

Topic 4: Expansion, Controversy and Division in England, 1739-45

On the evening of 1 January 1739, the leaders of the still unified revival movement met at Fetter Lane for an *agape*, a love feast or light meal followed by a time of prayer, testimony, worship and fellowship. Among those present were John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Benjamin Ingham and others who had risen to prominence as the awakening had spread and intensified during the previous two or three years. Such was the richness of the fellowship that few realised the passing of the time. Then, wrote John Wesley,

About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise thee o God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord' (Wesley's Journal, 1 January 1739; quoted in Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, p.91; cf Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 360; Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, pp.187-8).

All the signs were that that this mighty anointing of the Spirit would seal their unity and further deepen their conviction that they were jointly involved in a great resurgence of powerful spirituality in the land. Certainly the following months led to a uniquely significant phase in the development of the Revival – the move, first by Whitefield than by Wesley, to take the gospel message out of consecrated buildings, the parish churches and the extant religious societies, and directly to the unchurched masses – but it would also indicate a period of contention, schism and division which would leave its mark not only on the movement but on the subsequent shape of organised Christianity in England.

i. The advent of field-preaching

On 14 January Whitefield was ordained priest in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, by Martin Benson, bishop of Bristol. Ordinarily he would have been instituted into an established parochial living, but believing he had been called to an itinerant ministry, he prevailed upon Edmund Gibson, bishop of London, to appoint him priest-in-charge to the colonial living of Georgia. This would allow him the opportunity to fulfil his vision of providing an orphan house for the colony along with the freedom, duly sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority, to itinerate at home in order ostensibly to raise funds but principally to preach the gospel to the now customary large and expanding crowds. Although keen to continue his awakening ministry, his growing notoriety as an 'enthusiast' as well as his increasingly virulent public criticisms of his fellow clergy for their conventionality and carnality, meant that more and more pulpits

would be closed against him. Yet knowing that there were those among the awakened in Bristol who were anxious to have him come among them, in February, accompanied by a layman William Seward who would later become his campaign organizer, he set out for the West Country. Having struck up a friendship with Howell Harris, he learned of the Welsh revivalist's successes through preaching in the open air, then, at Hanham Mount in the Kingswood area of Bristol, a locality of mineworkers long alienated from organised religion, he began preaching outdoors. He took his text from the Sermon on the Mount: 'I went upon a mount, and spake to as many people as came unto me. They were upwards of two hundred', adding: 'Blessed be God that I have now broken the ice!' On his return, three days later on 21 February, his listeners had grown to 2000 and thereafter they would expand yet still. Buoyed up by his success, he wrote: 'My preaching in the fields may displease some timorous, bigoted men, but I am thoroughly persuaded that it pleases God, and why should I fear anything else?'

A month later, John Wesley, at Whitefield's request, left London for Bristol in order to help consolidate the vast number of converts that were being made. It should be remembered 'that Whitefield and not Wesley was seen by the public as the real leader of the movement at this stage' (Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 191). On his arrival on 31 March, Wesley was nonplussed:

I could scarce reconcile myself at first with this strange way of preaching in the fields of which he set me an example on Sunday: having been all my life ... tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought of saving souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.

Then, the following day, 'At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation'. A rubicon had been crossed. Not only Howell Harris in Wales, but George Whitefield and now Wesley, all of whom were by conviction faithful to the Established Church, had taken the Revival to the people. Having put his hand to the plough, Wesley, for one, would never look back. Writing to an unnamed correspondent immediately afterwards, he penned the famous words:

Suffer me now to tell you my principles in this matter. I look upon all the world as my parish ... I judge it meet, right and my bounded duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work that I know God has called me to do.

'What began on 17 February on a hill outside Bristol was to change completely the scope of the Revival' (Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 361).

With Whitefield having left for London in late April, the Bristol scenes were replicated and increased in the capital, especially in the poor area around Moorfields, known for its open-air markets, its impoverished hovels and its brothels, and at Kennington Common. The response to the revivalist's preaching was unprecedented, and despite unease by the ecclesiastical authorities to say nothing of opposition by the parochial clergy who saw Whitfield as an unwelcome interloper, the whole religious milieu was being revolutionized: 'Traditional arguments were crumbling in the face of Whitefield's novel methods and in the context of the new marketplace mentality' (Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, p.83). The scene recorded in his Journal on 6 May typified the changes which were occurring:

Preached this morning in Moorfields to about twenty thousand people who were very quiet and attentive and much affected. Went to public worship morning and evening and at six, preached at Kennington. Such a sight I never saw before. I believe there were no less than fifty thousand people, and near fourscore coaches, besides great numbers of horses.

Although clearly an overestimate, which reflected in part Whitefield's besetting sin of vanity, corroborating evidence shows that a massive and popular religious revolution was underway. Whereas gospel preaching was given precedence, Whitfield used these occasions to raise significant funds in aid of the orphan house project. His record for 13 May was:

Preached this morning to a prodigious number of people in Moorfields and collected for the orphans £52. 19s. 6d, above £20 of which was in half-pence. Indeed, they almost wearied me in receiving their mites and they were more than one man could carry home.

All the money would be meticulously accounted for, and even the most hostile opponents could hardly criticize the effectiveness of this remarkable contribution to the charity work to which the Established Church was actively committed.

By mid-1739, the main axis of the Revival in England remained between Bristol and London, though Benjamin Ingham had made successful incursions into his native Yorkshire as well. A society had been established at Ossett as early as 1734, even before Ingham had left for Georgia, but beginning in Wakefield in 1737 after his return, the evangelical message had created an ebullient response, with the Yorkshireman, like his southern colleagues, having to organise his societies in barns, private houses and unconsecrated buildings. By 1739 an incipient connexion had been formed, with societies meeting regularly in Leeds, Dewsbury, Wakefield, Halifax and Birstall. Apart from Wales, however, the really dramatic scenes were occurring in the south. Wesley, for his part, had remained in Bristol. In May 1739 he took out

a piece of land at Horsefair in the city and built a 'room' in which the converts could meet. Apart from evangelistic preaching, his ministry was one of pastoral advice and the formation of 'bands' of those who desired closer instruction in holiness. Yet news of his and Whitefield's remarkable successes, and even more so the exuberant scenes with which they were accompanied, unnerved the ecclesiastical authorities. 'Dear Mr Wesley was left behind to teach them the way more perfectly', was Whitefield's appreciative comment. On 16 August Wesley was called before the bishop of Bristol to justify his and Whitefield's irregularities. On hearing his defence, Bishop Benson exclaimed: 'Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelation and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing!' (Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr Wesley*, Vol.1., p. 114). Nevertheless there would be no going back. The impact of the gospel upon the common people was its own justification. It would become apparent that whereas Whitefield's gift was for awakening the unconverted, Wesley's specific calling would be the building up of novices in the faith. If 'the summer of 1739 belonged to Whitfield' (Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, p. 86), the control of the organization in which the converts were taught, trained, disciplined and given an identity, was devolving into Wesley's capable hands. Following Whitefield's departure for Georgia on 10 August, the Wesleys would have virtual control of the Methodist movement. Yet during his year in America, the revival programme would be completely transformed.

ii. The 'stillness' controversy

In his *Journal* for 1 November 1739, John Wesley first mentions the controversy which would create dissention in the revival movement and ensure that Moravianism and Methodism would go their separate ways. Having been overseeing the work in Bristol, he had left the Fetter Lane society in the charge of others – Whitefield was in Georgia – but when he returned he felt that unfamiliar doctrines were being taught.

The first person I met was [Mrs Turner] whom I had left strong in the faith and in good works; but now she told me that Mr Molther had fully convinced her she never had any faith at all, and had advised her until she received faith, to be 'still', ceasing from outward works.

Philipp Heinrich Molther (1714-80), a Moravian minister from Jena, had arrived in London in October on route for Philadelphia. Many from the Georgia community had left the southern colony for the more hospitable climes of Pennsylvania and Molther was being sent there to supervise the work. However, due to prolonged bad weather, he had been prevented from going further and would spend the winter months in London. On attending meetings at Fetter Lane,

Molther had been unnerved by the overt introspection which seemed to characterize the spirituality of some members, and was shocked by the emotional excesses which had become commonplace among the worshippers: 'I was alarmed and almost terror stricken at hearing their sighing and groaning, their whinings and howlings, which strange proceedings they called the demonstrations of spirit and power' (Daniel Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 53). Continental Moravians had differed from the Halle Pietists in being less emotional in their worship, while their doctrine of salvation replicated that of orthodox Lutheranism in holding that it was *sola fide*, 'of faith alone'. Faith was simply a matter of embracing the salvation by quietly accepting the offer of the gospel; it had little to do with excessive emotional striving. The genesis of faith in the heart was an imperceptible event, while noisy excesses could in fact detract from the silent, spiritual nature of the transaction between God and the individual soul. By placing such an emphasis on an emotional response, worshippers were in danger of trying to induce faith within themselves on the basis of their own striving. Overindulgent spiritual introspection could become a subtle version of 'justification by works'. Molther, as it happens, never taught that seekers should desist from using the means of grace in order to achieve spiritual assurance, though he believed that Holy Communion should be restricted to believers or those who had already made their commitment to God and had found faith. (This was, in fact, the official doctrine of the Church of England). His reticence, however, on the topic of responding overtly to the claims of faith, was taken to justify the idea of 'stillness' or extreme passivity in the matter of salvation.

There were, however, others among the leaders of the society who had been teaching actively the 'stillness doctrine' for some time. Peter Böhler, who had made such a profound impression on Wesley a year previously, had advocated a more quietist approach to the obtaining of personal faith than was usual among the orthodox Moravians, and his views had become popular within the Fetter Lane fellowship. Although it was probably a travesty of what he had actually taught, many had come to believe that seekers could do nothing to induce faith within themselves at all. Rather than giving themselves to prayer, Bible reading, partaking of the sacrament or the like, all they could do was to wait quietly upon God in the hope that he would bestow upon them the gift of faith. To 'do' anything, was tantamount to preventing God from acting in a sovereign fashion for their salvation. Howell Harris, who had been present in Fetter Lane for the first time between March and May 1739, had been adversely effected by this very teaching. His diary entry for 30 April reads:

I did not know what to do. I was afraid to write the conditions down lest it was 'working'. I was afraid to pray, though I had desires put in me, lest it was 'doing' ... I went along (much humbled inwardly) fearing every step ... dreading the name of 'doing' or anything like it (quoted in Geraint Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation*, p. 53).

Although Harris had been converted four years earlier, and had been a leader of the Welsh revival virtually ever since, he was often swayed by doctrinal novelties and susceptible to unfamiliar teaching. Like Wesley's 'Mrs Turner', even he had been led to believe that in fact, he was bereft of saving faith. Fortunately this uncertainty was not to last.

However erroneous the suggestion that Mohler had encouraged the 'stillness' concept, and despite the fact that Böhler's teaching had probably been misconstrued, by early November Wesley sensed that the fellowship was moving in a direction of which he gravely disapproved. The underlying problem may not have been 'Moravianism' as such (though more of this below), but that some of the influential members at Fetter Lane were beginning to repudiate the even nominal authority of the Established Church. Wesley would remain obdurately attached to the Church of England. The revival movement, for him (and for Whitefield and Harris), was a renewal movement within the establishment. This, too, was the vision of Count Zinzendorf and his subordinates, Mohler and August Spangenberg (who had reached London from Pennsylvania on his way home to Germany on the very day that Mohler had arrived travelling in the other direction: he too would remain in the capital for the next few months): 'Zinzendorf saw his *Brüdergemeine* ("congregation of brothers") as a fellowship of members of the various churches and deeply abhorred the suggestion that it should itself become a new sect' (Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-60*, p.54). Although both Germans, Spangenberg in November, Mohler a month later and again in April 1740, tried to persuade Wesley that they too were unhappy with the direction of the fellowship, by Christmas he had begun making alternative arrangements for the pastoral oversight of his London converts. He had already purchased a disused iron works, 'the Foundery', near Moorfields, and fitted it out for preaching and fellowship activities. Gathering hearers together in June 1740 and robed in his canonicals, he preached a series of three early morning sermons setting out how he construed faith, salvation and the means whereby a person was accepted by God. These accorded to the XXXIX Articles and Book of Common Prayer. He rejected the 'stillness teaching' out of hand; he emphasised the necessity of using the means of grace in order to receive the gift of faith, and he claimed that the Lord's Supper was a converting as well as a confirming ordinance, that is that it should be open to those who were seeking faith as well as

those who already had assurance of being accepted by God. (This, as it happened, did not accord with official Anglican teaching). Although the Moravians ostensibly agreed with his doctrine – though they felt that the Englishman needed to be more emphatic in his preaching of justification by faith alone – James Hutton (son of Wesley's old High Church friend the Revd John Hutton) and by then one of the leading figures within the Fetter Lane society, had become radically alienated from his old mentors, the Wesley brothers. Since having visited Herrnhut in the summer of 1739, he had identified fully with the Moravians, and on returning in October, he had become openly critical of both John and Charles. The tone of his criticism became obvious in his correspondence with Zinzendorf. The brothers, he wrote in March 1740, 'are dangerous snares to many young women: several are in love with them: I wish they were once married to some good sisters, but I would not give them one of my sisters if I had any' (quoted in Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 365). He had grown to resent the authority which the Wesleys were wielding among the converts, and had little sympathy with their desire to preserve the Anglican ethos rather than institute more specifically Moravian practices into the community at Fetter Lane.

Wesley continued attending Fetter Lane meetings, but soon the situation came to a head. On 20 July he declared that the 'stillness doctrines' (which he was convinced were the result of Moravian influence) were 'flatly contradictory to the Word of God', and invited those who agreed with him to leave and make their new spiritual home at the Foundry. He recorded in his diary three days later:

Our little company met at the Foundry instead of Fetter Lane. About twenty-five of our brethren, God hath given us already all of whom think and speak the same: seven or eight and forty likewise of the fifty women that were in band desired to cast in their lot with us.

Informed of the split, Zinzendorf tried to arrange a reconciliation. Indeed, both Spangenberg (who had returned home) and Böhler were dispatched to London in the spring of 1741 charged with meeting with Wesley in order to preserve the unity of the revival movement. By then, alas, the rift had become irreparable: 'Henceforth the two communities went their separate ways' (Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 367). Many of the new Fetter Lane leaders: Hutton, John Bray, Richard Bell, and others, had become harshly disparaging of the Wesleys, and though Zinzendorf refused to criticize them outright, 'he rigidly defended classical Lutheran teaching, but saw [John] Wesley as having reverted to the religion of the Holy Club' (Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-60*, p.75). The two men met at Lincoln's

Inn, London, in September 1741, and though respectful of one another, it was clear that the differences between them – their conversation was conducted in Latin – were profound. The Moravian found the Methodist's teaching on 'Christian perfection' (the possibility of living a wholly consecrated life) to devalue the *justitia aliena* or the finished work of Christ, while the Methodist feared that the Moravian had succumbed wholly to antinomianism. There was to be no meeting of minds. Whereas they would refrain from denigrating one another publically, no further rapprochement would occur. In March 1743, Zinzendorf announced privately that the Wesleys, 'though very learned and gifted men, are both in the plain way of false teaching and deceiving souls' (quoted in Podmore, p.79). The publication of the fourth part of Wesley's *Journal* in June 1744, which openly accused the Moravians of antinomianism and sectarianism, put paid to any hope of unity in the revivalists' ranks. By then Benjamin Ingham and thrown in his lot with the Moravians: his Yorkshire connexion had accepted Moravian discipline in June 1742, while John Cennick (1718-65), George Whitefield's gifted assistant who had gathered a network of Calvinistic societies in Wiltshire, went over to the Moravians in 1745. Those who were left in the Fetter Lane fellowship following Wesley's secession to the Foundery were overwhelmingly Moravians. Whereas the Church had formerly refused to become involved in the ecclesiological developments which had sprung from the Revival, by 1740 it could hardly stand to one side. On 24 September word came from the Church's headquarters in Marienborn, Saxony, that the Fetter Lane congregation would now come under its pastoral care and jurisdiction. Thereafter 'the Moravian Church would now be directly, fully, and permanently involved in English religious life, and by the mid-1740s it would represent a third force, after Whitefield's Association and the Wesleyan Methodists, within the English Revival movement' (Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-60*, p.72). Even as the Revival progressed during the coming decades, for all purposes unity among the revivalist bodies had been forfeited.

iii. The predestination debate and the genesis of Calvinistic Methodism

While the implications of the 'stillness controversy' worked themselves out, George Whitefield was contributing mightily to the extension of the Great Awakening in America. Having left England on 10 August 1739 he would not return home until March 1741, sixteen months later. By that time another serious rift had occurred in the revivalists' ranks, this time on the question of God's elective will or, in Wesley's parlance, 'predestination'.

If Molther had been appalled at the emotional excesses that he had witnessed in Fetter Lane, Wesley tended to see these paroxysms of overt feeling as confirmation that the Holy Spirit was at work imparting spiritual life to the new converts: 'He was still more convinced that behind it all was the work of God himself, bringing men and women to agonized self-recognition and, through the distress of repentance, to the joy of conversion and the peace of sins forgiven' (Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 369). Whitefield was less sure. His missionary work had been much more deliberately planned, while the response rising from the immense crowds who listened to him tended to be more muted and less extreme. In a letter of 25 June 1739 in which he expressed his concerns over emotionalism, he mentioned for the first time a subject which would become even more contentious, that of the doctrine of election:

I hear, honoured sir, you are about to print a sermon on predestination. It shocks me to think of it; what will be the consequences but controversy? If people ask me my opinion, what shall I do? I have a critical part to act, God enable me to behave aright! Silence on both sides will be best. It is noised abroad already, that there is a division between you and me. Oh, my heart within me is grieved.

Predestination, or the idea that God has actively preordained some to eternal life and others to perdition, has been a recurring if highly problematic aspect of Christian theology from the beginning. Paul's teaching about the fate of Israel, God's elect people, in the Epistle to the Romans, and the stark dualities in which it is couched: 'It is written, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau I have hated"' (Rom. 9:13), have exercised the ingenuity of the most brilliant minds in Christendom: Augustine and Pelagius in the fifth century, Gottschalk of Orabisi in the eighth century, Luther and Erasmus in the sixteenth and the Calvinists and Arminians a century later. Whereas the biblical evidence points to God's sovereignty in relation to his world, it also presupposes that human beings are able to respond freely to the gospel invitation. The doctrinal question has always revolved around the way in which that sovereignty is exercised, and to what extent does sin, both inherited and active, prevent free will from responding to the divine appeal.

John and Charles Wesley, notwithstanding their evangelical convictions, had never diverged from their High Church opinions concerning the extent of the atonement (that Christ had died not for the elect few but for all the world) and the individual's ability, through baptismal grace, to co-operate with God in order to make the gospel their own. When Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annesley had repudiated Dissent in the 1670s and '80s, they embraced the so-called 'Anti-Calvinism' of Archbishop William Laud's pre-Cromwellian English Church (cf Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinism: the Rise of English Arminianism, c.1590-1640*),

which had become a rejuvenated Anglican orthodoxy following the Restoration. Whitfield, for his part, like the Welsh revivalists Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland, was more in accord with the Reformed tradition of the pre-Laudian Church, and took their doctrine from those who Harris called ‘the good old orthodox Reformers and Puritans’ (quoted in D. C. Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p. 2). For them Calvinism provided a rationale for the conundrum of unbelief, and explained why only some, and not all, responded to the good news of the gospel. It also provided pastoral comfort; that salvation and perseverance to the end did not depend on the vicissitudes of the human will but on the omnipotence of the gracious God. For pragmatic revivalists, whose main aim was the success of the evangelical message and the salvation of souls, silence on both sides (as Whitefield suggested) would have been best. For Wesley, however, there was a basic principle at stake, namely the very character of the Christian God. Controversy would become inevitable.

Wesley would soon realise that he was, to an extent, rowing against the current. Whenever free grace has been vigorously preached and warmly embraced, history has shown that Calvinistic notions have followed. Redeemed sinners *know* that their salvation is wholly undeserved, and were it not for the sovereign grace of God they would still be in their sins. The concomitant of this is the belief that they had been chosen for salvation. The logic of their experience often sends them in a Calvinistic direction. In Bristol especially, more and more converts were feeling the pull of predestinarian views: ‘This people’, wrote Wesley in 1739, ‘was so deeply prejudiced for it’. John Cennick, whom Whitefield had been appointed schoolmaster at Kingswood, a school he had established to educate the children of the local miners, had embraced Calvinistic views and was having exceptional success in propagating them, while the news from Bristol was that Wesley’s teachings were being openly questioned. On 30 April 1739 he told the London brethren: ‘I was led, I know not how, to speak strongly and explicitly of predestination’. The result was the powerful, indeed notorious, sermon entitled *Free Grace*.

In it the revivalist was at his most pugnacious. Whereas grace is the free gift of God, wholly unearned and undeserved, he claimed, being free it is available to all and not to some privileged minority of the elect. Whereas there were those who repudiated the more extreme, supralapsarian form of the doctrine which held that God had actively ordained both the salvation of the few and the damnation of the many – the so called hyper-Calvinist ‘double predestination’ -, the putatively milder view, that those who did not respond to the gospel call were given their just deserts, was equally intolerable:

Call it therefore by whatever name you please, election, predestination or reprobation, it comes in the end to the same thing ... [that] one part of mankind is infallibly saved and the other is infallibly damned.

Contemtpuous of the provisos made by the doctrine's defenders, he listed with gusto its flaws and deficiencies: that it undermined the rationality of preaching; that it undercut any motive for holy living; that it bred contempt for the so-called reprobates; that 'it naturally tends to inspire, or increase, a sharpness or eagerness of temper, which is quite contrary to the meekness of Christ'; that it abolishes spiritual comfort; and, due to the fact that all people's fate had been eternally decided come what may, it nullified the need for the Christian scheme altogether: 'How uncomfortable a thought it is, that thousands and millions of men, without any preceding offense or fault of theirs, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings'.

Scripture, on the other hand, pictured a God who was eager for all to turn to him, while Christ had been sent into the world to call all people to repentance. Why, therefore, are men lost? 'Not because of any decree of God ... Whatever be the cause of their perishing, it cannot be his will'. Sinners are lost of their own volition and not on the basis of God's sovereign design; as Jesus had said: 'Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life' (John 5:40). For John Wesley, now well into his stride, the concept of predestination was not only an affront to scripture and a travesty of the gospel, it was blasphemous: 'It represents the most holy God as worse than the devil!' To justify it on the basis of the Bible was tantamount to sacrilege: 'No scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works; that is ... no scripture can prove predestination'. To hold to these views was not only to embrace heresy, but to refuse to counter them was spiritual treason: 'The honour of our gracious God, and the cause of his truth, will not suffer me to be silent!' Following this unrestrained peroration, he concluded his treatise by claiming that the divine decree encompasses all who desired to cast themselves on the Lord, in the sure knowledge that he would never cast them off:

This decree yields the strongest encouragement to abound in all good works and in all holiness, and it is a wellspring of joy, of happiness and ... endless comfort. This is worthy of God [and] ... every way consistent with all the perfections of his nature.

By late 1739 the doctrinal differences between Whitefield's Calvinism – which represented the consensus view amongst the Welsh revivalists, the bulk of those involved in the Great Awakening in the colonies, the Evangelical Revival in Scotland and the main body of English Dissenters – and the Wesleys' increasingly militant Arminianism, was becoming critical, and in 1740 the unity of the movement was in danger of being irreparably impaired. During his extended American tour Whitefield was kept in touch with these developments, and

wrote regularly to his still esteemed colleague: 'Provoke me to it as much as you please, I intend not to enter the lists of controversy with you on the points wherein we differ', he declared in March. It was evident that he was trying seriously to avoid an open breach. The fraught situation was exacerbated a month later by the excommunication of John Acourt, an aggressive Calvinist, from the Foundery. In July, Howell Harris warned Wesley that the very integrity of the Revival was being endangered by doctrinal truculence, and although John was more conciliatory in public, Charles refused to temper his remarks: 'Who can stand before envy, bigotry and predestination!' he exclaimed in November; every sermon was redolent with talk of general redemption and the 'snares' of particular election. By then it had become impossible for Whitefield to hold back. He was being inundated by trans-Atlantic messages imploring him to defend the Calvinist position. His tone remained courteous and restrained, but in a letter from Georgia, dated 24 December (which was published in England in early 1741), he responded: 'I think it my duty to bear an humble testimony and earnest plea for the truths which, I am convinced, are clearly revealed in the Word of God'.

After discussing the propriety or otherwise of casting lots (a practice on which both Wesley and the Moravians put much store), he took his stand on Romans 8. The received exposition of that chapter, as confirmed by Article XVII in the Anglican formularies he claimed, taught

that God intends to give saving grace, through Jesus Christ, only to a certain number, and that the rest of mankind, after the fall of Adam, being justly left of God to continue in sin, will at last suffer that eternal death which is its proper wages.

As to Wesley's list of flaws, none of them stood up to scrutiny. Rather than undermining the rationality of preaching, it was through the preaching of the gospel that the elect were called by God; far from undercutting the need for holiness, believers showed their gratitude for God's elective love by living blameless lives; it was no part of Christian faith to tell apart the reprobate from the elect, and all believers were charged with loving their neighbours, whoever they were. For the saints, election was a comforting doctrine, or so claimed the Church of England's Article XVII: 'the consideration of predestination, and election in Christ, is full of sweet, pleasant, unspeakable comfort to godly people'; while surely, it was unfair to blame the doctrine of election for engendering a bitter attitude in the faithful when many who held to general redemption were narrow, crabbed, and censorious in their views. But mostly Whitefield challenged the accusation of blasphemy.

You unjustly charge the doctrine of *reprobation* with blasphemy, whereas the doctrine of *universal redemption*, as you set it forth, is really the highest reproach upon the dignity of the Son of God, and the merit of his blood. Consider whether it be not rather blasphemy to say as you do, Christ not only died for those that are saved, but also for those that perish ... You plainly make salvation depend not on *God's free grace*, but on *man's free-will*. And if thus, it is more than probable, Jesus Christ would not have had the satisfaction of seeing the fruit of his death in the eternal salvation of one soul. Our preaching would then be vain ...

Whitefield's tone was reserved and considerate throughout, and he concluded, with patent sincerity:

God knows my heart, as I told you before, so I declare again, nothing but a single regard to the honour of Christ has forced this letter from me. I love and honour you for his sake; and when I come to judgment, will thank you before men and angels, for what you have, under God, done for my soul. Yours affectionate, though unworthy brother and servant in Christ ...

Henry Rack's summary is judicious:

Whitefield is often seen as little more than an emotional preacher with no intellectual gifts, yet his *Letter* is no contemptible performance. It is a well-reasoned ... presentation of the traditional Calvinist arguments ... in answer to the obvious knock-down common sense displayed by Wesley (*Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 200).

As it would transpire, it did little to assuage the widening rift.

Whitefield's prolonged absence abroad weakened significantly his influence over the revival movement, especially as Wesley maximized his opportunity to organize the burgeoning network of societies, fellowships and new congregations. The former's return in March 1741 coincided with an acrimonious clash between Wesley and John Cennick in which Cennick, refusing to tone down his predestinarian preaching, was expelled from the Kingswood society, along with 52 others. By June an alternative society, the 'Tabernacle', had been established, thus creating two competing Methodist fellowships in the Kingswood area, the one espousing Wesley's perfectionist doctrines and the other holding to Calvinism. During the summer Cennick undertook a vigorously opposed though ultimately successful preaching campaign in the Swindon and Lyneham area, forming his numerous converts into a new connexion of explicitly Calvinistic Methodists, 'the Wiltshire Association'. Although both Whitefield and Wesley, following their first meeting in mid-March, committed themselves to renewed collaboration, too much had occurred in the meantime for the partnership to flourish. Both men suspected the other of having compromised fatally the Christian message, the one by advocating perfectionism and free will and the other by championing predestination and, by implication, antinomianism. By now Charles Wesley was implacably opposed to Whitefield

and rejected any cooperation between those who held to the opposing doctrinal schemes. In a letter to John in September, he stated

Do you not know the value of souls, precious immortal souls, yet trust them within the sound of predestination? ... Stop the plague just now, or it will be too late. Send me word first post that you have warned our flock from going to hear the Other Gospel. O how you are outwitted ... renounce your credulity ... till he [Whitefield] renounces reprobation.

Notwithstanding these mutual recriminations, both Whitefield and John Wesley (more than Charles) realized that they were irrevocably involved in a common mission of evangelical renewal which, to a great extent, had taken on a life of its own. The reality, however, was that the unity of the Evangelical Revival in England had been destroyed. By late 1742, the harmony and accord experienced so vividly in January 1739 had all but disappeared. Rather than one body united in fellowship, there were now three separate revivalist groups: the Moravians, the Wesleyans, and the Calvinists: 'They were each equally committed to evangelical renewal, but each now competed for the same space in a religious marketplace that was becoming decidedly overcrowded' (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, pp.35-6).

iv. The development of structure, 1742-5

For the next three years John Wesley and George Whitefield offered their followers robust leadership (Wesley especially so), while the two strands of the Methodist movement would grow substantially (Wesleyanism particularly), both numerically and geographically. Calvinistic Methodism became strongest in London, – Whitefield's disciples had established their Tabernacle at Moorfields, competing with the Foundery, in 1741 – Bristol, Gloucester and Wiltshire (as well, of course, as Wales). Wesley's movement remained strong in both London and Bristol, though it was now intensifying its presence in Cornwall, the Midlands and Yorkshire. Although the English Calvinists looked towards Whitefield for vision and guidance, his movement lacked initially a strong organized structure and would always depend on the leader's preaching and presence in order to maintain momentum. For all his courtesy and reserve in dealing with Wesley, Whitefield had a record of being spectacularly rash in criticizing his fellow clergy: his pamphlet, *To a Friend in London Concerning Archbishop Tillotson* (1740) had accused that renowned if deceased prelate of knowing no more of Christianity than Mohomet. The Wesleys, on the other hand, scrupulously avoided

antagonizing the Anglican establishment, so whereas the backlash against Whitefield had become virulent, his rivals' labours were free to flourish.

John Wesley laboured ceaselessly as an itinerant, and, as well as cultivating friendships among sympathetic clergy, by 1743 he had attracted and trained an impressive company of gifted lay preachers. Always maintaining tight discipline among them, he could now delegate responsibility for the care of the societies in the knowledge that sound doctrine, namely (in his case) Arminian evangelicalism, would be maintained allowing him the freedom to oversee the further expansion of the movement. *The Nature, Design and General Rule of the Societies* (1743) provided a blueprint for Wesleyan Methodism and an intimation as to how its novel ecclesiology would develop. The basic structure was that of the 'society', membership of which was not on the basis of profession of faith or even the experience of conversion but merely a desire to 'flee from the wrath to come'. The societies were grouped together in 'circuits' under the jurisdiction of a number of travelling preachers, appointed for a period of three years, who would visit regularly to evangelize and provide pastoral care. Inter-congregational engagement would occur in the 'quarterly meeting' – these would be held initially in Newcastle, Bristol and London – when circuit preachers would gather together to discuss matters of mutual concern, while every year a 'conference' would be held to which all preachers were expected to attend. The Conference (soon capitalized), the first of which was held in June 1744, would be the ultimate arbiter of doctrine and discipline. All society members and the preachers were expected to attend public worship in their parish churches even if the ministry there was unsympathetic to Methodist or evangelical ideals, and be meticulous in partaking of the sacrament. Soon a sturdy and effective organization was in place, which flourished under John Wesley's undisputed leadership. 'Wesley's Methodism still resembled a large, segmented Anglican voluntary society' (Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, p.117), and though it was intended as an auxiliary to the Established Church, it inevitably created an identity of its own. Still purportedly a renewal movement within Anglicanism, because of Wesley's ambiguous attitude to episcopal authority, it was often seen as a competitor. 'Conformity', for Wesley, 'simply meant not contradicting its doctrines and not deserting its worship' (Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 250). Otherwise its leader was highly selective as to the Church of England's structures and discipline. The fact that authority was concentrated in John Wesley's hands (to which Charles unfailingly deferred), created an alternative *ipso facto* arch-episcopate: 'Notoriously [John] was an authoritarian leader, and several of those who fell out with him thought that he was ambitious for power and would brook no superior' (ibid, p. 247). This may

have been the case, but he also inspired exceptional devotion and would retained his basic integrity throughout his life. It soon became apparent that John Wesley possessed leadership skills of the highest degree.

Neither did Whitefield lack energy and resolve, and, following a hiatus during his American sojourn, excelled in the popularity of his preaching, though he would never match Wesley as an organizer. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists under Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland had already created an effectively regulated body, and Whitefield was fortunate in drawing Harris (when the Welshman could spare the time) to assist in the oversight of the Moorfields Tabernacle which had become the centre point of what was coming to be known as 'Whitefield's Association'. Harris, who retained fraternal relations with the Wesley brothers, was able to effect a precarious pacification if not reconciliation between the two Methodist strands during these few years. Whitefield's *Letter... to the Religious Societies* (1740) had already described the characteristic piety of Calvinistic Methodism and had laid out its organizational structure. As with Wesley's body, the basic unit was the 'society', but membership was restricted to those who had already experienced evangelical conversion and were willing to be instructed in the Calvinistic faith. This included election, limited atonement and the perseverance of the saints. Close fellowship within the society, which included a rigorous disciplinary regime, was essential to its witness. 'None but those who have experienced it', the *Letter* stated, 'can tell the unspeakable advantage of such an union ... By this means brotherly love will be excited and increased amongst you, and you will learn to watch over one another for good'. Although potentially intrusive, the depth of fellowship engendered within the societies was highly valued by its members, while its societal structure reinforce the movement's identity. Whereas there were no 'circuits' as such, each society had its 'steward' or 'exhorter', who, as well as providing leadership within the fellowship, sought to extend the Methodist gospel through peripatetic preaching. In Wales two incipient 'associations' had developed, one in Cardiganshire led by Daniel Rowland and the other in Breconshire and Glamorgan led by Harris, where the exhorters would meet quarterly for instruction, while the two principal leaders, Rowland and Harris, would themselves visit individual societies as regularly as possible. This model would have a parallel in Whitefield's evolving plan for organizing the English work.

'The awakening seems ... to be over', wrote Whitefield in October 1742, '[but] there are so many living stones it may be time to think of putting them together'. The movement's thirty or so societies were divided into four 'associations': London, Bristol, Gloucestershire

and Wiltshire, each with its ‘superintendent’ who would report either to Whitefield, John Cennick or (when he was available) Howell Harris. Exhorters and stewards had responsibility for individual societies, each of which could have between a dozen to fifty members. The superintendents and exhorters would meet quarterly while the Association – now capitalized – would convene annually under the presidency of Whitefield or, during his absences, Harris. In March 1743, the Welshman (much to his delight) was appointed ‘general superintendent’ of the undertaking in both England and Wales. This had the advantage (for Whitefield) of utilizing Harris’ superior organizational skills to strengthen the English movement – which remained significantly less extensive than both Wesley’s body and the Calvinistic Methodists in Wales – while the Welsh appreciated the link with the Revival on a wider front. As in Wesley’s case, ‘Calvinistic Methodism was intended to be a network of societies in connection with one another, whilst working towards the renewal of the Church ... [It] was never designed to be an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, or an alternative to the Church altogether’ (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.47).

After 1743, the weaknesses of the English Calvinistic Methodist organization was not essentially structural but had to do with Whitefield’s protracted absences, either in Scotland or, more seriously, in America. Twice in 1742-3, for months at a time, he left the work in the hands of others while he itinerated north of the border, and in late summer 1744 he would leave for America, this time until 1748. A particularly grievous and unexpected blow occurred in late 1745 with John Cennick’s secession, along with another of the Moorfield’s deputies, John Syms, to the Fetter Lane Moravians. As well as depleting the congregation by half, almost all of the Wiltshire societies followed Cennick’s lead and put themselves under Moravian control. English Calvinistic Methodism was now confined to London, Bristol and Gloucestershire.

Despite this, organization was never the secret of Methodist strength, whether Whitefield’s variety or that of the Wesleys. Methodism remained a revivalist movement fuelled by zeal, deep spiritual commitment, evangelistic boldness and extraordinary vigour: ‘Methodism [was] a marvel of Christian energy’ (Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, p. 118). It was wholeheartedly committed to the conversions of those who had been bypassed by conventional religion, and remained massively potent. The historian John Walsh’s striking vignette sums it up best:

Perhaps the most characteristic image of the English movement is, not that of Wesley preaching to great crowds in the sunken outdoor amphitheatre at Gwennap in Cornwall, but Wesley as he is described in John Barrit’s diary, standing in a barn with a knot of

shabby people around him, explaining the love of God in the process of regeneration. Would they recognize the presence of God's love? Yes, they would. For how did wives and husbands recognize the love they bore for one another, or children know they were loved by their parents? They *felt* in their hearts. And so too it would be with God's grace (John Walsh, 'Methodism and the origin of English-speaking evangelicalism', in Mark E. Noll et. al., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism*, p.34).

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