constituents:

> "It is a trust, but not from the people: 'There is no power but of God.' It is a delegation, namely, from God; 'for rulers are God's ministers,' or delegates."[146]

Yet despite this belief in authority being derived entirely from God, Wesley still recognised the representative role that Parliamentarians played in relation to their electorate, as can be seen in his reply to a letter written by Mr Price:

> "I really thought, not the grass, or corn, or trees, but the men of England, were represented in Parliament…Here is Mr Burke; pray, what does he

[146] Wesley, John *'Observations on Liberty'* in *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley,* (New York, Emory and Waugh) 1831, Vol.VI p.311

represent? 'Why, the city of Bristol.' What, the buildings so called; or the ground whereon they stand? Nay, the inhabitants of it."[147]

Wesley therefore had high ethical expectations of governing officials acting in a manner which took into account wider concerns of society beyond their own self interests. However, there does appear to be some conflict between Wesley's ideas concerning the appropriate qualifications to be Church leaders as compared to political representatives. In his Journal on May 30th 1759, Wesley noted with concern the method of choosing elders within the Church of Scotland:

"And what of these [elders]? Men of great sense and deep experience? Neither one, nor the other. But they are the *richest* men in the parish. And are the *richest*, of course, the *best* and the *wisest* men? Does the Bible teach this? I fear not. What manner of Governors then will these be? Why, they are generally just as capable of governing a parish, as of commanding an army."[148]

In contrast, Wesley urged Methodist Societies to ensure that they "Put the most insignificant leader in each class in charge of it."[149] Jennings sees this as an example of where Wesley's distrust of the rich led to the empowerment of the poor within Methodism. It seems contradictory that Wesley wanted leadership within the Church to emanate from humble backgrounds when he did not seem

[147] ibid.
[148] Wesley, John *'The Journal of John Wesley'* (Wednesday 30th May 1759) in Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume IV, (New York, B Waugh & T Mason), 1835. p.25. Also, see Jennings, Theodore. *Good News to the Poor*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press), 1990, p.65.
[149] Wesley, John. 'Letter to Mr John Cricket' February 10th 1783 in John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume VII, (New York, B Waugh & T Mason), 1831, p.256.

to have a problem with the leaders of government coming almost exclusively from the wealthy aristocracy. Neither did he seem to object to the widespread corruption which plagued Eighteenth Century elections in the 'rotten boroughs', which permitted candidates to buy their way into Parliament. This would seem to be one of the greatest inconsistencies within Wesley's thinking, which is compounded by a distrust of democracy; explored further in Chapter Three. Wesley's failure to apply his Methodist egalitarian ideas concerning ecclesiastical government to the wider civil society and its governance structures demonstrates an inconsistency of thought and/or an expedient resort to pragmatic measures to achieve his objectives, with which observers and critics became familiar. Indeed, Wesley himself seemed to recognise this, noting that his opinions concerning the origin of governmental authority were in contradiction to "men of understanding and education…in almost every civilised nation." [150]

It is therefore evident that John Wesley's views on politics and governmental authority form an important backdrop to his beliefs on liberty and rights. During his youth he learned of his parents' conflicting opinions concerning the 'Glorious Revolution' and he was subsequently exposed to the widespread political ideas and arguments that related to the resulting constitutional settlement. However, far from being the liberal radical that some scholars have attempted to portray him as, or alternatively the entrenched authoritarian defending Jacobite absolutism, Wesley was a constitutionalist who believed that power derived from God and should be exercised responsibly. Furthermore, despite the tensions and contradictions which are apparent in much of Wesley's thinking

[150] Wesley, John *Thoughts concerning the origin of Power*, p.5.

and which indicated a lack of a systematic approach on his part towards government and politics, Wesley clearly had a deep and genuine concern for the ‘good’ and ethical exercise of political power. However, Wesley’s complex, often conflicting, thoughts about politics and civil government presented problems for him when he was later rationalising his approach to liberty, which requires further exploration.

John Wesley on the liberty of conscience

As established, John Wesley favoured limited constitutional forms of government over an absolute monarchy, even if he believed that both legitimately wielded power. The reason for this favouritism was built on the notion that such a government was in the best position to uphold long established English liberties. However, in order to fully understand Wesley’s approach to liberty it is necessary to explore his own definition and ethic of liberty, and the unique tensions that exist within his thoughts. His thinking can then be further explored through the examination of two important case studies, namely, Wesley’s thoughts on the American War of Independence and on Slavery. This will provide the means for exploring the aforementioned tensions. The aim of this chapter is to place John Wesley’s political beliefs in relationship with his specific views on liberty and to relate them back to his theological and missiological beliefs. This understanding of Wesley’s politics, rooted within his theology, is vital and may provide a degree of illumination when exploring more of the problematic aspects of his writings; in particular his opposition to popular and democratic forms of government as well as the confusion that can arise when reading his thoughts on natural rights. The picture that will emerge is one which stands in marked contrast to secular liberal rights theories, providing a

theologically grounded perspective which seeks to locate liberty in relationship with duties and responsibilities before God.

The Liberty of Conscience and its Social Location

Whilst Wesley was undoubtedly a Tory in his politics, he still had a firm belief in the importance of natural liberty:

> "Every man living, as a man has a right to this [liberty], as he is a rational creature. The Creator gave him this right when he endowed him with understanding. And every man must judge for himself, because every man must give an account of himself to God. Consequently, this is an indefeasible right; it is inseparable from humanity. And God did never give authority to any man, or any number of men, to deprive any child of man thereof, under any colour or pretence whatever."[151]

Liberty, therefore, is of central importance to Wesley, and is deeply rooted within his own theological understanding of the relationship between God and humankind. Thus, in order to understand Wesley's wider concept of liberty it is crucial that we place it within the context of his theology and teachings.

For Wesley, first and foremost was the importance of the "liberty to choose our own religion"[152] and, following that, the freedom "to worship God according to

[151] Wesley, John. *'Some Observations on Liberty'*, (London/Edinburgh) 1772, p.4.
[152] The Works of John Wesley, 11:37 and 11:19 see English, Donald. 'John Wesley and the Rights of Conscience', *Journal of Church and State*, 37(2): p.349-363 at p.350.

our own conscience, according to the best light we have".[153] This concept of 'conscience' was explored extensively by Wesley in his Sermon on the matter[154] and in his 'Notes on the New Testament'.[155] Wesley observed that while conscience may "be termed natural, because it is found in all men; yet properly speaking, it is not natural but a supernatural gift from God…".[156] Wesley's understanding of the nature of conscience is therefore very different from the secular conception as he also gives it, as Hynson observes, "a Christological referent" equating it "with the light which enlightens every man, that is Jesus Christ."[157] However, John English believes that Wesley's definitions of 'religious liberty' and 'conscience' are inconsistent and that his words "do not fit together". He notes that conscience for Wesley "focused on moral choices, or fulfilling the commandments of Christ".[158] English argues that:

> "Conscience…presupposes an individual who has not made a religious commitment…The act of conscience, for him or her, is an act of intellect, or assent to a set of propositions".[159]

This problem is compounded by Wesley's ambiguity when explaining the origin of conscience, as at one point he appears "uncertain whether man 'in a state of innocence' possessed the moral sense or conscience.[160] Generally however, Wesley seems to ground conscience in a creative gift received from God, which

[153] ibid.
[154] See Wesley, John. 'On Conscience' also known as *'Sermon XII: Witness of our own Spirit'* (1767). Accessed via http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/105/ (1/11/11)
[155] See Wesley, John. *The New Testament with Explanatory Notes by J Wesley*, (William Nicholson and Son, Halifax), 1869. Accessed at: http://bit.ly/H06mWr (1/11/11)
[156] Ibid.
[157] Hynson, Leon. 'John Wesley's Concept of the Liberty of Conscience" *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Volume 7, Spring 1972, p.36-46 at p.37.
[158] English, Donald. '*John Wesley and the Rights of Conscience*', p.352.
[159] ibid
[160] Hynson, Leon. *'John Wesley's Concept of the Liberty of Conscience'*, p.37

he incorporates into a broad concept of "preventing grace" - a negative aspect of prevenient grace.[161] Perhaps one of the reasons for Wesley's failure to integrate his thoughts was his own reluctance to use terms that involved nature, such as natural law and natural right. English argues that Wesley believed that appeals to nature were appeals to secular concepts as it was his belief that "nature" was being used as a justification for an autonomous and self-regulating universe.[162] He contends that Wesley rejected this concept as unscriptural, preferring to emphasise the subservience of human beings and the rest of the creator order, to God.[163] This suspicion of 'natural rights' language does not, however, appear to be consistent with other statements made by Wesley where he claims that "Every nation…has a natural liberty to enjoy their own laws, and their own religions"[164] and also, on another occasion, stating that liberty of conscience is "that liberty which every man may claim as his right by the law of God and nature."[165] Perhaps a more accurate assertion is that while Wesley touched upon the possibility of natural law origins of rights, he failed to fully develop this idea, either out of a conscious reluctance to do so due to the suspicions outlined by English or simply due to inconsistency in his thought. Other Wesleyan scholars have concluded that Wesley supported a form of "natural rights Arminianism"[166] while rejecting any notion that Wesley was a "natural rights democrat".[167] Wesley's opinions in these matters therefore appear to be undeveloped and imprecise.

[161] Wesley, John, *'On Conscience'* Accessed at: http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-105-on-conscience/ (Accessed 1/08/19)
[162] English, Donald. 'John Wesley and the Rights of Conscience', p.353.
[163] ibid.
[164] Wesley, John. *Some Observations on Liberty*, (Edinburgh), 1776, p.30 (Para 48).
[165] Wesley, John. 'Letter to Reverend Richard Wanley' (Dean of Ripon), July 9th 1766 cited in Wesley, John. Emory, John (ed). *The Works of Reverend John Wesley*, Volume VI (New York, J Collord), 1835, p.760.
[166] Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution*, p.62.
[167] ibid, p.94

Despite that lack of development in some areas of his thought, Wesley does appear to have a high regard for the importance of liberty and its importance within being human. For Wesley, liberty was not only connected to the human attribute of rationality but essential to the human condition. As he explains in his Sermon "The General Deliverance":

> "He [man] was, after the likeness of his Creator, endued with *understanding*, a capacity of apprehending whatever objects were brought before it, and judging concerning them. He was endued with a *will*, exerting itself in various affections and passions; and, lastly with *liberty*, or freedom of choice, without which all the rest would have been in vain, and he would have been no more capable serving his Creator than a piece of earth or marble. He would have been as incapable of vice or virtue as any part of the inanimate creation. In these, in the power of self-motion, understanding, will and liberty, the natural image of God consisted".[168]

Wesley therefore grounds liberty in humankind's free choice to embody God's creational intention for them and, for Wesley, it is through the prevenient grace, justifying and sanctifying grace of God that humans can recover a lost liberty intended for all human beings.[169] As Weber notes, "Wesley did not believe in the persistence through time of the natural liberty of original creation, but rather

[168] Wesley, John. 'The Great Deliverance: A Sermon" in Wesley, John. *Sermons on Several Occasions*, Volume V (Ezekiel Cooper & John Wilson, New York), 1806 p.119 accessed at: http://bit.ly/GXB6oV (1/11/11)
[169] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.307.

in the possibility for liberty of the will in the context of grace."[170] Thus Wesley places his understanding of liberty in a clear theological and social context that is a rejection of John Locke's secular notion that human beings are in anyway autonomous from divine sovereignty. Weber articulates this further - "what makes religious liberty a natural *right* for him is not the sanctity of rational freedom itself but what it implies for a person's relationship to God".[171] Consequently, Weber argues, Wesley believes that "Religious liberty is a liberty to choose our own religion, to worship God…according to best light we have"[172]. For Wesley, the personal conversion meant that each individual must be able to choose a life that is faithful to God and any stumbling block to this, which included state coercion, was fundamentally wrong. Weber thus asserts that Wesley saw "coercing another person's religious belief [as] more than a violation of a right; it is a usurpation of the responsibility for one's eternal destiny."[173]

It seems that Wesley was concerned that there was more at stake than simply a liberal freedom; it was the very soul of the believer that could be placed at risk, and for Wesley the greatest risk was not punishment by the civil authorities but the punishment that could be inflicted by God. For this reason, no Christian could be compelled by any conscience but his own. As Wesley explains:

> "Yet again: are we to be guided by our *own* conscience or by that of other men? You surely will not say that any man's conscience can preclude mine. You, at least will not plead for robbing us of what you so

[170] ibid, p.307.
[171] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.32.
[172] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.323.
[173]ibid.

> strongly claim for yourselves: I mean, the right of private judgement, which is indeed inalienable from reasonable creatures. You well know that unless we faithfully follow the dictates of our own mind we cannot have 'a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.'"[174]

Thus liberty is inextricably linked with the idea of accountability to God, and although reason may play a part in understanding it, as Weber articulates "the true location of the right is in the divine-human relationship"[175] and it is "not in reason apart from God".[176] This emphasis on the divine-human relationship is crucial in establishing accountability to God as the reason for the liberty conscience but of major importance for Christians is the constitutional order that guarantees this.[177] The scope of this guarantee was required to go beyond the private and personal observance of the faith to ensure that public and collective expressions could also be protected by the state. The recognition of the public nature of religious liberty was of such fundamental importance to Wesley that he saw it as a natural right that must be exercised within a society.[178] Thus societal structures and institutions had to incorporate the recognition of this right within the very fabric of their being and while legal systems and codes were not the origins of rights, they were necessary to give expression to them. As Weber observes, liberty may be recognised in laws and traditions but "its authority as a right precedes such institutionalisation."[179] This leads Webber to affirm Wesley's place within a natural rights tradition "at least on this point".[180]

[174] Wesley, John. 'An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion' in Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, Volume V, (J Emory and B Waugh, New York), 1831, p.8 accessed at: http://bit.ly/GXD5tp (accessed: 1/11/11).
[175] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.234.
[176] ibid.
[177] See ibid.
[178] ibid, p.328.
[179] ibid.
[180] ibid.

Rights and Wesley's Social Ethic

Wesley's views on rights can be misconstrued if they are not placed within the wider context of his thinking. For Wesley, considerations of rights were completely interwoven with the entire constitutional and societal order. Most importantly the question of rights had become one of the major political topics of the Eighteenth Century which, due to the symbiotic nature that existed between religion and politics during this period, touched upon questions of a theological nature. For Wesley, "the appeal to religious liberty as natural right functions as a critical principle within an established order of law and government."[181] However, it would be incorrect to assume that Wesley gave all rights the same fundamental status. Wesley saw rights relating to the political sphere as positive rather than natural rights, which means that they were "rights that emerge in time and not from eternity, and that are traceable to historical conflicts and decisions…"[182]. There have been suggestions by some scholars that Wesley believed that the origin of political liberties in England could be found in the 'Glorious Revolution'. However, in his "*Thoughts upon Liberty*" Wesley refers to the ancient Briton's resistance of invading Roman armies, the struggles of the "Cambro-Britons" against the Saxons, and the English barons against their kings as examples of the "desirableness of liberty".[183] Thus Wesley is aware that the historic rights struggle is rooted in a much older tradition than merely the events of 1688. These political rights were distinctive from other rights, such as religious freedom, as they find their genesis within historical developments. As Weber explains, "In Wesley's thinking…the constitution is…. a historic

[181] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.328.
[182] ibid, p.313.
[183] Wesley, John. *Thoughts upon Liberty*, p.1.

growth and a web of relationships".[184] Thus Wesley was not an absolutist regarding political rights, but would advocate a situation where the constitutional order preserved those freedoms which related to the liberty of conscience.

Perhaps one of Wesley's greatest contributions to the social order was a belief that the poor should not simply be the recipients of charity but that they were all in genuine need of salvation from their wretched condition. As Marquardt points out, "Wesley regarded poverty as an evil to be eliminated through every allowable means". [185] The social and economic conditions suffered by the poor were, in Wesley's eyes, not necessarily the result of factors which lay within their control. That is not to say that Wesley did not recognise that reckless and sinful behaviour contributed to poverty but rather that he also recognised that the behaviour of the rich was a factor contributing to the wretchedness of the poor.

Wesley labelled accusations that "they are poor because they are idle" as being "wickedly, devilishly false"[186] and in addressing his affluent readership he adds "If you saw these things [poverty] with your own eyes could you lay out money in ornaments or superfluities".[187] Wesley travelled extensively through his homeland, preaching in areas where the established Church had neglected or ignored the spiritual and pastoral needs of the people. Wesley was therefore able to see first-hand the extent of poverty in Great Britain and was also able to

[184] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.31-32.
[185] Marquardt, Manfred. *John Wesley's Social Ethics – Praxis and Principles*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press), p.43.
[186] See ibid p.31**.** Also see, Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume III p.546.
[187] ibid.

draw conclusions about its origins and causes. As he states in his "*Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions":*

> "Thousands of people throughout the country are dying for lack of nourishment. This is due to several causes, but especially because of breweries, taxes and luxury".[188]

Wesley thus emphasised the connection between the affluence of the rich directly impacting on the poverty of others and his proposed solutions may have startled the more conservative Wesleyans. Wesley advocated that the Methodist Societies organise their goods and wealth in a manner which would be described as a form of Christian Socialism. It is not entirely surprising that Wesley encouraged the spirit of mutualism and co-operation within his societies which fostered among the poor members of the societies "a high degree of mutual aid and co-operation and laid the foundations for popular education".[189]

This spirit of co-operation is clearly evident when Wesley met a group of Methodists in Hornby who, after being evicted by their landlords, "built some little houses at the end of the town, in which forty or fifty of them live together".[190] Yet Wesley goes beyond this and at the 1744 Methodist Conference, among the rules set down for societies was the provision that "Every member, till we have all things in common, will bring once a week, bona

[188] Wesley, John cited in Marquardt, Manfred. *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, p.44.
[189] Niebuhr, Richard. *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, (New York, Abingdon Press), 1961, p.70.
[190] Wesley, John. 'John Wesley's Diary' Thursday 7th July 1757 in Wesley John & Emory, John (ed), *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume III p.636.

fide, all he can towards a common stock."[191] For Wesley this approach was justified by scripture, (Acts 4:32), and it also reflected a wider 'property ethic' which is worth exploring in more detail as it bears relevance to Wesley's perspective on rights based questions.

However, it should be noted that Wesley does not at any point dispute the right to property, instead his ethic on property merely concerns the equitable use of physical resources "where God is the supreme owner who has delegated the power of administration only for a limited time and with clear instructions for using all goods."[192]

Thus, Wesley's ethic of property and rights relates back to his wider theological understanding that God is sovereign over all things and rights exist in order to enable people to live their lives in accordance with God's sovereignty. For Wesley, all things within the created order rightfully belonged to God and, as such, talk of 'private possession' was inherently misleading:

> "Thou no longer talkest of *thy* goods, or *thy* fruits, knowing they are not thine, but God's. The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof: he is the Proprietor of heaven and earth. He cannot divest himself of his glory; he must be the Lord, the possessor, of all that is. Only he hath left a portion of his goods in thy hands, for such uses as he has specified".[193]

[191] See Madron, Thomas. 'John Wesley on Economics' in Runyon, Theodore. *Sanctification & Liberation- Liberation Theologies in Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press), 1981, p.108.
[192] Marquardt, Manfred. *John Wesley's Social Ethic*, p.37.
[193] Wesley, John. 'On Worldly Folly' cited in Jennings, Theodore. *Good News for the Poor – John Wesley's Evangelical Economics*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press), p.99.

Wesley, therefore saw the acquisition of property and goods as something that was not entirely or necessarily the result of individual work and effort, but rather a blessing that was deposited with specific divine intentions. For this reason, it was wrong for individuals to talk of their own possessions - "my fruits", as in Wesley's view "They are as much thine as the clouds that fly over thy head! As much as the winds that blow around".[194] Wesley therefore cultivated an idea of stewardship as a reality of Christian material existence, reminding one rich gentleman that he was "not the proprietor of anything; no not of one shilling in the world. You are only a steward of what another entrusts you with…".[195] In this regard John Wesley's teachings are entirely consistent with his wider social ethic and his understanding of God.[196] Wesley expected his Methodists to work out their faith through an obedience to God in all aspects of their lives, which in their entirety belonged to God. In Wesley's sermon on "*The Good Steward"* he provides the most specific and detailed advice on what God demands from his stewards when referring to the practices of a debtor:

> "It is not with a steward, he is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as *he* pleases, but as his master pleases. He has no right to dispose of anything which is in his hands, but according to the will of his Lord. For he is not the proprietor of any of these things, but barely entrusted with them by another; and entrusted in express condition, that he will dispose of all as his master orders. Now, this is exactly the case of every man, with relation to God. We are not at liberty to use what he

[194] Ibid.
[195] Wesley, John. Journal, October 28th 1754, see ibid, p.100.
[196] As Jennings observes: "Wesley's view with respect to goods is entirely congruent with the basic structure of his theology as a whole" ibid, p.101.

has lodged in our hands as we please, but as he pleases alone as possessor of heaven and earth, and Lord of every creature…".[197]

Wesley's understanding of liberty therefore, is clearly defined in relation to the liberty to behave in a manner which was expected of God. This was not a subjective conception either, as Wesley saw it as a duty of every human being to live a life consistent with this social ethic. Wesley did state that it was acceptable to use money in order to ensure that "your wants are first supplied"[198], by which Wesley meant the basic needs of food, shelter and simple clothing. Beyond this was surplus wealth which was to be distributed to the poor and the needy. Thus, for Wesley the acquisition of wealth and property was not necessarily an evil in itself if it had been appropriated by honest and ethical means, but the effective use and distribution of these blessings by sharing them with the lowly and poor was, in his mind, an ethical imperative. Wesley's objection was to luxury and to the hoarding of possessions; practices which he regarded as "absolutely forbidden", and those who engaged in such pursuits he accused of "robbing the poor, the hungry, the naked, wronging the widow and the fatherless, and making themselves accountable for all the want, affliction and distress that they do not remove."[199] It is also important to note that Wesley's definition of the 'rich' was not simply focused on the aristocratic upper classes:

"By riches I mean, not thousands of pounds, but any more than will procure the conveniences of life. Thus, I account him a rich man who has

[197] Wesley, John. The Good Steward, in ibid p.101.
[198] Wesley, John. 'Sermon on the Mount', ibid, p.107
[199] Wesley, John. "Laying up Treasurers" in Stone, Ronald. *John Wesley's Life & Ethics* (Abingdon Press, Nashville), 2001, p.122.

> food and raiment for himself and his family, without running into debt, and something over."[200]

Wesley's advice would therefore seem applicable to almost all persons who have possession of a discretionary income.[201] Yet Wesley's instruction that Methodists should "earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can"[202] would suggest that he did not object to a person saving money as long as it did not reach a level that constituted "hoarding" and was spent appropriately on necessary items as opposed to frivolous luxuries. It can therefore be confidently deduced that Wesley would have been highly critical of 21st century Britain and the predominance of materialism.

While Wesley implored the rich to personally ensure that they behaved in a more ethical manner, he did not believe that charitable giving was the sole means of alleviating the distress of the poor. As a Tory he firmly believed that God had vested in the crown and Parliament the power to govern over the whole of Great Britain and all persons within its jurisdictions. As Marquardt notes:

> "Wesley viewed the most important rights with which God had entrusted the king [in partnership with Parliament] as police power and taxation. For Wesley, the king's [or rather Parliament's] task was to use his power

[200] Wesley, John. 'The Wisdom of God's Counsels' in Jennings, Theodore. *Good News to the Poor*, p.107.
[201] Discretionary Income defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as: "income remaining after deduction of taxes, other mandatory charges, and expenditure on necessary items." Accessed at: http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/discretionary+income?region=us (Accessed 1/08/19)
[202] Often cited as a direct quote from Wesley it is in fact a paraphrase taken from his 'Sermon on the Danger of Riches' in which he advised his listeners to "gain all you can…save all you can…[and]…giving all…[you]…can" see Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume II p.254 accessed at: http://bit.ly/H3qrIu (accessed 1/11/18)

> of taxation to more equitably distribute goods and eliminate grave distresses, to provide food and employment for the people."[203]

Wesley's belief that the central role of government was to grant relief to the poor and implement practical measures by interventions is in marked contrast to laissez-faire ideologies concerning the operation of a free market which were finding support in Eighteenth Century economic thought, notably in the writing of George Whatley whose tract entitled *Principles of Trade* was published in 1774. When Whatley and others were calling for deregulation of trade, Wesley's belief in governmental action further denotes that his conception of economic liberty was firmly embedded in an overriding belief that the liberty of the poor to have their basic needs met was a command by God that could not be ignored by government. In this way Wesley's thought is very much in conflict with the idea of a laissez-faire free market allocating resources purely on the basis of supply and demand. Wesley may have been a Tory, but economically his conservatism directed him towards enabling the needs of the poor over and above providing luxuries for the rich and wealth for the middle classes. His ideas on property and sharing of wealth were communitarian and egalitarian in nature. For Wesley, the liberty of conscience applied as much to institutions as it did to persons and communities and thus the British Government was expected to act with conscience with regard to all matters within its jurisdiction.

[203] Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, p.47

Liberty and the Evil of Slavery

Early Encounters: The American Colonies and the formative years

Perhaps the most significant issue concerning liberty that John Wesley addressed during his lifetime was the issue of slavery. Wesley's first encounters with Black Slaves seem to have occurred during his brief ministry in the British Colony of Georgia in North America. Georgia itself, whilst having black servants, had banned the practice of slavery within the colony, under the instructions of Colonel Oglethorpe and the trustees of the colony. This ban was codified into law in 1735 by an Act of Parliament and given royal assent as: "His Majesty thought fit to pass some laws since the charter [of Georgia], whereby the inhabitants are restrained from the use of Negroes."[204] The legislation subsequently passed was described and implemented as "An Act for rendering the Colony of Georgia more defensible by prohibiting the importation and use of Black Slaves or Negroes into the same."[205] However, this prohibition against slavery arguably did not appear to arise from recognition of the abhorrent nature of the practice but rather because it exceeded the 'economic' objectives of the colonies' trustees. As Betty Wood argues:

> "The Trustees wished to guarantee the early settlers a comfortable living rather than the prospect of the enormous personal wealth associated with the plantation economies elsewhere in British America. They would obtain this living by working for themselves rather than being dependent upon the work of others."[206]

[204] Talifer, Patrick. *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia, with comments by the Earl of Egmont*, (Athens, University of Georgia), 1960, p.39. Cited in Smith, Warren Thomas. *John Wesley and Slavery*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press), 1986, p.36.
[205] Cited in Smith, *John Wesley and Slavery*, p.36.
[206] Wood, Betty. 'Slavery in Colonial Georgia' in *The New Georgia Encyclopaedia* accessed at: http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-685 (accessed: 1/09/18)

Forty years later Olglethorpe, in a letter to Granville Sharpe (a leading opponent of the slave trade), contended that the colonies' trustees had "determined not to suffer slavery" as it was "against the Gospel, as well as the fundamental law of England" and for these reasons "refused…to make a law permitting such a horrible crime."[207] Wood, however, believes that the idea "that the Trustees were prototype abolitionists is a more dubious proposition",[208] highlighting Oglethorpe's participation in the Royal African Company and the use of slaves in the building of Savannah in support of his viewpoint. However, on the balance of probabilities, it seems likely that moral and ethical considerations came to the fore during the development of the trustees' approach to slavery such that they decided that slavery would:

> "result not only in the corruption of the colonists…but also in the repudiation of the basic principle of the colony that independent men could gain a decent living by their own labour".[209]

Wood contends that the abolition agenda focused primarily on the moral well-being of white colonists rather than protection of black slaves. The trustees were concerned that slavery might lead to inequality of wealth between the colonists and could encourage idleness and luxury, such that arguments about 'dignity of the person' were distinctly secondary considerations.[210] It is possible that as time progressed, previous decisions may have been re-rationalised, with concerns about the health, well-being and dignity of the slaves gaining greater

[207] See Wood, Betty. *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, (Georgia, University of Georgia Press), 2007, p.3.
[208] ibid.
[209] ibid, p.85.
[210] ibid. p.6.

emphasis. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that John Wesley's encounters with black slaves did not occur until he and his brother Charles travelled from Georgia to the neighbouring colony of South Carolina, where the extensive plantations were being legally serviced by African Slaves. On their first visit to the settlement of Charlestown (1736) it was Charles who first recorded his dismay about the cruelty of slavery:

> "I had observed much, and heard more, of the cruelty of the masters towards their negroes; but now I received an authentic account of some horrid instances thereof. The giving a child a slave of its own age to tyrannize over, to beat and abuse out of sport, was, I myself saw, a common practice."[211]

After giving an account of the horrendous, dehumanising practices and severe bodily mutilation of black slaves Charles concluded:

> "These horrid cruelties are the less to be wondered at, because the government itself, in effect, countenances and allows them to kill their slaves, by the ridiculous penalty appointed for it, of about seven pounds sterling, half of which is usually saved by the criminal's informing against himself. This I can look upon as no other than a public act to indemnify murder.[212]

Smith highlights the above as one of the first examples of the Wesley brothers articulating their hostility to the cruel practices associated with slavery. Although

[211] Wesley, Charles. *Journal*, cited in Smith, *John Wesley and Slavery*, p.41.
[212] ibid, p.42.

Charles recorded these observations, Smith logically hypothesises that the brothers must have discussed together the practices of slavery which they had witnessed in Charleston and that these events must have significantly influenced their future thoughts on slavery. John recorded in his own journal several encounters he had with black people during the time he was in South Carolina. On July 31st 1736 John noted that when he was preaching in Charlestown:

> "I was glad to see several negroes at church, one of whom told me she was there constantly, and that her old mistress (now dead) had many times instructed her in the Christian religion."[213]

True to character he seized on this opportunity to engage this woman in conversation concerning spiritual matters. He wrote:

> "I asked her what her religion was. She said she could not tell. I asked if she knew what a soul was. She answered, 'No.' I said, 'Do not you know there is something in you different from your body? Something you cannot see or feel? She replied, 'I never heard so much before.' I added. 'Do you think, then, a man dies altogether as a horse dies? 'Yes, to be sure.'[214]

This exchange had a profound influence on John Wesley (hereafter Wesley) who was surprised, disturbed and bewildered by the woman's lack of spiritual

[213] Wesley, John. 'The Journal of John Wesley' (Saturday 31st July 1736). Cited in Smith, *John Wesley and Slavery*, p.45.
[214] ibid.

knowledge. In response to this conversation he wrote in his journal the following words:

> "O God, where are Thy tender mercies? Are they not all over thy works? When shall the Sun of Righteousness arise on these outcasts of men, with healing in His wings!"[215]

It is therefore clear that Wesley's primary concern for this woman centred on her spiritual well-being and her failure to realise the gospel message. It is the same concern which would later drive Wesley to preach to the neglected poor in his own country. This was a continuing theme which dominated Wesley's encounter with black slaves when he was in the colonies. In April (1737) he had the opportunity to engage with a black slave called 'Nanny' who was owned by the Reverend Thompson (Minister of St Bartholomew's, Ponpon, South Carolina). He began his questioning in a similar way to his earlier encounter:

> "I asked her whether she went to church there. She said 'Yes, every Sunday, to carry my mistresses' children.' I asked her about what she had learnt at Church. She said 'Nothing; I heard a great deal, but did not understand it' 'But what did your master teach you at home?' 'Nothing' 'Nor your mistress?' 'No.'"[216]

Wesley then used this as an opportunity to instruct the woman in spiritual matters and he went on to note in his journal that:

[215] ibid
[216] ibid, p.47.

> "The attention with which this poor creature listened to instruction is inexpressible. The next day she remembered all, readily answering every question; and said she would ask Him that made her to show her how to be good."[217]

Smith astutely regards this exchange to be "one of the most important Wesley had during his American ministry"[218] .Wesley's promise to the woman that in heaven "No-one will beat or hurt you there"[219] clearly shows that he was aware of the physical abuse that the woman had suffered or was suffering as a result of her situation. While Wesley does not hereby directly address or criticise the conditions of slavery, his interactions with Nanny, and other slaves, clearly show he was concerned for their spiritual and physical well-being. While in South Carolina, Wesley thought about how to prioritise a mission to the black slaves:

> "perhaps one of the easiest and shortest ways to instruct the American negroes in Christianity, would be, first, to inquire after and find out some of the most serious of the planters. Then, having inquired of them, which of their slaves were best inclined and understood English, to go to them from plantation to plantation, staying as long as appeared necessary to each."[220]

Unfortunately, Wesley received very little interest from planters in his proposal and on 30th April returned to Georgia never to return to South Carolina. Upon

[217] ibid, p.47-48.
[218] ibid, p.48.
[219] ibid.
[220] ibid, p.51.

leaving the colony for England as a result of his expulsion by the colony's authorities, Wesley, while on board the vessel *Samuel,* "began instructing a negro lad in the principles of Christianity."[221] It is revealing that during Wesley's time of spiritual anguish and the emotional turmoil that had resulted from his expulsion from Georgia together with a perceived failure in his mission, that he would seize the opportunity to engage with a young black person. While Wesley's attempt to preach to 'the noble savage' may have ended in failure and disillusionment, it was his encounters with black slaves that would ultimately prove to be the most significant aspect of his ministry in the Colonies. In his journal he celebrates that, "A few steps have been taken towards publishing the glad tidings both to the African and American heathen."[222] Thus for Wesley, his ministry to the black African-Americans who he encountered was one of the few redeeming features of his American endeavour. It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that Wesley's personal experiences in America had a significant impact on his views about slavery. The decision by Georgia to lift the prohibition on slavery, was later criticised by Wesley who, in 1774, wrote a letter to Anthony Benezet:

> "Mr Oglethorpe you know went far as to begin settling a colony without negroes, but at length the voice of those villains prevailed who sell their country and their God for gold, who laugh at human nature and compassion and defy all religion, but that of getting money. It is certainly our duty to do all in our power to check this growing evil, and something may be done by spreading those tracts which place it in a true light. But I

[221] Wesley, John. 'The Journal of John Wesley', (Monday 26th January 1738) in Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume III, p.52.
[222] Wesley, John. 'The Journal of John Wesley' (Wednesday 1st February 1738), ibid, p.60.

> fear it will not be stopped till all the kingdoms of the earth become kingdoms of our God."[223]

However, since both these letters were written by Wesley later in life, the extent to which he may have publicly voiced concerns about slavery while in the colony is a moot point. Wesley seemingly did not have a problem associating with plantation owners in South Carolina who owned slaves. However, this does not necessarily mean that Wesley approved of slavery. Indeed, it seems unlikely that Wesley would have held views on slavery that were contrary to his brother's perspective. Nevertheless, his feelings on the matter did not lead to more positive action until after he had started the Methodist movement on returning to England. Wesley's experience in the colonies can therefore be reasonably seen as contributing to the development of his thoughts about slavery which would be articulated more clearly in the later years of his ministry and his subsequent support for the abolitionist movement. What is clearly evident is that in these formative years in America, Wesley's concerns for the physical and mental welfare of slaves could not be disconnected from his concern for their spiritual welfare. In a journal entry dated 29th November 1758 Wesley reaffirmed his spiritual concern for black slaves:

> "I rode to Wandsworth, and baptized two negroes belonging to Mr. Gilbert, a gentleman lately come from Antigua. One of these is deeply convinced of sin, the other rejoices in God her Saviour, and is the first

[223] John Wesley in a letter to Anthony Benezet see Vaux, Robert. *Memoirs of the Life of Anthony Benezet*, (New York, Bert Franklin), 1817, p.44 cited in Smith, *John Wesley and Slavery*, p.53.

> African Christian I have known. But shall not our Lord, in due time, have these heathens also ' for His inheritance.'"[224]

Wesley may have seen the term 'heathen' as implying a generally negative view towards non-European peoples, but in many ways, Wesley promoted an image of indigenous peoples which was complimentary, portraying their behaviour as superior in many respects to that of western people. In his famous sermon "*Laying up Treasures*",[225] Wesley compares the behaviour of western Christians with 'heathen' Africans and concludes that the cultural behaviour of the latter is far superior, particularly with regard to material possessions and resources. This would seem to indicate that Wesley did not subscribe to contemporary racist views that indigenous peoples were inferior to white Europeans.

What does seem to have significantly influenced Wesley's views on the subject of slavery is Anthony Benezet's *Historical Account of Guinea* (1771) which he read in 1772. Stone suggests that although this may not have been "the first book to influence Wesley, [it] was to contribute significantly to Wesley's tract".[226] Benezet himself had incorporated work from Granville Sharpe's own book on slavery, along with a number of other abolitionist writers. This was a significant time for the debate on slavery with Lord Chief Justice Mansfield's famous decision on the fate of the American slave James Somerset. On June 22nd 1772 Lord Mansfield declared "that whenever and wherever a slave set foot on

[224] Wesley, John**.** 'The Journal of John Wesley' Wednesday 29th December 1758 in Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume IV (1840 Edition) p.12 accessed at: http://bit.ly/HrUqvi (accessed 1/11/18).
[225] Wesley, John. 'Sermon VIII – Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount' in Wesley, John. Norman, William E (ed) 'Sermons on Several Occasions' (Hudson), 1810. p.127 accessed at: http://bit.ly/HjqXSl (accessed 1/06/11)
[226] Stone, John Wesley's Life and Ethics, p.191.

English soil he was from that moment free."[227] Unfortunately this part of the Lord Justice's judgment was considered to be *obiter dictum* and therefore not necessarily legally binding in terms of legal precedent and thus the trading of slaves continued in British ports. However, the judgment became widely known and since Granville Sharpe participated in the case in Somerset's defence, having already published his *Representation of the Injustice…of tolerating Slavery* (1796), the issue of abolition of slavery was high on the political agenda for reformers.

Benezet seems to have been an influential figure in Wesley's thought since Wesley used the aforementioned tract as a basis for his own writing. Smith also postulates that Wesley probably read three of Benezet's previous publications: *Observations on the Enslaving, Importing and Purchasing of Negroes* (1759), *A Short Account of that part of Africa, inhabited by the Negroes* (1762) and *A caution and warning to Great Britain and her Colonies, in a short representation of the calamitous State of the enslaved Negroes* (1766). Benezet was extremely condemnatory of slavery because it:

> "destroys the bonds of natural affection and interest, whereby mankind in general are united; … introduces idleness, discourages marriage, corrupts the youth, runs and debauches morals, excites continual apprehensions of dangers and frequent alarms."[228]

[227] Maloney, Newton. *The amazing John Wesley: an unusual look at an uncommon life*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica), 2010, p.136.
[228] Benezet, Anthony. *A caution and warning to Great Britain and her Colonies, in a short representation of the calamitous State of the enslaved Negroes*, (Philadelphia, Printed by Henry Miller), 1766, p.4 (of original pamphlet) accessed at: http://www.archive.org/download/cautionwarningto00bene/cautionwarningto00bene.pdf (accessed 1/10/18).

Many of these objections may have been shared by the trustees of the Colony and it is likely that Wesley would have been thinking on similar lines to Benezet. However, it was Benezet's connection between "the evils of slavery and the inconsistency with the religion of Christ"[229] and "the liberties of mankind…much the subject of general attention…"[230] which probably resonated most with Wesley's own thoughts.

Thoughts on Slavery

John Wesley's "Thoughts on Slavery" published in 1774 is his most significant piece of writing on the subject. Early in this tract Wesley seeks to define slavery:

> "Slavery imports and obligation of perpetual service, an obligation which only the consent of the master can dissolve. Neither in some countries can the master himself dissolve it, without the consent of Judges appointed by the law. It generally gives the master arbitrary power of any correction, not affecting life or limb. Sometimes even these are exposed to his will, or protected only by a fine, or some slight punishment, too inconsiderate to restrain a master of an [sic] harsh temper. It creates an incapacity of acquiring anything, except for the master's benefit. It allows the master to alienate the slave, in the same manner as his cows and horses. Lastly, it descends in its full extent from parent to child, even to the last generation."[231]

[229] ibid.
[230] ibid.
[231] Wesley, John. *"Thoughts Upon Slavery"* – Fourth Edition (Dublin, W Whitestone), 1775. p.3.

Wesley thus saw slavery as a form of total ownership of one human being by another which is very much reminiscent of Aristotle's concept of a slave being a 'living tool'.[232] This concept clearly concerned Wesley who argued that this was a "flagrant violation of liberty itself, to which an Angolan has the same natural right as an English man."[233] Wesley sought to substantiate his view by challenging many of the incorrect and racist assumptions made by supporters of the slave trade:

> "Upon the whole, therefore, the Negroes who inhabit the coast of Africa, from the river Senegal to the to the southern bounds of Angola, are so far from being the stupid, senseless, brutish, lazy barbarians, the fierce cruel, perfidious savages they have been described, that, on the contrary, they are represented, by them who have no motive to flatter them, as remarkably sensible, considering the few advantages they have for improving their understanding; as industrious to the highest degree…as fair just and honest in all their dealings, unless where white men have taught them to be otherwise; and as far more mild, friendly and kind to strangers, than any of their forefathers were."[234]

Wesley clearly saw white Europeans as acting corruptly. This theme is developed as he describes the sadistic and tortuous practices to which slaves were subjected in the hands of their masters and refutes misnomers formulated to justify slavery - "[t]hat their parents sell them is utterly false: Whites not

[232] See Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.319.
[233] Wesley, John. *"Thoughts Upon Slavery"* in Wesley John and Mason, John (ed). *The Works of Reverend John* Wesley, Volume Three, Third Edition, (John Mason, Paternoster Row London) 1830, p.70 accessed at: http://bit.ly/H0YLKO (1/11/11).
[234] ibid, p.64.

Blacks, are without natural affection."[235] Regarding the treatment of slaves he rhetorically asks: "Did the creator intend that the noblest creatures in the visible world should live such a life as this?"[236] This is undoubtedly a reference to the humanity of the slaves but also suggests that their very nature made them noble and a closer reflection of the image of God than white Europeans. As Marquardt elucidates:

> "the widely held view that blacks [sic] were not authentic human beings deeply contradicted Wesley's fundamental conviction that the value of the person resides first and foremost in the individual soul, created by God for eternal life."[237]

Interestingly, Wesley did not rely heavily on scripture to justify his position on slavery, deliberately "setting the Bible out of the question."[238] Instead he grounded his arguments on "natural rights", arguing that despite the legality of the trade, it was still ethically wrong : "Notwithstanding ten thousand laws, right is right and wrong is wrong. There must remain an essential difference between justice and injustice, cruelty and mercy."[239] In so doing, Wesley seems to be appealing to concepts which can be delineated as fundamental rights, universal in their application regardless of race. Stone regards this as Wesley's "liberation ethic grounded in natural law"[240] as supported by Wesley's call to:

[235] ibid, p.66.
[236] ibid p.68.
[237] Marquardt, Manfred. *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, p.73.
[238] Wesley, John. 'Thoughts on Slavery' in Wesley John and Mason, John (ed). *The Works of Reverend John* Wesley, Volume Three, Third Edition, p.70.
[239] ibid.
[240] Stone, *John Wesley's Life and Ethics*, p.196.

> "Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature…Away with all whips, all chains, all compulsion. Be gentle toward all men. And see that you invariably do unto everyone, as you would he should do unto you."[241]

While an appeal to nature is clearly evident here, Wesley's echoing of Matthew 25 also places his ethic of rights within a distinctly Christian tradition based on mutual love and consideration. For Wesley, it was this lack of love that was an integral part of slavery, devaluing the person and creating a cyclical and perpetuating evil. Wesley described the perverted nature of the master-slave relationship by highlighting the hypocrisies peddled by the slave owners. In a highly critical discourse, Wesley accused them of acting "the villain to enslave them, then you brutalise them and fail to educate them, then you blame them for lacking education as a reason for using them as 'brute beasts'."[242]

This indicates that Wesley's ethic of rights appears to be dually rooted within a natural rights theory and also a Christian ethic based upon scriptural commands to love others. In this manner the ethic is far more stringent and more closely tied to corresponding duties. Thus, one person's right to liberty led to a corresponding duty or responsibility on those who had the authority to enable that liberty. Wesley's teaching on this point is egalitarian in that although it recognised and accepted societal hierarchies, there was a clear obligation for people not to abuse their positions or act contrary to the intentions of God who, of course, remained the supreme authority. Such abuses could not be justified

[241] Wesley, John. 'Thoughts on Slavery' in Wesley John and Mason, John (ed). *The Works of Reverend John* Wesley, Volume Three, Third Edition, p.79.
[242] See ibid p.69 & p.75.

since all authority derived from God. Those who were entrusted with authority, and misused it, were rebels against the Lord. Thus, while structures existed in society which ascribed different roles and responsibilities to various people within chains of command, the requirement to behave in a loving brotherly/sisterly manner was paramount. Thus while Wesley would not have objected to servitude itself, (since all people were to be regarded at servants at different levels within a society), slavery was a form of servitude in which brotherly/sisterly love could not flourish, for it deprived a slave of all his/her liberties and the master was thereby accountable to God for failing to behave in a Christian manner.

Wesley's ideas on slavery will be explored further when considering the response of the Methodist Church to racial discrimination and immigration policies in recent decades. However, at this point it is necessary to turn to the American Revolution in order to understand how Wesley's theory of rights and liberties was applied to this event and how various tensions which were outlined in Chapter One were given expression.

Case Study: The American Revolution

On July 4th 1776 the Continental Congress representing the Thirteen Colonies in America announced their independence from British rule through the Declaration of Independence. This action resulted in the American War of Independence (also known as the American Revolution) between the former/rebelling colonies and Great Britain. This in turn led to the foundation of the United States, which was officially recognised as a sovereign state by the

British on September 3, 1783 in the Treaty of Paris. The independence movement and the war itself was highly controversial, in part due its relationship with political and philosophical ideas on liberties and rights, and the wider effect it could have on British society. Wesley felt that he had to engage with the issues that presented themselves in the war with a view to achieving a satisfactory conclusion with minimal bloodshed. However, as Weber observes, Wesley's writings have indicated that he was not a "neutral peacemaker". Weber argues that in reality Wesley was:

> "…an ardent partisan and patriot whose idea of peace was acceptance of obedience to the king and the king's laws, and whose contribution to political discourse mainly took the forms of arguing the case for royal and parliamentary authority and exposing as lies the arguments against king and government made by the American rebels and their English supporters."[243]

However, Wesley's initial attitudes to the American grievances prior to the commencement of the war were generally sympathetic, as evidenced by his letter to the Earl of Dartmouth on 14th June 1775:

> "I cannot avoid thinking (if I think at all) that an oppressed people asked for nothing more than their legal rights, and that in the most modest and inoffensive manner which the nature of the thing would allow."[244]

[243] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.111-12.
[244] Wesley, John cited in ibid, p.113.

Wesley therefore understood that the American Colonists had legitimate grievances, a view which he had previously expressed in his tract entitled *The Present State of Public Affairs*[245] in which he claimed, presumably with reference to criticisms of the stamp tax imposed by the British government:

> "I do not defend the measures which have been taken with regard to America: I doubt whether any man can defend them, either on the foot of law, equity or prudence."[246]

Yet Wesley did not blame the crown for these inequities but rather named George Grenville, First Lord of the Treasury (Prime Minister), who was the architect of the controversial Revenue Act (1764) and Stamp Act (1765). Of course, as a High Anglican Tory, Wesley in all likelihood would have been more comfortable blaming a Whig Politician than criticising Parliament or the Monarch who gave royal assent to the legislation. As time progressed, Wesley defended these taxes as a reasonable and justifiable means of funding the defence of the colonies. Initially however, he chose to ally his concerns with the disgruntled Americans.

Further to his sympathy for American arguments concerning unfair policies, Wesley believed that Americans were "enthusiasts for liberty" and American colonists who fought "for their Wives, Children, [and] Liberty" would have a significant motivational advantage over British soldiers who simply fought for

[245] See Wesley, John. 'Free Thoughts on the Present State of Affairs' (1768) in John. Emory, John (ed). *The Works of Reverend John Wesley*, Volume VI, p.247-260.
[246] Wesley, John. *The Present State of Public Affairs* (1770) cited in Raymond, Allen. 'I fear God and honour the King': John Wesley and the American Revolution" *Church History*. Vol 45, No.3 (Sept 1976), p.316-328 at p.317.

pay.[247] Wesley did not therefore see it as in Britain's interest to provoke a conflict with the Thirteen Colonies. He felt that the Americans were well motivated and better equipped, trained and funded than the British believed, as well as being generally united against the unpopular policies imposed upon them. Furthermore, a military conflict on the North American Continent would require a huge commitment of land and naval forces, leaving Britain defended only by a relatively small army heavily reliant on militia.[248] In these circumstances Wesley believed that an invasion by a hostile nation such as France, insurrection from independence movements in Scotland or Ireland, or even a full-scale revolution based on republican principles, were all possibilities that could lead to the overthrow of the crown and the collapse of the established constitutional order. Yet it was his concern for the maintenance of the existing constitutional settlement that would motivate Wesley to eventually condemn the actions of the Americans.

Wesley's transition from support to opposition towards the American cause was due to a change in his perception of the reasons for the colonists' actions. Essentially, Wesley came to the belief that the primary motivation of the colonists was not to secure English liberties but rather to establish an independence from Great Britain. This is clearly what alarmed Wesley and his reaction is unsurprising considering, as Andrews observes, that "the American patriots' increasing resentment of imperial authority was far removed from Wesley's political instincts" which were orientated towards loyalty towards the crown and Parliament. In a letter to his brother Charles on 17th October 1775

[247] See Wesley, John cited in Andrews, Dee E. *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800 – The Shaping of An Evangelical Culture*, (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press), 2000, p.49.
[248] ibid, p.113.

John blamed the American leadership for the rebellious stirrings amongst the colonists.[249] At first Wesley's main concern was to address some of the constitutional questions raised by the colonists; specifically whether or not Parliament had a right to tax them. The implication raised in a letter to Mr. Christopher Hopper dated 26th December 1776 is that Parliament did have this right:

> "I see no possibility of accommodation. The one point is, has the Supreme Power a right to tax or not? If they have, they cannot, they ought not to give it up. But I say, as Dean Tucker, "let them drop." Cut off all other connexion with them than we have with Holland or Germany. Four-and-thirty millions they have cost us to support them since Queen Anne died. Let them cost us no more. Let them have their desire and support themselves."[250]

Wesley was not therefore amenable to the suggestion that 'taxation without representation' was in anyway a valid argument, and if reconciliation was not possible, then Britain should withdraw support for the colonies. With regard to the demands for 'liberty' by the colonists, Wesley believed that they already had such liberty guaranteed by Parliament and the Crown and by crying out for it were "as perfectly mad as any of the inhabitants of Bedlam":

> "They are screaming out for liberty while they have it in their hands, while they actually possess it; and to so great an extent that the like is not known in any other nation under heaven; whether we mean civil liberty, a

[249] See Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation,* p.126.
[250] Wesley, John cited in Webber, Politics in the Order of Salvation, p.127.

> liberty of enjoying all our legal property, or religious liberty, a liberty of worshipping God according to the dictates of our own conscience."[251]

This was an argument which Wesley would continue to employ in defence of his own support for the crown. Raymond asserts that this loyalty was driven by the belief that "England stood on the verge of internal revolution" and this "is perhaps sufficient cause for his pro-government pamphleteering…".[252] Widespread dissatisfaction with the government existed across the country, riots and public disorder were not uncommon, and new ideas about freedoms and liberties translating into democratic forms of republican government did pose a threat to the archaic systems of monarchy and patronage that continued to exist in Europe. Wesley himself knew just how dangerous an impassioned mob fuelled by hatred could be. He had much experience of dealing with such mobs when preaching across the country and hearing of the persecution of Methodist societies. However, Wesley placed his faith in the law and the system of English justice to uphold liberty and was successful in many of the cases he brought forward. For Wesley the fear of 'mob rule' was due to the probable curtailment of liberties that would accompany it:

> "No government under heaven are so despotic as the republican; no subjects are governed in so arbitrary a manner as those of the commonwealth."[253]

[251] ibid, p.128.
[252] Raymond, 'John Wesley and the American Revolution', p.319.
[253] Wesley, John. 'A calm address to our American Colonies' (1775) in Wesley, John & Emory, John (ed). *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, Volume IV (T Mason and G Lane, New York), 1840 p.298.

This fear was not totally unfounded since Eighteenth Century revolutions were rarely bloodless affairs. Furthermore, although the American Revolution may have resulted in the establishment of a government that respected liberty, its French Counterpart experienced the horror of 'the terrors' and eventually resulted in the establishment of a dictatorship under an Emperor. Without the benefit of hindsight, it is at least understandable why Wesley may have adopted the position he did, even if, eventually, he made himself an enemy of democracy - a problematic legacy for Methodists to reconcile.

These problems are reflected in Wesley's central piece of work which addressed the American Revolution: "A Calm address to Our American Colonies." In this publication, Wesley asserts that the colonies were established under a royal charter and, for this reason, could only derive authority from this source. As Weber explains, in Wesley's thinking "they have no justifiable appeal to a natural right of self-government to support a claim to be taxed only with their own consent".[254] Wesley thus saw the British government as having a right to enact laws and taxes on the chartered colonies, this not being dependent on the colonies having elected representatives. As Wesley argued:

> "I have no representative in Parliament; but I am taxed; yet I am no slave. Yea, nine in ten throughout England have no representative, no vote; yet they are no slaves; they enjoy both civil and religious liberty to the utmost extent."[255]

[254] Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.115.
[255] Wesley, John. Emory, John (ed). 'A calm address to our American Colonies' *The Works of Reverend John Wesley*, Volume I, p.294.

Thus, Wesley's definition of liberty is not therefore dependent on the existence of democratic forms of government. However, it was fears about war and the associated violence which inevitably accompanied revolution, which led Wesley to adopt his attitude towards the Americans. In the knowledge of the great evils which had been committed in the English Civil War in which the entire country had been torn apart, Wesley believed that in the American Revolution similar evils would be committed. In a sermon, which he preached at Bethnal Green Church, Wesley described how the cry for 'liberty' had meant that:

> "in every town, men who were once of a calm, mild, friendly temper, were now mad with party zeal, foaming with rage against their quiet neighbours, ready to tear out one another's throats, and to plunge their swords into each other's bowls."[256]

Thus, Wesley's objections to the events in America should not be seen in isolation from his general concerns about violence and war. Furthermore, he came to the conclusion that in America liberties were actually being undermined by the revolutionaries:

> "Do you not immediately observe, that after this huge outcry for liberty, that has echoed throughout America, there is not the very shadow of liberty left in the confederate provinces? There is no liberty of the press. A man may more safely print against the Church in Italy or Spain than publish against the Congress in New England or Pennsylvania. There is no religious liberty. What minister is permitted to follow his conscience in

[256] Wesley, John cited in Raymond, 'John Wesley and the American Revolution", p.324.

> the execution of his office? To put man in mind to be "subject to principalities and powers?" to "fear God and honour the king?" Who is suffered (whatever his conscience may dictate) to "pray for the King, and all who are in authority?" There is no civil liberty. No man hath any security, either for his goods, or for his person; but is daily liable to have his goods spoiled or taken away, without either law or form of law, and then suffer the most cruel outrage as to his person, such as many would account worse than death. And there is no legal method wherein he can obtain redress for whatever loss our outrage he has sustained."[257]

Thus, of course, these fears were not, in reality, reflected in the establishment of the United States at the end of the Revolutionary War which sought to guarantee liberties and freedoms within its constitution. However, Wesley's cynicism and suspicion of American motives prevented him from seeing any of the advantages of the independence, although when it had happened he recognised that it was due to be "an uncommon train of providences".[258] Thus Wesley had to recognise that the existence of a separate American nation under a separate government was divinely decreed, and thus he simply accepted the development. However, there are obvious tensions and inconsistencies in Wesley's thoughts when he emphasises his support for the concept of liberty while simultaneously denying democratic civil rights. Whilst it does seem that Wesley's liberal strengths lie in his arguments for religious freedom, there are clearly some tensions and inconsistencies in his thoughts in this regard.

[257] Wesley, John cited in Webber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation*, p.140.
[258] ibid, p.146.

The Roman Catholic Exception

While Wesley was in many respects a champion of religious freedom, his attitudes concerning Roman Catholics provide some rather serious obstacles for a fully integrated and consistent approach on the subject. Ironically, Wesley himself was often accused by his enemies as being a 'Jacobite' and a 'Papist', yet his actual attitude towards the Roman Catholic faith was far from complimentary. He was an opponent of the Catholic Relief Act 1778 which enabled Catholics to own property, inherit land, and join the army. After it was passed, he wrote a critical public letter in 1780 stating that "I insist upon it that no Government, not Roman Catholic ought to tolerate men of the Roman Catholic Persuasion."[259] The reason for this seemed to be a propagation of the Catholic faith within a protestant nation as the Act would:

> "encourage them to preach openly, to build chapels (at Bath and elsewhere), to raise seminaries, and to make numerous converts day by day, to their intolerant, persecuting principles."[260]

These statements can be explained via Wesley's sincere belief that Roman Catholicism itself was linked to a polity that would deny English liberties:

> "Do you know what the spirit of popery is? Did you never hear of that in Queen Mary's reign, and of the holy men who were then burned alive by the Papists, because they dare not so as they did…If we had a King of

[259] ibid, p.330-31.
[260] ibid, p.331.

> this spirit, whose life would be safe? At least what honest man's?...what a dreadful thing this would be for a man of conscience…".[261]

This attitude does, however, seem rather curious when John Wesley himself was influenced by Catholic writings on mysticism and Christian perfection. Thus in his '*Letter to a Roman Catholic*" dated 18th July 1749 he affirmed that both Protestants and Catholics believed in the same Jesus Christ and sought to establish those areas of faith and doctrine which both groups held in common.[262] Furthermore, Weber in particular draws attention to Wesley's personal friendships with Catholics as well as "his general openness to them, the presence of some Catholics in his meetings, and his willingness to learn from Catholic texts…".[263] For this reason it seems unfair to judge Wesley too harshly when considering the widespread anti-Catholic feeling that existed in society. He certainly did not believe that his call for a lack of 'toleration' should equate to persecution:

> "Would I, then, wish the Roman Catholics to be persecuted? I never said or hinted any such thing. I abhor the thought; it is foreign to all I have preached and wrote for these fifty years. But I would wish the Romanists in England (I have no others in view) to be treated still with the same lenity that they have been these sixty years; to be allowed both civil and religious liberty, but not to be permitted to undermine ours. I wish them to stand just as they did before the late Act was passed; not to be

[261] Wesley, John. 'A word in Season or Advice to an English Man' in Wesley, John and Emory, John (ed) *The Works of Reverend John Wesley*, Volume VI, (J Emory and B Waugh) 1831, p.365 accessed at: http://bit.ly/GZtB0l (accessed 1/11/18).
[262] See Wesley, John. 'A letter to a Roman Catholic' in Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley*, (J&J Harper, New York), 1827, p.531 accessed at: http://bit.ly/GZsI88 (1/11/11).
[263] Weber, *Politics in Order of Salvation*, p.333.

> persecuted or hurt themselves; but gently restrained from hurting their neighbours."[264]

However, once again this illustrates an inconsistency in Wesley's thought. If his baseline for religious liberty is restricted to the freedoms of Catholics prior to the passage of the Catholic Relief Act, then such liberty is limited purely to the right to believe, although such a belief can lead to societal restrictions not imposed on others. Under these conditions religious liberty does not have the same public character enjoyed by Wesley and his Methodist Societies.[265] It is worth noting that Wesley did seem to be comfortable with restricting the liberties of a group if there are reasons for doing so that relate to his concern for the defence of other liberties, protected through the established constitutional order. For Wesley, granting too many freedoms to Roman Catholics would result in the propagation of Catholic doctrine, which in turn would result in Popery and repression of Protestants. Such sentiments were not simply the concerns of high church Tory Anglicans; they were widely shared amongst Protestant thinkers (even in the newly formed United States) who questioned whether ideas on liberty could be truly reconciled with Roman Catholic doctrines.[266] It is ironic that Wesley himself, while leader of the Methodist movement, exercised a degree of control over the societies which has been described by several commentators as being dictatorial in nature. This can only serve to further highlight the various tensions and conflicts within Wesley's thinking.

[264] Wesley, John. 'Second Letter to the Freeman's Journal, Dublin', (March 23rd 1780), in Wesley, John & Emory, John. *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume V, (New York, J Emory & B Waugh), 1831. p.836. Also cited in Weber, *Politics in Order of Salvation*, ibid, p.334.
[265] Weber, *Politics in Order of Salvation*, p.334.
[266] John Adams, Second President of the United States, writes in a letter to Thomas Jefferson (19 May 1821): "Can a free government possibly exist with the Roman Catholic religion?" See Adams, John in Cappon, Lester Jesse. *The Adams-Jefferson letters: the complete correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams*, (Williamsburg VA, University of North Carolina Press), 1988, p.573.

Conclusions

John Wesley was a man who was significantly influenced by his early childhood experiences and his formational years at Oxford University. Claims that the young John Wesley was a Jacobite or that he had a dramatic political conversion which led him to become a more liberal figure seem unconvincing. Instead Theodore Weber's belief that Wesley was an 'organic constitutionalist' who consistently believed in power being shared and balanced between the Crown and Parliament would seem to be a reasonable assumption. This is not to say that Wesley was static in his political opinions, evidenced by his realisation of the need to challenge slavery and in his support, wariness and opposition to the American colonial cause, but that there was some consistency in his approach across his lifetime. Wesley was not a follower of Locke and did not endorse a theory of 'social contract'. Instead Wesley believed that divine authority ultimately came from above. So, whilst recognising social agreement was necessary in order for a society to function, he did not believe it was the source for authority, which had to be divine. However, Wesley still had a notion of government governing for the common good and was prepared to criticise those vested with power and authority for failing to consider the needs of the poor and vulnerable. Wesley may have been a Tory but his politics were far removed from the laissez-faire ideologies that now influence contemporary conservatism. Wesley's views on the sharing of property and riches place him with a radical tradition that finds its genesis within his high church medievalism; placing a significant responsibility on those with power and wealth to serve others.

Most significantly, John Wesley's emphasis on the importance of the liberty of conscience became a fundamental tenet of his philosophical outlook. His belief in the importance of forms of ‘natural liberty’ granted by God would also lead him to become a significant proponent for the abolition of the slave trade. John Wesley’s conception of liberty and rights was grounded in a theological framework which endeavoured to establish the fundamental and universal nature of these liberties underpinned by the human-divine relationship. That being established, there are some notable tensions within Wesley’s writings, many of which appear contradictory and, at times, seemingly irreconcilable. His Tory attitudes and his suspicion of democratic and populist forms of government may be understandable considering the violent social upheavals in the 18th Century world associated with populist uprisings, but they also provide significant challenges for 21st Century Methodists seeking to apply Wesley’s ideas to modern day questions concerning human rights. Wesley’s denial of civil and political rights is a particular stumbling block in constructing any kind of Wesleyan rights ethic. However, Wesley’s arguments against slavery and his progressive social agenda, which considered rights to property as being subservient to social needs, provide a useful contribution to the ethical debate on rights and how rights thinking develops incrementally over generations.

Chapter Three

British Methodism and Liberty from 1945 onwards: A case study on racial discrimination.

Introduction

The issue of racism in Great Britain has received significant attention from scholars, campaigners and policy makers in the latter half of the Twentieth Century. Modern Britain is a multicultural society where citizens and residents possess a diverse range of ethnic heritages. However, racial discrimination is an ugly stain on British history and presents a continuing challenge for all who seek to promote an inclusive, tolerant society. Attitudes towards racial discrimination amongst the British public have varied across time and locations as well as between communities and individuals. Different approaches to the public debate on race and racism can therefore be observed within different contexts. This chapter will seek to explore the approach of the Methodist Church to the issue of racism from the end of the Second World War to the present day. Racial discrimination is one of the most significant human rights issues to have been addressed by the Church in the mid to late Twentieth Century and an examination of the British Methodists' approach to race issues exposes and replicates many of the inconsistencies and tensions within John Wesley's own thinking on rights and liberties.

Before proceeding towards this detailed examination of rights and racial discrimination, it is important to consider the general human rights context in which Methodism has functioned. The methodology employed in this chapter hereby encompasses both a historical evaluation of British Methodism's perspective on questions of liberty and rights through a case study on its

reaction to racism during the Twentieth Century, and an ethical analysis which seeks to determine the theological and philosophical basis on which Methodists proceeded. This case study has been selected because of Wesley's anti-slavery position being embedded in his theology, which sought to emphasise the worth of every human being created in the image of God. In this sense Methodist theology, from its very beginning, had a significant anti-racist component due to Wesley's thoughts on the matter. It is therefore possible to identify a thread that runs from Wesley to the current time on a significant equality issue that is arguably the most predominant issue concerning liberty and equality in both the Eighteenth and Twentieth centuries. The only other equality issue that comes close, or would be equal, is in respect of gender rights; a topic that goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, the case for gender equality is not as evident in Wesley's thought as his anti-racist stance, which makes it more suitable for exploration for the purposes of this thesis. A Twentieth Century case study, focused on a British context, significantly adds to the limited body of research in this area within Methodist studies.

The concept of racism

In order to fully understand the Methodist response to racism it is first necessary to explore the ideological concepts behind racism and how they have been utilised within historical and contemporary contexts. As Miles and Brown explain[267]:

[267] See Miles, Robert and Brown, Malcolm. *Racism* (London, Routledge), 2003 p.7.

> "The matter of whether 'races' exist or whether the concept of 'race' represents human beings and social relations in a distorted manner, are epistemological and ontological questions."[268]

The ideology of racism, which this chapter seeks to examine in relation to a British Methodist perspective, can be described as; "the belief that all members of each race possess characteristics, abilities, or qualities specific to that race, especially so as to distinguish it as inferior or superior to another race or races".[269] For the purposes of this project Racism is understood as a reliance on a theory of race augmented with a theory of hierarchy, creating a negative predisposition towards certain defined persons based on their (arbitrary) racial classification. However, both the concept of 'race' and 'racism' have changed and altered with their context over time, with racist ideological concepts held within the Eighteenth Century finding new forms of expression in the Twentieth Century. The legacy of the imperial exploits of Britain and colonialism, which reached their pinnacle in the late Nineteenth Century, have had a long-lasting influence on the British psyche and on British culture long after the sun had set on the British Empire. While a detailed examination of the history of racism within Britain goes beyond the scope of this chapter, it nevertheless forms an important backdrop to the focus on Methodist perspectives on racism. Christian concepts have made a significant contribution to the cause of anti-racism, leading to the emergence, in the Twentieth Century, of an idea of equal human dignity and worth to which Methodism has made its own distinctive contributions.

[268] ibid
[269] Definition taken from the Oxford English Dictionary (Online Edition) at: http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/racism?q=racism (accessed 1/12/18).

Racial Tensions and Discrimination Post 1945 -1970

In order to understand the Methodist approach to human rights and racial discrimination it is necessary to start the analysis in the mid to late 1940's when the issue started to gain wider public attention. The Second World War was a conflict in which Britain employed the resources of her vast empire in order to fight, with other allied powers, the Axis Powers. The mustering of colonial assets saw the widespread recruitment and mobilisation of black and other soldiers from non-white ethnic groups under British command together with the reception of black soldiers from other nations such as the United States of America. This, of course, was not the first time that black people had settled in Great Britain. In the Nineteenth Century a number of seaports such as London, Liverpool, Cardiff and Bristol already had their own well-established black communities which evolved as a result of Britain's maritime exploits and activities. As Ian Spencer observes:

> "The black soldiers who compromised a small part of the Roman armies that invaded Britain, the African slaves who were not freed by Mansfield's much misunderstood judgement of 1772 and the Asian and black seamen who lived in the multi-racial dockland communities are evidence of a long-standing element of racial diversity in Britain."[270]

Yet while there is a long history of racial diversity within Britain, there is a corresponding history of unjust racial discrimination and despicable persecution of ethnic minorities which has to be considered. Following the end of the

[270] Spencer, Ian. *British Immigration Policy Since 1939: The Making of Multi-Racial Britain*, (London, Routledge), 1997. p.1.

Second World War a labour shortage in certain areas, services and industries led to the British government encouraging immigration from European nations and Commonwealth countries. However, as John Solomos observes:

> "The relatively liberal attitude towards the arrival of European workers contrasted sharply with the fears expressed about the perceived social and racial problems that would arise with the arrival of 'coloured' colonial workers, even though they were British subjects."[271]

Throughout the latter half of the Twentieth Century it is arguably evident that the British government increasingly pursued an approach to immigration which was in many ways racist. As Spencer observes, "the simple logic developed by officials was that if the 'coloured' immigrants were not here the difficulties would not occur."[272] The British public, and consequently the British government, were becoming concerned about immigration in the early fifties. The Empire Windrush had arrived at the Port of Tilbury on 22nd June 1948. This vessel carried 493 Jamaican passengers who, as British subjects, were looking forward to beginning a new life in England with its glut of post-war job vacancies. By the late fifties, the number of British subjects from Commonwealth countries emigrating to Britain had increased significantly and in a letter to MPs, Clement Atlee (who had been Prime Minister when the Empire Windrush arrived) warned against regarding the new arrivals as:

[271] Solomos, John. *Race and Racism in Britain*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan), 2003, p.52.
[272] Spencer, *British Immigration Policy Since 1939*, p.44.

> ‘undesirables and unemployables…The majority of them are honest workers and I feel make a genuine contribution to our labour difficulties at this time.”[273]

Despite this advice, confidential cabinet papers have subsequently revealed that shortly after the arrival of the Empire Windrush, the British government began formulating policies to prevent further influxes of black people from the colonies. Spencer therefore regretfully observes that:

> “This dichotomy between the government’s publicly expressed tolerance of black immigration and its private regret and hostility was established right at the start of the post-war debate.”[274]

The passengers on the Empire Windrush received a less than warm welcome. It did not take too long for these immigrants to realise the extent to which Britain could be extremely racist in its societal attitudes. However perhaps most disconcerting were the racist attitudes held within the Church and by so-called Christian believers. This was particularly shocking when many of the new immigrants were committed Christians who had hoped to find acceptance amongst their Christian brothers and sisters in England. One particular incident is recounted by Mike Phillips in a letter to a friend:

> “having gone to church for the very first time – so elated, so delighted that I’m coming from an Anglican church back home, I went to join in worship, and so I did – but after the service I was greeted by the vicar,

[273] Letter in response to JD Murray (2nd June 1948) in HO213/244 cited in ibid p.52.
[274] Spencer, *British Immigration Policy Since 1939*, p.53.

> who politely and nicely told me: 'Thank you for coming but I would be delighted if you didn't come back.' And I said "Why?" He said, 'My congregation is uncomfortable in the company of black people'".[275]

Fortunately this did not prevent Mr Phillips from continuing in his faith and later becoming a minister but, as he observed, this was "a common experience, more so with the Anglican Church and other mainstream churches too, but most of all with the Anglican."[276] There is also some evidence to suggest that Black Methodists also experienced discriminatory attitudes in British Methodist Churches when they settled in Britain. In the fifties, the *Methodist Recorder* contained articles and letters which variously referred to perceived problems associated with the immigrant population including, by way of example, 'mixed race marriages'[277] the view that "moral standards of the coloured people are lower than ours"[278] and the observation that in Birmingham "the number of colonial immigrants in regular (church) attendance remains disappointingly small".[279] The Reverend J.J. Whitfield of Birmingham concluded that "it is not so much the form of worship as the absence of the free and friendly atmosphere West Indians are accustomed to find in church that makes it feel difficult for them to feel at home among us".[280] At the 1998 Methodist Conference Mrs Ellie Morton, who emigrated to Britain ten years after the Windrush arrived in Britain, told delegates that since that period Methodism had "moved a long way but there still are a lot of prejudices in the Church."[281] The clear implication in this

[275] See Phillips Mike and Phillips Trevor. *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain*, (London, HarperCollins Publishers), 1998, p.149.
[276] ibid.
[277] *The Methodist Recorder* (1st May 1957).
[278] *The Methodist Recorder*, (4th September 1955).
[279] *The Methodist Recorder*, (9th April 1959).
[280] ibid.
[281] Morton, Ellie. (Oxford and Leicester) in *The Methodist Recorder* (Thursday July 2nd 1998) at p.24.

statement is that there were racist attitudes within the Methodist Church and although the situation had vastly improved by the last decade of the Twentieth Century, there were still some underlying problems. This suggests that whatever the official position of the Church was regarding racial discrimination in the early post-war years, an undercurrent of racial prejudice/discrimination was present within church membership and influenced immigrant congregants. Thus, the anti-racist approach taken by the Church must be viewed in light of the constant battle against racist views which seemed to be prevalent within British society which permeated the church.

The most apparent attempts to further an anti-racist agenda during the 1940's and 1950's can be determined from the reports on South African Apartheid. For Methodists, the evil of apartheid was linked to the Methodist campaign against the slave trade that had been led by John Wesley almost two hundred years earlier. One article in the Methodist Recorder at the beginning of the 1950's described the treatment of black people in South Africa as amounting to: "The existence of a slave race, herded like cattle in reserves, and working for the white population on low wages."[282] This is just one of the parallels drawn between slavery and apartheid during this period. It was an observation that would continue to assert itself as part of an extended and continuous campaign in *The Methodist Recorder* against the evils of apartheid. The Reverend EK Hobson, writing in the Recorder during the same period, saw the abolition movement pioneered by William Wilberforce and Mr Wesley as a proud part of the Christian heritage and warned that apartheid was an example of the; "mass of misery, oppression, prejudice and misunderstanding [that] has been inherited

[282] Editors Columns 'Apartheid Reinterpreted' in *The Methodist Recorder* (April 20th 1950) at p.10.

by succeeding generations from the bad old days [of slavery]."[283] For Hobson, the practice of apartheid was not simply the reassertion of the same prejudices that resulted in the slave trade, but rather a continuation of underlying racist attitudes that had been passed down through the generations, of which apartheid was a despicable expression. The level of concern expressed by the Reverend Hobson cannot be underestimated. In his opinion, racial discrimination "may not loom as large in the public mind as the danger of communism, but it may come to overshadow it…".[284] Indeed Hobson believed that notion of equality supposedly promoted by secular communism was a competitive threat to the egalitarian vision of the Church which should be lived out in Methodism. In his article, Hobson commends the Methodist International Houses, which were positioned near universities in order to provide accommodation for international students, as an environment where multi-ethnic community living could flourish. From Hobson's perspective, "A hundred more international houses would be a better defence against communism than a squadron of fighter jets…".[285]

The belief that the Church needed to take positive action to dispel racist attitudes within British society is apparent from various articles and letters published in *The Methodist Recorder* over three decades. According to these writers/correspondents, during the 1940's-60's the Church did not appear to take a co-ordinated approach to combating racism across the Connexion but seemed to have simply prompted circuits and individual churches to welcome recent immigrants and organise events to encourage their inclusion within the

[283] Hobson, E.K. *The Methodist* Recorder, (22nd January 1953) at p.9.
[284] ibid.
[285] ibid.

life of the Church. Miss Hilda Porter, Convenor of the Methodist Committee for the care of overseas students, contributed to one such article in *The Methodist Recorder* concerning the role of the Methodist International Houses in counteracting the so called 'colour bar'. One of the problems she identified was that employers were often refusing to take on black graduates because of the prejudices of their clients.[286] This frustration with racial discrimination in the employment field is further echoed in one *Methodist Recorder* article which condemned the attitudes of Birmingham bus workers who were protesting against the employment of black bus drivers. The editor described this as "probably the worst case of the colour bar in the country" whereby the de facto ban on employing black people was "both wrong and unreasonable, and ought to be lifted without delay".[287] However it is questionable to what extent these articles of protest actually influenced racist attitudes within its readership. While *The Methodist Recorder* was clearly following an anti-racist agenda, the Connexion was conspicuously slow to co-ordinate a campaign to combat racism. It seems that although the link between Wesley's anti-slavery campaign and the practice of apartheid was made, there does not appear to be a great deal of evidence to suggest that the Methodist Church engaged in any sustained theological reflection on the nature of the problem of racism in the UK and how to combat it by relating to John Wesley's own endeavours against slavery.

While Methodists continued to discuss the problems of apartheid in South Africa and the problem of the 'colour bar' in the pages of the Methodist Recorder, the UK Government began to devise policies which would impede the flow of

[286] The Methodist Recorder (March 10th 1955) at p.10
[287] The Methodist Recorder (1st May 1952) at p.3

'coloured' immigrants into the country. The Commonwealth Immigration Bill 1962, which was the result of increasing public and government hostility towards 'coloured' immigrants, appears to have encouraged Methodists to redouble their efforts to adopt a more inclusive attitude towards West Indian Immigrants within the Church. The Bill was not explicitly racist, but its principal impact was clearly on black immigrants. As William Dedes, a government minister without portfolio, explained:

> "The Bill's real purpose was to restrict the influx of coloured immigrants. We were reluctant to say as much openly. So, the restrictions were applied to coloured and white citizens in all Commonwealth countries – though everyone recognised that immigration from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand formed no part of the problem."[288]

The need for immigration controls had been voiced within *The Methodist Recorder* as early as 1954, with a reference to immigration "getting out of hand", with the needs of immigrants in certain areas perceived to be "swamping" available housing and school facilities.[289] Moreover, eleven years on, the Rev. J. Crouch was endorsing the government's position that the legislative controls of immigration were not racial because "they were not restricted to coloured people" and were "sensible because the welfare state cannot cope with the influx of immigrants",[290]even though this contradicted clear evidence that the government's immigration policy was implicitly racist. While views on the subject within the Methodist Church were mixed, widespread

[288] See Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, p.56.
[289] *The Methodist Recorder* (11th November 1954).
[290] *The Methodist Recorder* (23rd December 1965).

public hostility towards black immigrants eventually resulted in a series of high-profile attempts by individual churches, circuits and districts to promote racial harmony and to publicise this in *The Methodist Recorder*. Nevertheless, despite these attempts, some attitudes within church congregations during the 1960's appeared to continue to reflect the ingrained prejudices that existed within wider British society. When reporting on the WCC sponsored conference in Notting Hill, *The Methodist Recorder* paraphrased the comments of Dr Eugene Carmen Break, (General Secretary of the WCC) who had declared that "racial conflict was one of the most important problems facing the churches today."[291] Perhaps part of the problem was that while ecumenical bodies such as the WCC took the issue of racial discrimination seriously, the governing bodies of national churches appear to have allocated insufficient resources towards tackling the issue of racism in the Church. While encouraging a series of teach-ins on racial discrimination, it seems that the Methodist approach to racial justice was far from integrated and systematic across the Connexion. It was not until later in the century that Methodists demonstrated commitment to challenging the institutional racism within the church in a sustained, consistent and adequately resourced manner across the Connexion.

<u>The outreach and segregation in Methodist churches debated in the 1960's</u>

Perhaps one of the most significant moves towards a connexional attempt to engage with ethnic minorities was the establishment of a connexional committee on Community Relations in 1968:

[291] *The Methodist Recorder*, (Thursday May 22nd 1969) at p.3.

> "to stimulate and to receive requests for ministers, deaconesses and full-time lay workers to be appointed in the Circuits for work amongst immigrant peoples."[292]

By 1970 it was recognised that the extent of the challenge of engaging with ethnic minorities and shaping attitudes was so great that the Church could not simply rely on the ordained clergy but had to consider recruiting and training more community lay workers "to reinforce and expand the often pioneer work in race relations of an ordained minister".[293] In addition to this it was recognised within the report that churches across the Connexion needed to engage in an integrated and "systematic local programme of community relations".[294] This might suggest that the committee felt that the work of improving race relations had focused too heavily on the efforts of the clergy without the sufficient backing and resourcing of the laity. However, at the same time, while recognising the importance of the work undertaken by the Church, there was still the lack of a definitive statement from the conference which condemned the practice of racism within society. It was not until 1978 that the Division of Social Responsibility asked the Methodist Conference to formally endorse a statement and programme on race relations. The statement emphasised that "Racism is a direct contradiction of the Gospel of Jesus"[295] and welcomed the "multi-racial nature of society in Britain and…our unqualified commitment to it."[296] In addition the conference also sought to affirm that it was "essential to assert and maintain

[292] See the Agenda of *The Methodist Conference* (Representative Session) 1970 at p.385.
[293] ibid.
[294] ibid.
[295] See 'The Division of Social Responsibility Report', *The Methodist Conference* (1978) at p.283.
[296] ibid, p.39.

both by law and by public acceptance, the full citizenship rights of every British citizen whatever his or her colour, race or faith" and to:

> "deplore the creation of uncertainty and apprehension in society, particularly the minority communities, by statements which express irrational fears concerning the colour ratio of [the] British population, and urge members to give no support to statements or proposals which may be understood to be racist and discriminatory and therefore liable to incite racial hatred".[297]

Yet it can hardly be said that this motion was in anyway radical when it is considered that two years previously Parliament had passed the Race Relations Act 1976 which built upon the earlier 1965 and 1968 Acts. By this time racial discrimination was an illegal act and the Methodist Church was now in the position of requiring their members to obey the law, not simply their consciences. Arguably, Methodists in Britain had not been as radically progressive as they could and should have been. While Methodists were ready to condemn racism at home and abroad, the initiative to lobby for race relations legislation owed more to the ecumenical movement than it did to Methodism alone. Part of the continuing problem was a lack of theological reflection on the nature of racism and its relationship to rights and liberties, at least within official publications and reports by the Connexion. There appeared to be dependence both on ministers and laity at the grassroots level, and the wider ecumenical movement, to take action against racism rather than pushing a strong connexional response. More importantly, the Church did not seem to have a

[297] ibid, p.285.

detailed strategy to deal with the institutional forms of racism that plagued it. The 1978 statement can therefore be seen as an important step in that it provided an authoritative marker within the Church concerning its own position on racism and a starting point for some encouraging work undertaken in the 1980's. However, it also seems that tensions existing within Methodism at this time continued to reflect the failure of congregations to live out the inclusive and accepting lives to which they were called. As one Methodist Minister observed:

> "it was the relationships between church members that caused the most hurt. Often there were virtually parallel congregations with white and black hardly knowing each other or speaking to one another. Some had been members of the Methodist Church in this country for twenty years and still did not feel accepted."[298]

It was this implicit racism which seems to have troubled the Methodist Church, perhaps at times masking more overtly racist attitudes, but most likely representing a failure to realise the importance of the positive, welcoming and affirmation that was required in the Church environment at a time when racism was still common and widespread within British society. As the 1976 Division of Social Responsibility report stated:

> "the reaction which met the WCC General Secretary's description of Britain as one of the most racist nations indicates that the large majority

[298] Peaden, Revd Dr W.R. 'Wolverhampton's Racial Tensions' in The Methodist Recorder (Thursday May 4th 1978) at p.12.

> of our people have yet to realise the extent to which the black population of many urban areas is disadvantaged".[299]

This realisation led to an even more intense campaign of education and awareness raising in the Methodist Church with a view to ensuring that members were not only knowledgeable about racial discrimination within the Church, but that they should also take positive action to ensure that black and ethnic minority people could feel welcome and empowered by the Church.

The 1980's onwards – A reorientation of the debate

The 1962 and 1971 Acts had restricted the rights of commonwealth citizens, and disproportionately those who belonged to ethnic minorities, leading to a widespread institutionalised bias in Britain. The policies pursued by the Conservative government from 1979-97 saw various developments in the way that the government approached immigration. Most notable was the passing of the British Nationality Act 1981 which further restricted the entitlement to British Citizenship and was followed in the 90's by a shift in focus from general immigration to refugees and asylum seekers. Yet despite the principal rationale behind changes to the immigration laws and race relations legislation being the promotion of a more cohesive and stable society, it is arguably the case that the government "failed to depoliticise the question of black immigration"[300] and, even at the time of writing, racist attitudes continue to plague the immigration debate.

[299] 'Report of the Division of Social Responsibility', *The Methodist Conference* (1976) at p.109.
[300] Solomos, *Race and Immigration*, p.66.

While Methodists continued to campaign against the existence of apartheid in South Africa during the 1980's, there was a growing "contrite recognition of British complicity in apartheid itself and apartheid-type attitudes and practices in the UK."[301] Following on from the race riots of the early 1980's, the Committee for Community and Race Relations began conducting extensive consultations with ministers and churches in multi-ethnic urban areas in order to determine the reasons for the riots and the measures which could be put in place to avoid them in future. One of the main areas of concern, identified within the report discussed at the 1982 Methodist Conference, was the impact of the British Nationality Act which received Royal Assent on 30th October 1981. Following on from a report first received at the 1980 Conference, concerns were raised about the lack of a right of appeal on naturalisation decisions and "the racism inherent in distinguishing between the rights of those from the 'new' commonwealth (mainly black) and the "old" (mainly white)."[302] Furthermore the report also expressed concerns that a great deal of individual and family distress would be caused by the new legislation amongst the black community and that:

> "Black British members of our congregations will need in some instances explicit encouragement, and even practical assistance in completing forms, to *register immediately* to establish the citizenship and right to abode to which they are entitled".[303]

It is difficult to ascertain to what extent Methodist Churches followed the advice of this report in assisting those members of their congregation who required

[301] 'The Methodist Conference Agenda' (1980) at p.153.
[302] 'Community and Race Relations Report', *The Methodist Conference* (1982) at p.35.
[303] ibid, p.37.

help in completing these forms. However, the acknowledgement that the Church had a role to play in providing this practical assistance is an example of how positive action was heavily promoted during this time. In addition, the Church was also quite open in its unreserved criticism of the new legislation which it believed had; "inflicted a deep wound on the sense of security of the black British [population] and their right to be and remain in this country."[304] In the view of the Church the reason for this failure on the part of government was the result of an:

> "absence from the policy making levels of almost all British institutions of members of ethnic minorities. This means that – 'unknowingly' – the cultural, social and economic presuppositions and interests of the dominant ethnic group is bound to determine the outcome."[305]

However, in making the acknowledgement of institutional racism the Church also had to recognise that the carrion call for "all members of minorities …[to]…be present at all levels of British life" [306] applied as much to the Church as it did to any other organisation in society. Thus, in order to address this issue, the Methodist Church commissioned two significant publications on black people in Methodism: *People, Churches & Multiracial Projects*[307] written by Tony Holden; and *A Tree God Planted – Black People in British Methodism* by Walton et al.[308] In his introduction to the opening chapter, Holden gives the reason for writing the report as:

[304] ibid
[305] ibid, p.38.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Holden, Tony. *People, Churches & Multi-Racial Projects – An account of English Methodism's response to plural Britain*, (Nottingham, Russell Press), 1984.
[308] Walton, Heather. Ward, Robin. And Johnson, Mark. *A Tree God Planted – Black People in British Methodism*, (Nottingham, Russell Press), 1985.

> "Christians have to take their geographical location and cultural, political and social contexts seriously if their theology and mission are to be meaningful and effective."[309]

He also emphasises that:

> "some of the issues involved [concerning racial discrimination] are not touched by the Churches. In fact, some of the factors most crucial to the well-being of the Black and Asian communities (indeed to all the inner city) are rarely, only hesitantly, addressed by the churches."[310]

Thus, in his report Holden attempts to explain some of the issues and factors which affect black people in the Methodist Church. He outlines how various projects have assisted in mitigating some of the difficulties they have faced and suggests improvements on the way forward. Perhaps one of the most worrying criticisms that Holden directs at Methodism is the failure of its white members to live in right relationship with their black brothers and sisters within the ecclesiastical environment; a criticism that has been frequently echoed in speeches, reports, letters and articles at Methodist Conference and in the Recorder:

> "White people in the Church lack an awareness of who and what black people are; white people adopt an attitude of cultural arrogance towards

[309]Holden, Tony. *People, Churches & Multi-Racial Projects – An account of English Methodism's response to plural Britain*, (Nottingham, Russell Press), 1984. p.17
[310]ibid.

> black people; and there is both the overt and covert forms of racism within the church".[311]

Tony Holden, in his own testimony, admits that some of his experiences within the Church have been, at times, profoundly negative:

> "I have been a victim of racism all my life in South Africa but my most humiliating experiences have been here within the Church in Britain…There is much to be desired [sic] in the Church's response to racism in this country".[312]

In order to determine how to tackle racism within the church and society Holden seeks to examine some of the causal factors which lead to racism and also identify some positive responses to pluralism and a multi-ethnic society. One of the most notable assertions made by Holden is that "Racism is a by-product of the economic system" which would suggest a causal link between poverty and racist attitudes. This would seem to be consistent with the thinking of some leading sociologists, such as John Rex who asserts that:

> "Race relations situations and problems have the following characteristics: they refer to situations in which two or more groups with distinct identities and recognisable characteristics are forced by economic and social circumstances to live together in a society. Within this they refer to a situation in which there is a high degree of conflict between the groups and in which ascriptive criteria are used to mark out

[311] ibid, p.25.
[312] ibid, p.26.

> the members of each group in order that one group may pursue one of a number of hostile policies against the other. Finally, within this group of situations true race relations may be said to exist when the practices of ascriptive allocation of roles and rights referred to are justified in terms of some kind of deterministic theory, whether that theory be of scientific, religious, cultural, historical, or sociological kind."[313]

Some of the structural elements within a society that Rex links with racism, as summarised by Solomos, include:

> "frontier situations of conflict over scarce resources; the existence of unfree, indentured or slave labour; unusually harsh class exploitation, strict legal intergroup distinctions and occupational segregation, differential access to power and prestige, cultural diversity and limited group interaction, and migrant labour as an underclass playing stigmatised roles in a metropolitan setting."[314]

For this reason, Holden is likely to be correct that racism can be related to the economic system, although there are also other complex contributory factors which can be considered relevant. However, what is significant about the realised connection between racism and socio-political reasons is that it links different generations of rights together and recognises how different rights relate to each other. Thus racism can be seen a result of abusive power relationships that exist within a society and thus the struggle for racial equality

[313] Rex, John. *Race Relations in Sociological Theory*, (London, Routledge), 1983, p.159-60 cited in Solomos, John. *Race and Racism in Britain*, p.19.
[314] See Solomos, John. *Race and Racism in Britain*, p.19.

should form part of a much larger movement that encompasses a wider "struggle for equality, liberation, human dignity and racial justice."[315] Holden, when quoting Jill Tweedie, thus recognises that racism is essentially an expression of prejudice which also emerges in other ways in a society:

> "The rotten manifestations of racism are easily recognisable because, paradoxically they are in no way confined to racism. Oppression, deprivation, violence and a denial of full social rights afflict many people…".[316]

It therefore seems clear that in this report Holden has made a good case for racism to be incorporated within the wider context of rights violations. However, what he does not appear to do is incorporate this into a comprehensive Christological understanding or relate it back to the existence of sin and humankind's fallen nature. While Wesley linked his understanding of the evils of slavery to a theological perspective, Holden makes very few references to any of the theological ideas behind Methodism within his report. However, Holden does make reference to a World Council of Churches statement concerning the definition, which declared that:

"Every human being, created in the image of God, is a person for whom Christ has died. Racism, which is the use of a person's racial origins to determine a person's value, is an assault on Christ's values and a rejection of his sacrifice. Wherever it appears, whether in the individual or in the collective, it is a sin. It

[315] British Council of Churches Report (April 1976) at p.31 cited in Holden, Tony. *People, Churches and Multi-Racial Projects*, p.33.
[316] Tweedie, Gill. *The Guardian* (24th January 1984) cited in Holden, Tony. *People, Churches and Multi-Racial Projects*, p.41.

must be openly fought by all those who are on Christ's side and by the Church as the designated vehicle and instrument of Christ's purpose in the world".[317]

Yet while citing this reference to the WCC report, Holden does not make a case based on extensive scriptural reasoning or on the historical practices and doctrines of Methodism. Instead his arguments are mostly reliant on sociological research and observations. Whilst this is of course important, it does make it difficult to articulate a truly Methodist vision of what it means to be an inclusive Church, which seems strange considering the ecclesiastical context in which the report has been written. However, one of the most interesting questions Holden's report does tackle is the situation of 'Black Churches' and how Methodism seeks to relate to them. For Holden, Black Churches serve "as a reminder that socially rejected people need the strength of their own group as a base for dialogue with others."[318] He goes on to explain that these Black Churches:

> "are a product of a movement of *black consciousness and self-determination*. They are a means whereby people affirm and assert their own identity…Black Churches, at their best, offer to the whole Church an opportunity to understand the breath of differences which exist within the family of Christ"[319]

Yet within Methodism there has undoubtedly been a tension between the right of people to form a free association based on a common cultural and shared

[317] WCC Statement on Racism (1980) cited in Holden, Tony. *People, Churches and Multi-Racial Projects*, p.44.
[318] Holden, Tony. *People, Churches and Multi-Racial Projects*, p.51.
[319] ibid, p.52.

need and the belief that churches need to reflect the diversity of the Christian body. Thus, there is recognition of the "conflicting views about separatism and engagement" often experienced by Black Churches and historically shared within Methodism. The need for black people to occasionally organise themselves as a separate body has been expressed by Paul Boateng, a prominent black Methodist and former Labour MP, who asserts that:

> "It is not easy for white people to hear, as they must hear, that in the struggle for racial justice and in the struggle to create a multi-racial society, black people will, from time to time, wish to organise as black people to the exclusion of whites. That is something that is not easy for whites who may have all their lives been involved in the struggle against racism."[320]

Thus, there is an argument that in order for black people to assert their rights and liberties they must come together in unity to share in a common unity. Nevertheless, the Methodist emphasis has generally been directed towards integrating black people within a multi-ethnic Church by challenging the attitudes and behaviour of its white members and seeking to establish a welcoming environment for ethnic minorities within its churches. This has meant that numerous projects have been funded by the Methodist Church to better engage with black and minority ethnic people as well developing partnerships with black churches to engage ecumenically with them. This approach would seem entirely consistent with the Methodist Church's Wesleyan heritage in

[320] Boateng, Paul. USPG Christians Aware 'Conference on Multi-Cultural Britain' (January 1983) cited in Walton, Heather (ed). *A Tree God Planted*, p.46

seeking to include those who often find themselves discriminated against and disempowered by society.

The publication *A Tree God Planted* would seem to complement Holden's work by summarising the contexts and situations experienced by black people in the Methodist Church and by providing suggestions to transform the Church in order to bring about greater equality. The report highlights numerous examples where black people have found themselves discriminated against within the Methodist Church both by members and ministers. The report urged churches to involve their black congregants by encouraging them to enter into full membership of the Church and to fully participate in Church life. This would seem to be particularly important within a Methodist context where, historically, the involvement of lay people in the mission of the Church has been vitally important. However, the report also highlights cultural problems in the Church where white members act as an obstacle to empowerment, for example:

> "White Methodists are used to looking at church leadership in terms of efficiency…This typically Methodist emphasis on efficiency may over-ride human considerations. For example, if there is a position to be filled, more thought is normally given to the administrative competence of possible candidates than to what creative power can be liberated for the Church by a less clinical approach to the task."[321]

[321] Walton, Heather (ed). *A Tree God Planted*, p.42.

Concerns were also raised in the report concerning the training of black local preachers - cited as an “example of the tendency to allow functional requirements to override human considerations”[322]:

> “Some older black preachers remain on trial for many years and exercise a valuable ministry to everyone’s satisfaction. However, because they lacked academic training in their youth, they find it difficult to succeed in their exams. There is provision within our regulations for extension of the customary five-year training period and this option should be seriously considered in view of the fact that there are less than 100 black local preachers in British Methodism”.[323]

The flexibility which is demanded when encouraging members from disadvantaged backgrounds to hold positions of leadership within the Church is also a Wesleyan trait. John Wesley’s encouragement of ordinary people to become class leaders within Methodist societies reflected a desire to ensure that the movement did not become dominated by the affluent classes. In the same way the contemporary Methodist concern for empowering black and ethnic minorities is part of this long tradition. Yet it is Methodism’s understanding of the importance of ‘social holiness’ and desire to reform society which means that the anti-racist endeavours of the Connexion were not simply to ensure that black and minority people felt welcome with the Church, but that by their action society would also be changed.

[322] ibid.
[323] ibid.

Both of the aforementioned reports published by the Methodist Church were subsequently considered within a Methodist Conference Report in 1987 entitled *Faithful and Equal* in which much of the material in the two reports was consolidated. One of the purposes of this 'consolidated' report was described as to ensure that: "Methodism may more faithfully respond to Britain as a multi-racial society in which all receive equal opportunity and treatment."[324] However, the report is by no means confined to Methodism, appealing:

> "for the zealous and compassionate participation of Methodist people in all constructive programmes for racial justice and the building of a just and peaceful society".[325]

Thus, the desire to promote the rights and liberties of ethnic minorities within a society is therefore embedded in a vision of society infused by Christian values in which God's justice is realised. As a result, the anti-racist approach of the Methodist Church is grounded within a progressive and reformist tradition which reflects John Wesley's own desire to see society radically changed to recognise the sisterly and brotherly duties of humankind before God. Yet there is also a recognition that in order for society to change, Christian people must first set the example for others to follow.

The 1990's and the change of emphasis

The 1991 Methodist Conference considered a progress report on the implementation of *Faithful and Equal* within the church that included data taken

[324] Division of Social Responsibility Report, *Equal and Faithful*, The Methodist Conference (1987) p.157
[325] ibid.

from a Connexion-wide questionnaire. The Division of Social Responsibility described the response rate as "very disappointing"[326] and even "derisory."[327] The way in which the Church responded to the report was seen as diverse, depending on the context of the congregations. One worrying factor was that:

> "In a few cases that response is still racist in a straightforwardly personal sense. For example, in a small minority of churches the white members expressed misgivings about black Ministers and black members:
>
> 'If the numbers of coloured people do increase, I sense there would possibly be some difficulties [in]…accepting them'".[328]

However, in around 50% of the responses it appears that churches were indifferent or unconcerned with racial justice because they did not believe that it applied to their context. One response stated that "this church does not consider it has a problem; the multi-racial society exists somewhere else"[329] and "This question really does not apply in a community that has no coloured, black or ethnic minority groups."[330] Thus in many circumstances the problems that the church faced was a generally apathetic attitude to racial equality coupled with a failure to recognise racism (institutional or otherwise) and subtle discrimination within its membership. This is deeply problematic for a Church which considers itself to be connexional in its polity and seeks to work together for a common

[326] Division of Social Responsibility Report: *Faithful and Equal – A progress report*, The Methodist Conference (1991) at p.319.
[327] ibid.
[328] ibid, p.320.
[329] ibid, p.321.
[330] ibid.

purpose. The failure of the Church to engage with racial justice issues in one place is therefore a concern for the whole of the Church. As the report stated:

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> "Racism is not just a problem for those in multi-racial areas: Methodism is a multi-racial church in a multi-racial society, and racism is a problem which concerns us all".[331]

This response must be deemed correct since a Church cannot have an inconsistent approach to such an important issue which concerns the rights and liberties of the person and is so integral to Methodist beliefs and doctrines. John Wesley would not have tolerated his Methodist societies supporting the practice of slavery in any way and would have considered any individual Methodist engaged in the trade to have been in an unconscionable position. Similarly, any Methodist who is now found to be supporting or acquiescing in a culture of racism is in conflict with the teachings of the Church. The report thus concluded that failure to engage with the racial justice agenda was a failure to combat racism through omission. Thus, the reasonable expectation of Methodists is that they should take positive and affirmative action to promote racial justice by using all the resources at the church's disposal.[332]

Perhaps one of the most significant moves to support racial justice during this period was the introduction of Racial Justice Sunday into the Methodist Church calendar which was first celebrated across the Connexion on 9th September 1990. The setting aside of one Sunday to consider racial justice issues seems

[331] ibid, p.324.
[332] "If the Methodist church seriously wishes to fight against racism, it needs to use the full resources at its disposal" in ibid, p.332.

to have been very successful in drawing attention to these issues. Furthermore, the placement and stationing of black ministers and lay preachers also helped many congregations realise the imperative to improve race relations.[333] By embedding and integrating racial justice into the familiar worship elements – through sermons, hymns and prayers – rather than treating it as an adjunct to church life in isolation from doctrine and belief, it seems that racial justice is better understood within the mission of the Church.

It is therefore clear that the early 1990's saw a reinvigoration across the Connexion with regard to raising awareness of racial justice. Yet in the two following decades the question of immigration, and more specifically the treatment of asylum seekers, increasingly became the prominent issue regarding rights, liberties and racial discrimination. In addition:

> "the language of the political debate shifted towards the view that alienated black youths were a kind of social time-bomb that could undermine the fabric of the race relations amalgam and possibly society as a whole."[334]

At the 1992 Methodist Conference the issue of refugees and asylum seekers was raised in a wider resolution on racial justice. With the European Union showing signs of becoming a much closer political entity the Methodist Conference recommended that:

[333] ibid, p.323.
[334] Solomos, John. *Race and Racism in Britain* p.67.

> "the European Community should adopt a common immigration policy, endorsed by the European Parliament, that takes fully into account the right to political asylum and a refugee policy based on the highest humanitarian standards".[335]

This call for Europe-wide action was subsequently repeated at the 1993 Methodist Conference where in one report it was affirmed that:

> "The rights of minorities within all our nations must be carefully guarded. The rights of those who seek refuge from their own country's violence are equally precious international agreements".[336]

Within both of these statements there is again the recognition that it is the responsibility of the international community acting corporately to ensure that refugee rights are enforced over and above narrow conceptions of the perceived 'national interest.' However, it would seem that this belief in the importance of the collective responsibility of western democracies to uphold human rights is inconsistently upheld. In cases concerning refugees and asylum seekers the state will often take action which restricts rights while, when seeking to justify international conflict, it will argue the promotion and protection of human rights along with other humanitarian reasons.

It was the 1996 report to the Methodist Conference which saw the Church attempt to provide some prophetic criticism concerning the treatment of

[335] Report to the *Methodist Conference* (1992) at p.355.
[336] Report of the International, Relief and Development Affairs Committee, The Methodist Conference (1993) at p.323.

refugees and asylum seekers within the UK. One particular concern raised in the report was that arguments about immigration and asylum seeking were separate (although in some ways related) and that too often the debate became confused when both issues were treated as if they were entirely synonymous.[337] In endeavouring to establish the context of Britain acting as a sanctuary for refugees, the report highlights not only how the UK has a long tradition of giving shelter to refugees but how many of them "have made positive contributions to our national life, culturally and economically, beyond their numerical strength."[338] However, the report goes on to describe how this tradition is threatened:

> "The prospect of an application for asylum is overshadowed by a fear of detention and of being embroiled in complex and secret regulations which determine the process of their application."[339]

A particular concern in the report was that:

> "The opportunities for careful review of complicated personal situations have withered as appeal rights have been taken away. The speed at which some procedures have been operated have left vulnerable people bewildered as they have attempted to grapple with an unfamiliar bureaucracy, a strange environment and a foreign language. Other

[337] See Division of Social Responsibility Report: *Asylum and Immigration*, The Methodist Conference (1996), at p.459.
[338] ibid, p.461.
[339] Ibid.

> procedures have dragged on for unacceptably long periods, leaving such people in a limbo of uncertainty about their future".[340]

In the Church's opinion this burgeoning bureaucracy, along with complex immigration rules, was intended to "make entry to the UK increasingly restrictive and difficult"[341] for those genuinely fleeing persecution. Furthermore there was a great deal of concern also expressed regarding the "attachment to asylum-seekers… procedures which are normally associated with criminality".[342] The report identifies the practice of mandatory finger printing as one example, although in more recent years the controversial practice of detaining asylum seekers in reception and removal centres has attracted a significant amount of attention and criticism. This particularly applies to those centres operated by the private sector and where inspections have highlighted poor living conditions for detainees as well as wide ranging health and safety concerns, especially for families and children. When the reports were written, the practice of detention was less widespread with only 800 people held in such facilities. However, at this early stage, the report was highlighting concerns about the conditions of detention and questioning the justification for it. Attention was also drawn to other unsatisfactory aspects whereby the "staff are ill equipped"[343] and the "service is under-resourced"[344]. Furthermore:

> "The confusion between asylum legislation and the features of criminality…runs the danger of planting in the public imagination the

[340] ibid, p.166.
[341] ibid.
[342] ibid, p.467.
[343] ibid, p.471.
[344] Ibid.

> notion that asylum-seekers are to be thought of as being like criminals. This is an intolerable slur on people who come from situations of persecution in search of a human right".[345]

At this point it is appropriate to recall John Wesley's own concerns about the demonisation of the poor in Eighteenth Century society and the dehumanising opinions of black people that legitimised the sinful practice of slavery. Late Twentieth Century Government policy was being agitated by the populist press which was echoing the concerns of the fifties and sixties about the NHS, schools and housing stock being insufficient to cope with the demands of immigrants and, more recently, asylum seekers fleeing civil wars. This was now overlaid with media allegations that some asylum seekers could be dangerous Islamic terrorists. All of this was now in danger of fuelling hostility towards those who were ethnically and culturally different. As the report notes:

> "Britain has found it exceedingly difficult to move comfortably towards a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. The expression of the deep anxieties within British society and the increasingly ferocious legislation to guard against Britain's borders are rightly labelled racist".[346]

It seems that Twentieth Century Methodism was now seeing the state as being under a duty to shape social opinion rather than simply respond to it by pursuing populist policies concerning immigration and asylum seeking. This mirrors John Wesley's approach to government interventionism whereby he believed that legislation and taxation could be used by the state to encourage

[345] ibid, p.468.
[346] ibid, p.467.

ethical behaviour. This was itself tied to a belief that government must submit to God's justice and have faith in his leadership:

> "Instead of a sense of adventure and discovery built on trust in God's faithful love and protection, societies are frozen in fear and defensiveness. Instead of inclusive attitudes, exclusivism based on race and religion becomes dominant…hospitality to the stranger appears as a moral duty in settled societies. Love must be shown to the alien, in imitation of God."[347]

It is at this point that the report incorporates a theological justification for its policies on asylum by referring to Abraham's asylum in Egypt (Genesis 12:10-14) emphasising that the land itself belongs to God (Psalm 24:1); that the peoples of the earth are sojourners and pilgrims (Hebrews 11:1-12:2) and God's people can have this mobility because their eyes are fixed upon the heavenly city (Philippians 3:12-21).[348]As well as challenging the cultural inclination against asylum seekers, by emphasising that all people are travellers on God's earth, the scriptural passages also deflate any sense of nationalistic identity which would trump the responsibility to care and uphold the rights of a fellow human being. Since the Earth belongs to God, and national boundaries are simply human political constructs, the divisions drawn up between nations becomes meaningless in the same way that race distinctions are left behind in the unity found in fellowship with Christ (Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:1, Ephesians 2:11-22). Thus, through this ecclesiastical vision, which extends into society on earth, Methodists proclaim that:

[347] ibid, p.462.
[348] ibid, p.463.

> "Christian teaching and tradition support the vision of a society which is open to change…which invests in social cohesion…which contributes to international agreements which promise to reduce conflict and injustice between nations."[349]

Thus, the Methodist Church adopts an inclusive and accepting policy towards asylum seekers and refugees and in so doing even contends that:

> "If the immigration rules were relaxed, the numbers of people entering the UK for long-term purposes would probably increase significantly – though this would not necessarily be detrimental to the quality of life or economic development year".[350]

This proclamation would generally conflict with the policies of all the major political parties who have sought to place restrictions on immigration due to public fears and prejudices. However, there is sound theological backing for a more compassionate and flexible policy concerning both immigration and asylum seekers which is not covertly or overtly racist and seeks to uphold the human rights of the individual. Amongst the specific improvement policies suggested by the Church, the most notable include[351]; the restoration of the right to British citizenship for a child born in the UK whose parents have leave to enter for more than six months; a simplification of the categories of British citizenship; allowing persons who have lived in the UK for more than seven

[349] ibid, p.462.
[350] ibid, p.468.
[351] See ibid, p.476-478 for the full list of policy issues proposed to the Methodist Conference in 1996.

years being granted a right of abode; that more consideration must be given to the needs of children; that commercial companies should not be the enforcers of government policy; that appeals for removed immigrants should be restored; that the "detention of asylum-seekers and those requesting immigration should not normally take place, except on clear written grounds relating to national security or previous absconding…"; and decisions on asylum must be made efficiently without racial prejudice. This then represents a reasonably comprehensive set of demands issued by the Conference. Whilst it is unfortunate that the majority of them have not been implemented by the government, it is quite clear in this report that the advocacy of refugee rights is an area where the Methodist Church is counter-cultural, led by scripture and true to its Wesleyan 'social holiness' heritage.

Methodist opposition to new legislation that would trample on the human rights of refugees and immigrants continued through the 90's and once again came to prominence when the government proposed its Asylum Bill in 1999. The particular concern of many Methodists was the removal of asylum seekers' entitlement to financial benefits which would be replaced by food vouchers and that future accommodation for refugees would be provided on a 'no choice basis'. Notably outspoken Methodists included the Rev Nigel Gilson (former President of Conference) and Mr Stan Platt (voluntary adviser to the Church on refugee issues).[352] Concerns were also raised that the government's position on asylum was too 'hard-line' which led to the negative stereotyping of asylum seekers as being drains on the welfare state and abusers of the benefits system - accusations which are often misinformed and could be deemed 'immoral' for

[352] See Weetman, Barry. 'The Asylum Bill is Draconian' in *The Methodist Recorder* (Thursday 18th February 1999) at p.3.

their prejudicial perspective.[353] This position is reflected in the stance of the Reverend Arlington Trotman, Secretary of the Churches Commission for Racial Justice, who stated that: "Britain is renegading on its international obligations, the human rights legislation [sic] in particular, to take care of refugees and immigrant people."[354] On this evidence it can therefore be strongly argued that the Methodist Church of the late Twentieth Century has been reasonably consistent in its opposition to government policies on immigration in both Conservative and Labour administrations.

In the nineties the UK government was also participating in NATO led action in Kosovo in order to prevent genocide taking place within Europe. In the early stages of this war the majority of the action occurred when NATO planes bombed certain strategic targets in order to disrupt Serbia's military capabilities. The surprising element in the Methodist response was that many prominent figures supported the deployment of ground troops in order to protect refugees, although the United Methodist Church in North America opposed military intervention arguing:

> "The United Methodist policy rejects any use of war as an instrument of national foreign policy and insists that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve conflict by peaceful means. Church policy also states that 'war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Jesus Christ'".[355]

[353] See Weetman, Barry. 'Concern at Asylum Bill Inadequacies' in *The Methodist Recorder* (Thursday 4th November 1999, front page.
[354] ibid, p.2.
[355] Fassett, Revd Dr Thomas White Wolf quoted in Bottoms, Avril. 'Concern at conflict in Kosovo' in *The Methodist Recorder* (Thursday 1st April 1999) at p.2.

In marked contrast, however, the Methodist Church of Great Britain seems to have supported military intervention while protesting about the failure to deploy NATO ground forces early in the campaign, arguing against the reliance on aerial bombardments. As the Connexional Secretary for International Affairs observed:

> "If the countries of NATO are serious about their humanitarian concern for the people of Kosovo, they, and we, must be prepared to send in ground troops. Realistically we cannot bring about a rapid and lasting cessation of violence and an atmosphere conductive to the negotiation of a political solution by remote control – through missiles and laser directed bombs". [356]

This backing of a ground invasion is a surprising stance for the Church to adopt and one which has not really been repeated in more recent conflicts. Yet at the same time it also reflects an openness to the idea of the international community using military power in order to protect a humanitarian disaster as extreme as genocide. While a full and comprehensive review of the Methodist attitude to state humanitarian intervention to protect human rights goes beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that Methodist attitudes to war and peace are often complex and there is a diverse perspective within the Church on, if and when military action is or is not justified.[357] These complex issues would continue to trouble the Church into the Twenty First Century.

[356] Potter, Jennifer quoted in Bottoms, Avril. 'Kosovo: The Fight for Peace' in *The Methodist Recorder* (Thursday 1st April 1999) at p.1.
[357] For an analysis of Methodist attitudes to War and Peace from the beginning of the 20th Century see Hughes, Michael. *Conscience and Conflict – Methodism, Peace and War in the Twentieth Century*, (Peterborough, Epworth Press), 2008.

Methodism in the Twenty First Century

In December 1999 *The Methodist Recorder* published a feature entitled *A Right to the 21st Century* which sought to explore the Methodist concern for human rights in the Twenty First Century. The article began by linking the Methodist Church's Wesleyan heritage to the current international human rights order:

> "John Wesley, who saw the world as his parish, was among the first to articulate the dream for a genuine international community. This vision, shared with other right-thinking men and women, led to the proclamation and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10th 1948 which sets out the rights human beings are born with regardless of their gender, nationality, race, disability, or any other distinctive trait."[358]

This assertion was followed by a number of statements by prominent Methodists on their views concerning the future of human rights in the coming century and the priorities for the international community and its component states which are charged with upholding these rights. Much like the Methodists in the late 40's and early 50's, contemporary Methodists show some concerns about the effective enforcement of rights. As Caro Ayres, Development Education Officer for the Methodist Relief and Development Fund notes:

[358] Bey, Fen. 'A Right to the 21st Century' in *The Methodist Recorder*, (Thursday 23rd/30th December 1999) at p.7.

> "The UN Declaration of Human Rights is an admirable document, in theory. I say in theory because implementing those rights in practice is not always straightforward… While we see NATO rushing to defend the human rights of those living in Kosovo, there is no such stampede to protect the rights of the millions of children in Iraq who have died or suffered as a consequence of UN sanctions."[359]

However, the Methodist Church of Great Britain seems to have adopted a rather ambivalent position as to whether the use of force can be justified to protect human rights. To a certain extent it appears that the Church makes its evaluation depending on the individual context and whether humanitarian military intervention is justified in international law. There is, however, an underlying concern that armed conflict is not the most effective means to enforce human rights since, by its very nature, the killing of another human being is an act which is difficult to reconcile with the peacemaking agenda. Fen Bey quotes Walter Wink, a United Methodist Minister, when exploring this point:

> "To an oppressed people, Jesus was saying, do not continue to acquiesce in your oppression by the powers; but do not react violently to it either. Rather, find a third way, a way that is neither submission or assault, flight or fight, a way that can secure your human dignity and begin to change the power equation, even now before the revolution".[360]

[359] Ayres, Caro in ibid.
[360] Wink, Walter. *The Powers that be: Theology for a New Millennium*, (New York, Continuum International), 1998 cited in Bey, Fen. 'A Right to the 21st Century' in *The Methodist Recorder*, (Thursday 23rd/30th December 1999) at p.7.

However, the United Nations as a community of states has the responsibility of enforcing human rights internationally and preventing grave violations. The assertion that rights and duties are inextricably linked was also made in this report by Dr Elizabeth Harris, Connexional Secretary for Inter-Faith relations:

> "No-one only has rights. No-one only has responsibilities. All have both. And we in the West, who have many of our rights met in abundance, have an absolute responsibility to struggle on behalf of those whose rights are stripped from them…The human rights picture becomes skewed if rights are not linked with responsibilities."[361]

This belief in the union of rights and responsibilities would seem to make sense in light of the Methodist approach to rights and liberties throughout the Twentieth Century. The recognition that our rights are always tied to duties and responsibilities not only to each other, but to God, reminds Methodists that their conception of rights and liberties differs from the secular one. The former is rooted in a wider ethic that is concerned with God's justice and which rejects individualistic and selfish conceptions of rights which do not respect power relationships.

Methodists would therefore seem to have a good basis to move forward on human rights issues. However, while it may have been possible to predict what some of the continuing human rights issues would be in the Twenty First Century, the events of 11th September 2001, when terrorists attacked the World Trade Centre, have led to new evolving challenges and concerns regarding civil

[361] Bey, Fen. 'A Right to the 21st Century' in *The Methodist Recorder*, (Thursday 23rd/30th December 1999) at p.7.

liberties and new forms of anti-terrorist legislation. In particular the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005 both drew criticisms from the Methodist Church for being rushed through the legislative process and for being racist in their nature.[362] The Reverend Alison McDonald, a Methodist Minister and Solicitor, expressed her views regarding the government's legislation in the Methodist Recorder in no uncertain terms:

> "It seems as though this Government thinks there is a link between Islam and terrorism. If that thought is allowed to be put into virtually unfettered action, then our Muslim neighbours will have no civil liberties and no human rights".[363]

Islamophobia began to have an effect on British politics, particularly the increasing, but fortunately now waning, electoral successes of far-right political parties such as the BNP. Methodists were particularly concerned about the racist views of this extremist party, demonstrated by official church statements condemning the BNP and the election of BNP candidates.[364]). Following on from a Methodist Conference Motion in 2003 requesting that the Connexion provide more resources for churches to tackle the threat of the BNP,[365] the Methodist Church (on 23rd April 2004) launched its web resources, collectively known as 'Countering Political Extremism', to assist Churches in educating

[362] See Fagg, Andrew. 'Fears over terror bill proposals' in *The Methodist Recorder* (March 10th 2005) at p.1.
[363] McDonald, Reverend Alison quoted in ibid.
[364] See 'Concern after election of British National Party local councillor in Blackburn' on the Methodist Church website (22nd November 2002) at: https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/concern-after-election-of-british-national-party-local-councillor-in-blackburn/ (accessed 1/2/20).
[365] See 'Methodist Conference News' (2nd July 2003) at: http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=613 (accessed 20th September 2018).

congregations and campaigning against racist political parties in the run up to the European Union and local council elections. [366] However, widespread concerns about Methodist Members holding membership of the BNP party culminated, in 2009, in the Methodist Conference adopting a motion resolving that:

> "being a member of an organisation which promotes racism is not consistent with being a Methodist…[and]…that the Methodist Council be directed to explore any changes needed to give fuller effect to the principle that being a member of any organisation whose constitution, aims or objectives promote racism is inconsistent with membership of the Methodist Church, or employment which involves representing or speaking on behalf of the Methodist Church…".[367]

In effect, this motion prevented BNP members from becoming members of the Methodist Church and, in so doing, also prevented them from holding office of any kind in the Church. On reviewing the Motion at the 2010 Methodist Conference, the Methodist Council confirmed "that the Methodist Church already has the constitutional framework to enact this policy"[368] and therefore only had some minor revisions to standing orders to recommend to the conference. One of these revisions was to relocate the statement that "racism is a denial of the gospel' from the Finance section of standing orders to the section that concerns Methodist beliefs. The reason for this move was to give

[366] See 'Methodist Church launches web resource to help prevent far-right electoral gains' (23rd July 2004) at: http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=776 (accessed 20th September 2018).
[367] See 'Racism is a Denial of the Gospel – Notice of Motion 203 (2009) at The Methodist Conference (2010) at p.231-232 accessed at: http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/confrep-15-racism-is-a-denial-170510.pdf (accessed 20th September 2018).
[368] ibid, p.229.

the statement more prominence, on the understanding that it did not simply relate to the duty to provide funds for work against racial discrimination and marginalisation, but rather that "it reflects an understanding of God and the valuing of all humanity…which should be embodied in and evidenced by behaviours."[369] Although given the classification of a 'minor revision', the move was important in the context of the motion in that it made clear that racism, being a rejection of Methodism's core beliefs as embodied in the gospels, was now so fundamentally abhorrent to the Church that it could not be tolerated under any circumstances. The motion also reaffirmed a prior statement made to the media on 17th November 2006 concerning whether members of a racist organisation should seek or receive communion in the Methodist Church:

> "The Methodist understanding of communion is as a means of grace and a means of conversion. Communion is therefore offered to all who are looking for a deeper relationship with God. This should in itself cause people to challenge their attitudes. We would refer people to 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 where Paul suggests that if people come to communion and don't allow themselves to be challenged in this way, then it is God who will judge them. We would welcome everybody into Methodist Churches. There is no room within the Church for racism under any circumstances, and we will always challenge these attitudes but we will never turn people away."[370]

[369] ibid, p.234.
[370] See ibid, p235 also see 'We must challenge racism, but all are welcome in communion' (17th November 2006) accessed at: http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.archiveDetail&year=2006&newsid=174 (accessed 20th September 2018).

This statement in itself reveals a tension whereby the Church, in its endeavour to remain inclusive, has to be non-judgemental and welcoming to sinners while at the same time asserting that membership of the Church comes with responsibilities that cannot be entered into lightly and must be upheld in the Christian life and vocation. It is quite possibly one of the most interesting and exciting developments in the Methodist Church that could provide great opportunities for Methodists to re-engage with its Wesleyan Heritage of membership and social holiness, whereby the rights and responsibilities that flow from being part of the Church become integral to living an ethical life.

The Methodist Church had a further opportunity to reflect on the role of Church and Society in the presentation of a report to the 2003 Methodist Conference entitled 'Church and Society issues'.[371] The report stated that it was common practice to trace the formation of 'traditional liberties' to the Magna Carta in the 13th century.[372] Disappointingly, the report makes no reference to the biblical or theological origins of liberty within Christian thought and instead argues that human rights are essentially a secular invention, to originally protect European peoples from the oppressive actions of the Roman Catholic Church.[373] The report does, however, concede that in many senses the Church's pronouncements on human rights are a "political expression of the Christian gospel."[374] This could possibly be seen as a contradictory assertion in the report, with the author claiming both an exclusively secular origin and yet a Christian purpose for contemporary human rights concepts. The most likely

[371] See 'Church and Society Issues' *Methodist Conference 2003 Report*, accessed at https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-church-and-society-issues-2003.pdf (accessed 1st August 2019).
[372] ibid, p.1.
[373] ibid, p.5.
[374] ibid, p.5.

explanation for this apparent contradiction may lie in the failure, so far, of any extensive study being conducted to consider the Christian origins of 'human rights' concepts that have found theological expression in British Methodism. In the same year, 2003, the Methodist Conference also received a report from the 'Committee for Racial Justice.'[375] which, amongst other things, sought to address the underrepresentation of black and Asian people in the decision-making processes of the church and to encourage "racism awareness training and empowerment programmes."[376] The report also restated the theological basis for the committee's work that was based on the "inclusive nature of the redemptive love of Jesus"[377] rooted in the calling of the Methodist people. The report further affirms that human beings, who are created in the image of God (Imago Dei), are considered to be of equal worth.[378] The report then goes on to state that because humans are made in the image of God:

> "They belong to a single race, the human race, and to a single global family, members one of another. The gospel of Christ values and proclaims principles of race equality and respect for human diversity. Therefore, racism is not only an assault on human beings but also a desecration of the image of God in people. Racism - defined as beliefs, attitudes, actions and social structures that unfairly benefit some ethnic groups and cultures at the expense of others - is sin."[379]

[375] 'Committee for Racial Justice Conference Report' *Methodist Conference 2003*, accessed at https://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-racial-justice-2003.pdf (accessed 1st August 2019).
[376] ibid, p.1.
[377] ibid, p.2.
[378] ibid.
[379] ibid.

The report makes its theological argument that racism is a sin, based on the false ideology of white supremacy which led to the slave trade.[380] In citing this example the report's authors are locating the theological context of the report in the wider historical context of Methodism; in particular the anti-slavery activities of early Methodists that were influenced by the writings of John Wesley. However, this is not developed much further, with the report recognising that the Christian Church has both challenged and colluded with racism across its history, but not citing any further examples specific to British Methodism.[381] The report, in particular, highlights the association of Christianity with western culture, western culture with the capitalist system, and the capitalist system with oppression.[382] The Methodist Church is then asked to challenge "any theology that tries to limit and disfigure the Christian message in this way."[383] That being said, the report does not go into much further detail on the impact of western cultural and capitalist imperialism on the church, beyond citing it's dangers.

Of particular interest to this study are the report's comment on civil rights, which it states may have been adversely affected by measures introduced following the events of September 11th 2001. In particular the report cites "new anti-terrorist measures, in terms of the erosion of democracy, the denial of civil liberties and the removal of refugee protection."[384] and goes on to reference government policies that embolden the hard and extreme right in British politics. Since the report has been compiled, much in it has been vindicated, particularly in the xenophobic, anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, rhetoric in recent British politics.

[380] ibid.
[381] ibid, p,3.
[382] ibid, p.8.
[383] ibid.
[384] ibid, p.8.

The ‘hostile environment’ policy in particular has resulted in a dramatic rise in racist and xenophobic incidents. The Joint Public Issues Team, associated with the Methodist Church and its ecumenical partners has, in response to the ‘hostile environment’ resulting from the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016, produced the *Destitution, Discrimination and Distrust* Report.[385] The report accuses the government of increasing the risk of destitution, discrimination and distrust towards those who have come to Britain.[386] The report also makes a theological appeal to Christians to oppose the hostile environment policy, reminding its readers that “Every human being is a child of God and should be treated with dignity and respect.”[387]The report then states, in no uncertain terms, that “Racism and related forms of discrimination are a denial of the gospel.”[388] In many senses this appeal has remarkable parallels with John Wesley’s theological arguments against the slave trade. The report also cites scripture to justify the Christian response to the government’s racist approach.[389] The report most significantly demonstrates how the Methodist Church in the Twenty First Century, with its ecumenical partners, is willing to challenge racist government policies with confidence.

[385] ‘Destitution, Discrimination and Distrust – The Web of the Hostile Environment’ by the *Joint Public Issues Team*, 2018. Accessed at: http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Destitution-Discrimination-Distrust.-The-web-of-the-hostile-environment.pdf (accessed 1/09/19).
[386] ibid, p.4
[387] ibid, p.9.
[388] ibid.
[389] Passages cited in the ‘Destitution, Discrimination and Distrust – The Web of the Hostile Environment’ report include James 2:15-16 (p.10), John 10:10 (p.10), Galatians 3:28 (p.12), Romans 2:11, (p.12), John 7:24 (p.13).

In addition to the hostile environment policy there is also a significant body of evidence that the Brexit referendum has had an effect on the number of racist incidents.[390] As a recently published journal article explains:

> "The racism that has certainly intensified following the referendum is given legitimacy not just by the referendum itself, but by the forms of racism embedded as national policy."[391]

Following the referendum, the President and Vice-President of the Methodist issued a statement condemning recent incidents of hatred and racism.[392] The referendum also received attention in a Joint Public Issues Team report 'Conversation Welcome'[393] and a Methodist Council report, which stated the need for Methodists to issue prophetic challenges to injustice and to welcome the stranger.[394] It seems clear that the atmosphere generated around the Brexit debates is leading to greater division and toxicity in public debate, which should be of great concern to the Church. Furthermore, it has been argued that Britain's exit from the European Union could have a particularly negative impact on BAME communities, both in economic and community relations terms.[395] There are also related concerns that the UK's exit from the EU may remove the

[390] See Burnett, John. 'Racial Violence and the Brexit State' in *Race and Class*, Volume 58, Issue 4, April 2017, p.85-97
[391] ibid, p.89.
[392] See President and Vice President Statement on the EU Referendum (24th June 2016). Accessed at: https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/president-and-vice-president-release-statement-on-eu-referendum/ (Accessed 1st August 2019).
[393] 'Conversation Welcome: Exploring the future of the UK after the EU Referendum' by the *Joint Public Issues Team* (2017) accessed at: http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/conversation_welcome_final.pdf (Accessed 1st August 2019).
[394] See 'Brexit and Beyond' *Methodist Council Paper,* January 2019 Accessed at: https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/10758/brexit-discussion-paper.docx (Accessed 1st August 2019).
[395] See Mcintosh, Kimberly; Mirza, Rabia; Ali, Irum Shereen.'Brexit for BAME Britain – Investigating the Impact' in *Rota – Race on the Agenda*, November 2018. Accessed at: https://www.rota.org.uk/sites/default/files/events/ROTA%20Brexit%20for%20BME%20briefing%20221118.pdf (accessed: 1st August 2019).

impetus for much of the legal progress and protection relating to liberty and equalities.[396] At the time of writing there is much uncertainty regarding the outcome of Brexit, yet it seems clear that one of the most significant challenges for the church will be to hold firm to its theology of liberty and equality in a hostile climate.

It does seem evident that against a backdrop of varying levels and expressions of societal hostility towards immigrants to the UK the Methodist Church has, at least at policy level, officially endeavoured to welcome ethnic minorities into the Church family. However, the picture drawn from various archive materials including *The Methodist Recorder* and various Conference documents and studies conducted by the Church in the late Twentieth Century, reveal that the tensions and prejudices expressed by many of those outside of the Church has infiltrated and permeated Methodist congregations and this remains an ongoing concern. During the 20th Century the Methodist Church failed to adequately tackle the problem of racism within its congregations and also failed to satisfactorily challenge the prejudicial and discriminatory attitudes held outside of the Church. While there are examples in the 50's and 60's of individual churches, circuits and districts pioneering initiatives to tackle racism and encourage inclusive attitudes, there are also many examples where black people have found themselves unwelcome and discriminated against within the Church environment. However, efforts by the Connexion in the late 70's, 80's

[396] See Fredman, Sandra; Young, Alison; Campbell, Megan. 'The continuing impact of Brexit on Equality Rights' *The UK in a changing Europe/Oxford Human Rights Hub Paper* Oxford: Oxford Human Rights Hub. 2018. Accessed at: https://ukandeu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/The-continuing-impact-of-Brexit-on-equality-rights.pdf (Accessed 1st August 2019). Also see, O'Cinneide, Colm. 'Brexit and Human Rights' *Waterloo: the Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 2018. Accessed at: https://www.cigionline.org/sites/default/files/documents/Brexit%20Series%20Paper%20no.16_0.pdf (Accessed: 1st August 2019).

and 90's (and continuing to the present day) to co-ordinate and resource projects and other initiatives tackling racism and promoting a vision of a Church community and society which is inclusive, accepting and affirming of all people have seen some success. Furthermore, it is clearly evident that despite periodic tensions and inconsistencies, the Methodist Church has endeavoured to be faithful to its Wesleyan heritage, although at times it has not fully articulated the theological and historical basis for its position until fairly recently.

In 2010 the Methodist Conference received a report entitled 'Towards an Inclusive Church'[397] which had been written, partly, in response to the passage of the Equalities Act 2010, whilst also recognising the need for greater diversity and inclusion in the church and more intentionality in "valuing the whole people of God".[398] The inclusive church report enabled a new structure for equality and diversity issues to be explored in the church, which led to the creation of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Toolkit.[399] In November 2015 the EDI Committee and the Faith and Order Committee agreed a theological reflection that accompanied the toolkit.[400] The reflection affirms that "every human being as part of God's creation"[401] and seeks to affirm "God's grace and love for all."[402] It then goes on to state that:

[397] 'Towards an Inclusive Church' *Methodist Conference Report*, 2010. Accessed at: http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/confrep32-towards-an-inclusive-church-250510.pdf (Accessed: 1/08/19).
[398] ibid, p.404.
[399] See EDI Toolkit. Accessed at: https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-ministers-and-office-holders/guidance-for-churches/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/edi-toolkit/ (Accessed: 1/08/19).
[400] EDI Toolkit, Module 1.2 – Theological Reflections on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, March 2017, accessed at: https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/9010/edi-toolkit-1-2.pdf (Accessed: 1/08/19).
[401] ibid, p.3.
[402] ibid.

> "Our church communities are called to be places where the transformational love of God is embodied and life in all its fullness is a gift which is offered to all people. There are no distinctions based on race, gender, disability, age, wealth or sexuality, or any discrimination associated with this gift."[403]

The statement does, however, recognise that there are boundaries to the Church's inclusivity and hospitality which are intended to safeguard and to enable the church "to remain faithful to its identity as the Body of Christ."[404] The reference to identity is likely to be referring to the lawful discrimination that , at the time of writing, prevents a same-sex couple from being married within a Methodist Church. Yet the report also makes reference to being continually "open to the revelation of God"[405]in determining where these boundaries lie. The acceptance of the 'God in Love Unites Us'[406] report at the 2019 Methodist Conference indicates that these boundaries may well be re-drawn; a topic that lies beyond the scope of this particular thesis. In any case the debate around relationships and human sexuality demonstrates how matters concerning liberty and equality have a continuing relevance to Methodist theology in a number of areas. Within the theological reflection, which makes reference to numerous scriptural justifications for equality, there is the particular affirmation that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore possess "intrinsic worth."[407] The statement also makes reference to the new community created in Christ:

[403] ibid.
[404] ibid.
[405] ibid.
[406] 'God in Love unites us' - The Report of the Marriage and Relationships Task Group 2019' Methodist Conference Report 2019. Accessed at: https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/11672/conf-2019-10-marriage-and-relationships-task-group-2019.pdf (Accessed 1st August 2019).
[407] EDI Toolkit, Module 1.2 – Theological Reflections on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, p.3.

> "…in which old boundaries and divisions were, at the very least, recast in new ways, and bonds were cemented through the action of the Holy Spirit. Strangers became friends (Acts 2:42-47) and people understood their relationships to others in new ways (John 19:25-27; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:10-11)."[408]

Further proof of this is cited in Paul's belief that in Christ we are no longer "Jew or Greek…we are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)"[409]and that the Holy Trinity enables Christians to:

> "speak of God as a loving communion of three co-equal 'persons' [which] suggests that the Church should be a community of mutual support and love in which there is no superiority or inferiority."[410]

In addition, there are specific appeals to Methodist Theology citing the Arminian heritage and a commitment to Christian holiness and perfect love.[411] The reflection also makes an appeal to scripture, tradition, reason, and experience; a clear reference to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.[412] The most significant statement, however, is that:

> "The Church's commitment to matters of equality, diversity and inclusion is founded on the premise that God's love is universal, and that it is

[408] ibid, p.4.
[409] Ibid.
[410] ibid, p.4.
[411] ibid, p.5.
[412] ibid, p.3.

God's will that all should be drawn into deeper experience and understanding of the life and purpose of God."[413]

This is a distinctively Methodist statement that draws from John Wesley's understanding of God's love and salvation being for all people, and not simply a pre-determined elect. It demonstrates that the dignity and worth that human beings have, that results in their liberty and equality, rests in God's prevenient grace. It is this understanding of God that leads to Methodism having a particular and distinctive theological approach to liberty and equality.

Conclusions

Following on from the Second World War the British Government has, at various points throughout the Twentieth and early Twenty First Century, adopted immigration policies that are effectively racist. On these occasions it has mirrored the underlying and frequently overt racism that has been expressed in wider British society. It is saddening to note that from the period beginning in the late 1940's through to the early 1970's the Methodist Church's response to racism in British society and its own congregations was largely inadequate. Although there are some examples of local churches, circuits and districts taking action against 'the colour bar' it is notable from the accounts of black Methodists, and from letters and articles published in the Methodist Recorder, that racism was not sufficiently challenged and that the church did not live out the radical calling and theology of its founder John Wesley. Indeed, it is abundantly clear that racist attitudes were not uncommon in Methodist congregations during this period.

[413] ibid, p.6.

The two notable exceptions, where the Methodist Church did demonstrate a greater awareness of its responsibility to challenge racism, was by campaigning against apartheid in South Africa. In this regard the link between John Wesley's statements against slavery and the responsibility to oppose the segregation policies of South Africa is clearly present. Regrettably this opposition to a racist culture was not translated over to the domestic situation, which quite evidently resulted in a great deal of hurt for those who encountered racial discrimination in Methodist churches.

While the 1978 statement issued by the Methodist Conference did denounce racism as a sin that went against the Gospel, it must be noted that this occurred two years after the passage of the Race Relations Act 1976. The Methodist International Houses are one of the few examples of a co-ordinated attempt to provide practical support, in the way of accommodation, for international students who frequently faced racial discrimination from the landlords in the towns and cities where they studied .

It was during the 1980s and the 1990's that the Methodist Church began to take a more active role in tackling racial discrimination in British society, as well as articulating a theology that promoted liberty and equality across the Connexion. The Connexion also began to tackle the racism that was evident within Methodist congregations through prophetic challenge and an egalitarian theology true to its Wesleyan heritage. A commitment to racial justice is clearly evident from the reports produced by and through the Methodist Conference during this period and from the way the Church challenged the discriminatory

policies of government, in particular the British Nationality Act 1981. In calling for a society and world that was radically changed, to reflect our brotherly and sisterly responsibilities towards each other as children of God, it gave much better expression to the theological tradition of its founder John Wesley. This was accompanied by an increasing willingness to challenge the powers and to advocate for a more just society. In particular, the church sought to challenge the demonization of sections of society in line with its Wesleyan theology.

At the beginning of the Twenty First Century the response of the church to anti-terrorist legislation, following on from the 9/11 attacks in the Unites States, demonstrated a continuing concern for liberty. Furthermore, the Methodist Conference's prophetic challenges on the support for asylum seekers and refugees demonstrated its commitment to uphold the rights of the vulnerable and disadvantaged. Yet perhaps the most welcome developments have come in the Twenty First Century with the Methodist Church making further commitments to inclusivity and through the production of the EDI Toolkit for churches. It seems evident that the Methodist Church is now consistently endeavouring to be faithful to its calling and Wesleyan heritage; affirming that every human being is in possession of dignity and worth, granted to them as a child of God, thus embedding a theology with liberty and equality as core tenets.

Thesis Conclusion

The Methodist Church's approach to liberty and human rights questions has been marked by significant tensions and challenges throughout the course of the Twentieth Century. What is perhaps surprising is that many of the issues that have presented themselves as challenges to Methodists in the last half century are not so dissimilar to the ones which John Wesley faced in the Eighteenth Century. The racist attitudes which have lamentably emerged in British public life bear a striking resemblance to attitudes which enabled the proliferation of the slave trade. Furthermore, it is also possible to see how themes, beliefs and practices which relate to rights issues during John Wesley's time have found some remarkable parallels in the responses of Methodists to similar issues in the Twentieth Century. An appreciation of John Wesley's influence on contemporary Methodist thinking concerning rights, and how this links with English constitutional history, is therefore vital if Methodists are to understand their heritage and, more importantly, ensure that they live out their spiritual calling as a people dedicated to 'social holiness'.

The evolution of the English constitution, which occurred over several hundred years, had reached a critical point in the decades prior to John Wesley's birth. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 had embedded the idea of a government, where power was shared between a Parliament and a King as the ideal. Yet still there were tensions between those who supported the Stuart line, the so called 'Jacobites', and those who, in the spirit of the revolution, supported William of Orange and the constitutional settlement permanently inaugurated by his premiership. Wesley's own position, which crystallised over time, can be defined as being a 'liberal constitutionalist' and thus ultimately supporting the

prevailing constitutional order. Furthermore, his ideas on liberty and rights significantly differ from secular enlightenment concepts that centred on the idea of a social contract being the fundamental basis for the social order. Instead Wesley endorsed a theological understanding of the nature of authority whereby all authority derived from God. This approach led to some tensions and inconsistencies in John Wesley's thoughts, particularly in relation to popular forms of democracy which he devoutly opposed. Yet Methodists should also be aware that the difficulties reconciling Wesley's thoughts on democratic populism with models concerning the responsibility of the citizen to the state and to God are still relevant for a movement that often finds itself in conflict with prevailing social attitudes. By its very nature the Church's support for liberty must be a rejection of the selfish opinions and subjectivism that can dominate public life. While contemporary Methodism should not adopt Wesley's anti-democratic stance, an appreciation of his constitutionalism, and a belief in the subordination of government and the people to an even higher divine power, is a valuable principle to recall.

Wesley's belief that the liberty provided by God was one which enabled people to live the life that God called them to is also a fundamental tenet which needs to be remembered by the Methodist Church in the Twenty First Century. It was this understanding of liberty, which was rooted in the freedom which God gifted to humankind, that ultimately motivated Wesley. His desire to ensure that people were free to live the lives that God called them to, which drove his efforts to liberate those who were oppressed, was underpinned by a theological understanding of the importance of freewill in relation to a person's eternal destiny. Yet Wesley's thinking went beyond this; recognising that every human

being was a child of God, and it was in this recognition of equal human worth that Wesley's commitment to securing liberty is brought to fruition. Wesley's abhorrence of the slave trade due to its dehumanising influence, both on the slavers and those enslaved, would be reflected in later Methodist concerns about racial discrimination which was seen as a denial of the gospel and an attempt to dehumanise a section of society.

In the Twentieth Century the Methodist concern for human rights following the Second World War was part of an ecumenical endeavour that led to the establishment of the UNDHR. This worldwide concern for the promotion of human rights seems partly reflective of Wesley's own concerns for both the physical and spiritual welfare of people which manifested itself in a way that meant it was unrestricted by man-made political boundaries. John Wesley's relatively positive opinion of so called 'native' peoples was in notable contrast to the prevailing views of the time, which were dominated by theories of imperialism and white superiority over subjugated peoples within the colonies. This positive perspective is one attribute which contemporary Methodism has inherited from John Wesley in its beliefs and doctrines. Yet it is apparent that while Methodists may have been expressing opinions critical of the South African Apartheid and condemning racist attitudes, very little practical work was undertaken by the Connexion on a national level to tackle the problem of racial discrimination within the Church or to significantly challenge it in British society. From the various accounts that have been provided by black members of the Church who lived in the 50's – 70's, there is considerable evidence to suggest that racist attitudes and opinions were not uncommon amongst members of Methodist congregations and even amongst ministers. It was not until the late

70’s and the 80’s that the Methodist Church took significant action to combat racism in an organised way. Why this was the case is difficult to assess. Part of the problem may simply have been a lack of awareness within the Church of racial justice issues, as reflected in the surveys of many congregations who appeared to be in denial about the problem or simply apathetic. Despite examples of good practice across the Connexion, overall, the Church did not effectively motivate congregations to successfully combat racial discrimination.

The tensions and inconsistencies in Methodist thought on issues of rights and liberties seem to have been rooted in the implicit conservative tendencies that have been present in the Methodist Church from its early beginnings. While the beliefs and doctrines of the Methodist Church have encouraged and promoted inclusivity, the influence of more reactionary and conservative forces on and within the Church has, arguably, been underestimated. For Wesley, it was his High Tory politics and the associated suspicion attached to democratic forms of government which impeded his thinking and provided an obstacle to developing a fully integrated position on rights and liberties. Furthermore, while Wesley was to become a significant figure in the abolitionist movement, his protestations against slavery were slow to emerge during his ministry.

For the Methodist Church of the Twentieth Century, the pressures and influences of the wider society, in which racism was unfortunately common place, infiltrated congregations. This was a situation which the Church was slow to recognise and react to until quite late in the Twentieth Century. It seems apparent that a failure by British Methodism to fully and consistently engage with its own inclusive heritage, long held beliefs and doctrines prevented it from

fully living out its calling within the life of the nation. However, it is also undeniable that on numerous occasions the Church has placed human rights considerations at the forefront of its thinking, promoting a vision of the world in which individuals and groups of people have had their liberties and their fundamental status as equal human beings respected. For Methodists, the main challenge has been for them to develop and express in theological terms their specific ethic of human rights and then consistently relate and apply this within the mission of the church. In this area far more consideration is needed, particularly on developing a distinctive Methodist approach to contemporary human rights issues that is integrated and grounded in Methodist Theology. This thesis, hopefully, provides some further groundwork for this research to take place and be expanded on. Methodists can be confident that the richness of their own tradition provides the resources needed to accomplish this task. Recent developments, with the introduction of an inclusive Church policy for the Connexion and the formulation of the EDI Toolkit, are evidence that the Methodist Church is endeavouring to place liberty and equality at the heart of its practice and mission in a distinctive manner.

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