

Unit 7: Methodist Historical DNA and Modern Cell Churches: Is There A Match? Lecture: John Wesley in Historical Context

Just as it is impossible to define Wesleyan DNA without reference to John Wesley, it is impossible to define John Wesley without reference to his historical context. There is an old joke about the preacher's daughter commenting Sunday afternoon on a sermon she particularly liked: "Daddy, was what you said today true or was it just great preaching?" In attempting to apply truth to a modern context, it is typical for us to remove ideas from their historical context and apply them into our modern context. In doing so we might be faithful to the words themselves but miss the meaning and motivation that lies behind them. Wesley wrote and preached to people of his day and had no intention of writing theology for the 21st century. Therefore, in order to be truthful in addition to being inspiring, we need to know the historical context of what Wesley did and wrote.

This is difficult for me as I am an interested amateur ("for the love of the subject") rather than a trained historian. My earlier advice about my generalizations is truer in regard to Wesley and history than anywhere else in this course.

First, we also need to understand how his thought developed over his lifetime; it is only in biographies that human beings are consistent throughout their lives. Much emphasis is made over the need for individuals to practice the General Rules, a practice developed very early as a part of the Fetter Lane Society when Wesley was still strongly influenced by the Moravians. The General Rules predate the class meeting and the later discipleship system that developed which is largely unknown and ignored today. What is known is twisted out of its original shape so as to fit our needs and would no longer be recognized by Wesley. Wesley's practice of holiness and his definition of it in the General Rules is a good thing. Our modern redefinition of the General Rules, combined with our Social Principles, is a very different idea of holiness than that advocated by John Wesley. Our practice of such a form of holiness will no doubt make us better disciples, but it is a far cry from the very high expectation set by the early Methodists; high expectations have been proven effective in themselves as a means of church growth and particularly in the area of assimilation.¹ Wesley generated converts through various forms of field preaching; those converts were only preserved assimilated through high expectation involvement called for in the General Rules and practiced by the class meetings.

Second, there is a movement to return to the Anglican worship practices of Wesley, as if these were responsible for the Wesleyan revival. As Carl Bangs writes, "Eighteenth-century Anglicanism was full of high churchmen. The high-churchmanship of the Wesleys, while essential to their theology, does not in itself account for their greatness."² To return to more Anglican worship forms ignores the tension between the early Methodists and the Anglican church. Much of Wesley's writing is in response to criticism and even persecution by the Anglican church. The Wesleyan revival did not begin, after all, in the parish church but rather outside of proper Anglican worship forms and, truthfully, in spite of them.

¹Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret of Keeping People in Your Church* (<http://www.amazon.com/High-Expectations-Remarkable-Secret-Keeping/dp/0805412662>)

²Carl Bangs, *Historical Theology in the Wesleyan Mode*; a link to the full article can be found in the Workshop Materials section of this course.

The desire of some to return to a more high church liturgy as a means of attracting the lost and filling empty pews is an empty hope based on little more than personal preferences in worship liturgy.

Third, the Wesley's were adamant throughout their life that their movement was faithful to the Church of England, seeking only to encourage it to return to a more faithful expression of its own purpose. When this commitment to faithful Anglicanism is taken out of historical context it becomes a falsehood. The historical context of England in Wesley's time promoted an institutional persecution of any religious belief contrary to the official state Church of England. Wesley's defense of his Anglicanism comes from the continual protest on the part of his critics that he is preaching concepts and practicing behaviors which are contrary to the accepted teachings of the Anglican church of his day. While some historians might disagree, those criticisms are entirely accurate: early Methodism was NOT Anglican. And so two desires combine in virtually all of Wesley's writings: his love of the Anglican church and his desire to protect his movement from marginalization through persecution. The lost sheep he sought to save were baptized Anglicans socially excluded from the Church of England. The lack of holiness Wesley sought to spread across the land was needed most of all within the Church of England and among those who controlled the country. Wesley in a way was a missionary to his own church, but his critics were largely correct; if he preached and practiced what the Church of England of his day preached and practiced, there would be no controversy.

The roots of the persecution of non-Anglicans goes back to the English revolution. I'm going to cover the subject in a series of quotes in italics from Wikipedia articles which can be easily accessed for more information by clicking on the links in the footnotes. I hope this will provide an overview with ready access to details when more information is desired.

Protestantism in England began for political reasons; King Henry VIII needed a male heir and went through seven wives in an attempt to get one. (The real problem was his syphilis.) *Henry first asked for an annulment in 1527. After various failed initiatives he stepped up the pressure on Rome, in the summer of 1529, by compiling a manuscript from ancient sources proving in law that spiritual supremacy rested with the monarch, and demonstrating the illegality of Papal authority. In 1531 Henry first challenged the Pope when he demanded 100,000 pounds from the clergy in exchange for a royal pardon for their illegal jurisdiction. He also demanded that the clergy should recognize him as their sole protector and supreme head. The church in England recognized Henry VIII as supreme head of the Church of England on February 11, 1531, however in 1532 he still continued to attempt to seek a compromise with the Pope.*

In May 1532 the Church of England agreed to surrender its legislative independence and canon law to the authority of the monarch. In 1533 the Statute in Restraint of Appeals removed the right of the English clergy and laity to appeal to Rome on matters of matrimony, tithes and oblations, and gave authority over such matters to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. This finally allowed Thomas Cranmer, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, to issue Henry's annulment; and upon procuring it, Henry married Anne Boleyn. Pope Clement VII excommunicated Henry VIII in 1533.

In 1534 the Act of Submission of the Clergy removed the right of all appeals to Rome, effectively ending the Pope's influence. The first Act of Supremacy confirmed Henry by statute as the Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1536.

Such constitutional changes made it not only possible for Henry to divorce but also gave him access to the considerable wealth that the Church had amassed, and Thomas Cromwell, as Vicar

General, launched a commission of enquiry into the nature and value of all ecclesiastical property in 1535, which culminated in the Dissolution of the Monasteries (1536 - 1540).³ When Henry became the head of the church, he was able to seize all the properties owned by the monasteries, which is the foundation for the wealth of the royalty of England.

Oliver Cromwell, as a general and politician, was a leading figure in the seizing of Roman Catholic assets for the King.⁴ Cromwell rose to power through killing his king and seizing dictatorial power. *The English Civil War consisted of a series of armed conflicts and political machinations that took place between Parliamentarians and Royalists between 1642 and 1651. The first (1642–1646) and second (1648–1649) civil wars pitted the supporters of King Charles I against the supporters of the Long Parliament, while the third war (1649–1651) saw fighting between supporters of King Charles II and supporters of the Rump Parliament. The Civil War ended with the Parliamentary victory at the Battle of Worcester on 3 September 1651. The Civil War led to the trial and execution of Charles I, the exile of his son Charles II, and the replacement of the English monarchy with first the Commonwealth of England (1649–1653) and then with a Protectorate (1653–1659), under the personal rule of Oliver Cromwell. The monopoly of the Church of England on Christian worship in England came to an end...*⁵

During these years of revolution, the Puritan form of English Protestantism flourished. *A Puritan of 16th and 17th century England was any person seeking "purity" of worship and doctrine, especially the parties that rejected the Reformation of the Church of England, and those who justified separation from the Church of England ... Specifically, the term was applied to those wishing to extirpate from the Church of England all qualities for which they could not locate biblical authorization. As a matter of sociological necessity, the Church of England needed to differentiate itself from Catholicism in order to survive; in doing so it moved toward more radical elements of the reformation. Thus, by 1552, the Church of England had moved decisively towards the Reformed camp, although its worship still retained several elements which had been changed by the continental Reformed churches (including the keeping of Lent, allowing the baptism of infants by midwives, retaining the custom of the churching of women, requiring the clergy to wear vestments, and requiring kneeling at Communion)... Of all the debates about the extent of reforms in England, the one which would ultimately prove to have the longest staying power was the debate about whether the clergy should be required to wear vestments.*⁶ (One can see in this an echo of the conflict between pastoral wardrobe in traditional and contemporary worship!) Anything that seemed Catholic had to be wrong. Later, when Wesley was accused of promoting Catholicism, he vigorously defended himself by claiming adherence to the Church of England.

After the monarchy was restored, the political need to prevent England from returning to Catholicism was prominent in the pro-Catholic reign of Mary. *Throughout the reign of Edward VI, the Church of England had been steadily moving toward the Reformed position. This was halted in 1553,*

³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Church_of_England

⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Cromwell

⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Civil_War

⁶<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritan>

when Edward died and his Catholic half-sister assumed the throne as Mary I of England. Mary determined to end the English Reformation and restore the Church of England to full communion with the Church of Rome, and therefore instituted a series of persecutions of Protestants known as the Marian Persecutions, which saw Thomas Cranmer, Nicholas Ridley, John Hooper, and many other prominent English Protestants burned at the stake.

As a result of the persecution, roughly 800 English Protestants went into exile. Unwelcome in German Lutheran territories, they established English Protestant congregations in Emden, Wesel, Frankfurt, Strasbourg, Zurich, Basel, Geneva, and Aarau. Most of these churches continued to follow the 1552 Book of Common Prayer, but the Frankfurt congregation, under the leadership of John Knox, felt that the 1552 Book of Common Prayer was insufficiently reformed, and therefore worshiped according to a liturgy, known as the Book of Common Order, drawn up by Knox.⁷ John Knox eventually relocated to Scotland and is considered to be the founder of the Presbyterian Church.⁸

Between the Revolution and Wesley, many other religious leaders arose and founded new movements. During the years of revolution, George Fox founded the “enthusiast” movement known as the Quakers. *George Fox (July 1624 – January 13, 1691) was an English Dissenter who is commonly considered the founder of the Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as the Quakers. Living in a time of great social upheaval, he rebelled against the religious and political consensus by proposing an unusual and uncompromising approach to the Christian faith. His journal is known even among non-Quakers for its vivid account of his personal journey... Fox had more than a little experience among "English Dissenters", groups of people who had broken away from practices of the state church because of their divergent beliefs. He had hoped that the dissenters would help his spiritual understanding, whereas those in the established church could not, but this was not the case: he fell out with one group, for example, because he maintained that women had souls... Fox's preaching was grounded in scripture, but mainly effective because of the intense personal experience he was able to project. He was scathing about contemporary immorality, especially deceit and the exacting of tithes, and urged his listeners to lead lives without sin — though avoiding the Ranter (or Antinomian) view that all acts of a believer became automatically sinless. At the time, there were a great many rival Christian denominations holding very diverse opinions; the atmosphere of dispute and confusion gave George Fox an opportunity to put forward his own beliefs through his personal sermons. By 1651 he had gathered many other talented preachers around him, and continued to roam the country seeking out new converts. They continued to do this despite a harsh reception from some listeners, who would whip and beat them to drive them away. An interest in social justice was slowly developing, marked by Fox's complaints to judges about decisions he considered morally wrong — for example, his letter on the case of a woman due to be executed for theft. Oppression by the powerful was a very real concern for the English people, in the turmoil of the English Civil War following the excesses of Charles I (executed in 1649) and the beginnings of the Commonwealth of England. George Fox's conflict with civil authority was inevitable.⁹ Fox died in 1691, some four decades before Aldersgate. While it is another generalization, the Quakers represent the position in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of a church of pure “experience” and as devoid of*

⁷<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puritan>

⁸http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Knox

⁹http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Fox

traditionalism as possible. Quakers are responsible to obey the inner leading of the spirit; this occasionally led them to preach naked or partially clothed as a sign of rebuke to sin. These extremes of enthusiasm led to the accusation that Wesley was merely another “enthusiast” who should be ignored. *The England described in the Journal is an England still full of theology; all kinds of queer folk abound; strange subjects are discussed in odd places. There was drunkenness and cockfighting, no doubt, but there were also Deists, Mystics, Swedenborgians, Antiomians, Necessitarians, Anabaptists, Quakers, nascent heresies, and slow-dying delusions. Villages were divided into rival groups, which fiercely argued the nicest points in the aptest language.*¹⁰ As religious chaos had led to revolution and the murder of the king, the English in Wesley’s day were frightened of the possibility of religion that brought chaos into their orderly lives.¹¹ This attack led to Wesley’s defense that the Methodists were not only “normal” Anglicans but were the definition of normal from which the church has strayed.

In fact - although this is another generalization about which a genuine historian might properly object - the very presence of so much criticism of Wesley as a man in revolt against the Church of England indicates that his interpretation of the faith was far from normal. Consequently, any statement of Wesley’s removed from historical context must be considered carefully. An apologetic statement arises from the context of responding to an accusation; it may be quite different from how those within the Methodist movement spoke privately about their beliefs and practices.

English law provided significant penalties for those who were not a part of the Church of England. *English Dissenters were those who separated from the Church of England. They opposed State interference in religious matters, and founded their own communities in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Having hoped for a more Protestant Reformation in the Church of England, many individuals were disappointed that political decisions were made by the monarchs in order to control the Established Church. The Dissenters triumphed for a time under Oliver Cromwell. King James I had said "No bishop, no king"; Cromwell made good on that, abolishing both. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 the episcopacy was reinstated and the rights of the Dissenters were limited. The Act of Uniformity 1662 required Anglican ordination for all ministers. Many clergymen instead withdrew from the state church, the Church of England. These Dissenters were also known as Nonconformists, though originally this term referred to refusal to use certain vestments and ceremonies of the Church of England, rather than separation from it.*¹²

Legal persecution of dissenters began a century before Wesley and continued throughout his life. *The Act of Uniformity was an Act of the Parliament of England, 14 Charles II c. 4 (1662), which required the use of all the rites and ceremonies in the Book of Common Prayer in Church of England services. It also required episcopal ordination for all ministers. As a result, nearly 2,000 clergymen left the established church in what became known as the Great Ejection. The Test and Corporation Acts,*

¹⁰From Augustine Birrell, *An Appreciation of John Wesley’s Journal*, often included as a preface to online editions of John Wesley’s Journal. Any internet search on the title and author will provide a link to this delightful short biography of Wesley.

¹¹Chaos and anxiety are primary causes for systemic resistance to change in a *Diffusion of Innovations* understanding. For more information, see *Seminar Two: Dialogue*, on the Resources page at www.disciplewalk.com.

¹²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Dissenters

which lasted until 1828, excluded all nonconformists from holding civil or military office. They were also prevented from being awarded degrees by the universities of Cambridge and Oxford. The Act of Uniformity was an act of Parliament, prescribing the form of public prayers, administration of sacraments, and other rites of the Established Church of England. Its provisions were modified by the Act of Uniformity Amendment Act, of 1872. It was enacted by Charles II, and reintroduced episcopal rule back into the Church of England after the Puritans had abolished many features of the Church during the Civil War. The Act of Uniformity itself is only one of four crucial pieces of legislation, known as the Clarendon Code, after Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, Charles' Lord Chancellor. They were:

- Corporation Act (1661) - This first of the four statutes which made up the Clarendon Code required all municipal officials to take Anglican communion, formally reject the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643. The effect of this act was to exclude nonconformists from public office.
- Act of Uniformity (1662) - This second statute made use of the Book of Common Prayer compulsory in religious service. Upwards of 2000 clergy refused to comply with this act, and were forced to resign their livings.
- Conventicle Act (1664) - This act forbade conventicles (a meeting for unauthorized worship) of more than 5 people who were not members of the same household. The purpose was to prevent dissenting religious groups from meeting.
- Five Mile Act (1665) - This final act of the Clarendon Code was aimed at Nonconformist ministers, who were forbidden from coming within five miles of incorporated towns or the place of their former livings. They were also forbidden to teach in schools. This act was not rescinded until 1812.¹³ If the Methodist movement could be forced to admit to its “non-conformity,” it could be easily rendered just one more dissenting movement and so be disempowered. Wesley’s personal stance was fiercely pro-Anglican, but he continually resisted accusations that Methodists were a “conventicle” and should register under the laws as dissenters.

In addition to her personal conviction, this allowed his societies to function with greater freedom and greater access to the lost sheep of the Church of England. *Throughout his life, Wesley remained within the Church of England and insisted that his movement was well within the bounds of the Anglican Church. His maverick use of church policy put him at odds with many within the Church of England, though toward the end of his life he was widely respected.*¹⁴ There were many, many dissenting chapels; if they could have done the work of revival, then it would have been achieved long before Wesley. One by one, others such as George Whitefield and Thomas Maxfield either organized or registered their churches as dissenting chapels or became pastors of them. As they dropped out of the larger denomination, they dropped out of historical prominence. The tension contributed something vital to the revival the value of which is yet to be determined.

Wesley remained adamantly Church of England until his death. *Although Wesley declared, "I live and die a member of the Church of England", the impact of the movement, especially after Wesley's clandestine ordinations in 1784, made separation from the Church of England virtually inevitable. In 1784 Wesley made provision for the governance of Methodism after his death through the 'Yearly Conference of the People called Methodists'. He nominated 100 people and declared them to be its*

¹³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Act_of_Uniformity_1662

¹⁴http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wesley

members and laid down the method by which their successors were to be appointed.¹⁵ Frederick Norwood stated that “The separation was formalized when the Conference of 1795 asserted that Methodist preachers could administer sacraments without ordination by the Church of England.” After separation the Methodists stifled dissent in their own ranks out of a growing public fear that the Methodist movement could somehow lead to a reenactment of the French Revolution on British soil.¹⁶

To what degree, then, was Wesley influenced by the doctrines and practices of dissenters? First, Wesley’s grandfathers were both well known dissenting clergymen. *John Wesley was born in Epworth, 23 miles (37 km) northwest of Lincoln, the son of Samuel Wesley, a graduate of Oxford, and a minister of the Church of England. In 1689 Samuel married Susanna Annesley, twenty-fourth child of Dr. Samuel Annesley. Both Samuel and Susanna had been raised in Dissenting homes before becoming members of the Established Church early in adulthood. Susanna herself became a mother of nineteen children. In 1696 Samuel Wesley was appointed rector of Epworth, where John, the fifteenth child, was born.*¹⁷

I conclude with Carl Bangs insightful comments on eleven Puritan influences in Wesley’s life and ministry:¹⁸

It is well known that the Wesleys were Anglicans in the train of the high churchmanship of the Caroline Divines. Their basic loyalty to the Church of England, often sorely tested, is a clue to their distinctiveness and serves to mark them off from other leaders of eighteenth-century Evangelicalism. George Whitefield, for example, another Anglican, could organize his converts in Newburyport, Massachusetts, into a Presbyterian church. The Wesleys adhered to high liturgical and sacramental theories and practices, and they adhered to episcopacy. Even when John Wesley broke with the strict juridical order of English episcopacy, he acknowledged that in the strange providence of God he was himself playing the part of a bishop. He could define Methodism itself as good old Church of England religion.

There can be no question of the central, formative importance of Anglicanism's episcopacy, liturgy, and sacramentalism for the early Wesleyan connection. This influence extends itself into all or most Methodist and Wesleyan denominations to the present.

When the Wesleys became leaders of the Evangelical Revival, they retained both the structure and the theology of Caroline Anglicanism. Two revealing examples: early in the days of the Methodist societies John Wesley excluded from the meetings any Presbyterians who would not kneel for prayer, and, theologically, he resisted Calvinist doctrines that ran counter to Anglican Arminianism. It is just at these points, however, that one-sided understandings of the Wesleys have arisen.

¹⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodist_Church_of_Great_Britain

¹⁶http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primitive_Methodists

¹⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wesley

¹⁸Quoted from *Historical Theology in the Wesleyan Mode* by Carl Bangs. A link to the entire article is included in the Workshop Materials folder.

The Wesleys' adherence to the liturgical tradition, often forgotten in the nineteenth century, was picked up in the recent past under the influence of the romantic Anglo-Catholic movement, giving rise to a Methodist high church movement which exhibits, in my judgment, what A. N. Whitehead called "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." Eighteenth-century Anglicanism was full of high churchmen. The high-churchmanship of the Wesleys, while essential to their theology, does not in itself account for their greatness.

In tension with their high church orientation was their deep indebtedness to English Puritanism. The Wesleys' criticisms of certain Calvinist doctrines has obscured this. Their use of Puritan writers has been recounted. It is important to see also their indebtedness to Puritan piety and structure. Some points can be mentioned in illustration.

- 1. Seriousness, a persistent theme in Puritanism marked the piety and preaching of the Wesleys as they countered the frivolity and foolishness of eighteenth-century Britain.*
- 2. The warmed heart, in terms of which John Wesley expressed his awakening at Aldersgate, was a theme from the Puritan Richard Sibbes.*
- 3. Fasting, while a historical Catholic and Anglican practice, had fallen into disuse but had been revived by the Puritans and was followed by the Wesleys.*
- 4. The covenant was a central theme in Puritanism, and the Wesleys' service of the renewal of the covenant, borrowed immediately from Joseph Alleine, picked up a central theme of the Puritanism of the time of Queen Elizabeth.*

A whole cluster of Puritan distinctives centered in their "exercises of prophesying," when groups of clergy of Puritan sympathy gathered in conference to engage in Bible study, preaching, and mutual discipline of life and doctrine. So much in demand was Puritan preaching that Puritan clergy, mutually strengthened in conference, itinerated outside their parish bounds to meet the need, and even lay people, some of whom learned their theology in the conferences, were pressed into the service of preaching. In this Puritanism of the Elizabethan era are to be found the precedents of some of the most central features of Methodism. Thus the list continues-

- 5. Conference was what actually occurred when the clergy met for mutual strength. They conferred. Notable among these continuing conferences was that at Dedham, near Colchester, beginning in 1582. It consisted of as many as twenty clergy. They attended to matters of doctrine, internal discipline, public morality, and even the placing of ministers (although they were ostensibly under the Anglican episcopacy). They kept minutes in question-and-answer form. When John Wesley summoned his preachers in conference in 1744, there was ample precedent at Dedham and in the other Puritan conferences."*
- 6. Discipline was another Puritan concern, activity, and institution. Even the term Book of Discipline comes from Elizabethan times.*
- 7. Lay preaching arose as more and more parishes and people attended to preaching. The Puritan*

clergy were generally the best educated of the English clergy, many of them from Cambridge University. They had a preponderance of the licenses to preach, which meant the passing of an examination beyond the abilities of many parish clergy, who for their silence in the pulpit were called "dumb dogs." Puritan lay people, to meet the need in parishes with silent pulpits, undertook the task themselves, although their addresses for legal reasons had to be called "lectures." The Puritan lectureships provide a precedent for another central feature of Methodism.

8. Itineracy, although not pioneered by the Puritans, was characteristic of their ministry. The orders of friars provide an earlier precedent, but the Puritans furthered the practice in Protestant England, with both clergy and the lay lecturers traveling outside parish bounds to preach in and out of churches. The itinerant preachers were sometimes supported by freewill offerings, another innovation, or by public or private endowments (the origin of the endowed "lectureship").

9. The world parish concept of Methodism builds on this innovative crossing of parish boundaries. When John Wesley was attacked by James Hervey in 1739 for taking liberties with the legal parish bounds, Wesley pointed out that since he was an ordained minister charged to preach the gospel, and since he was not assigned to any parish when virtually every square mile of Europe was theoretically in some parish, he had no option but to say, "I look upon all the world as my parish." It had been a radical concept and practice for the Elizabethan Puritans, and it continued to be so for the Wesleys.

10. Singing, at least of Psalms, was one of the distinctive features that Puritanism brought back from Geneva, and it was to become central to the Wesleyan Revival.

11. Ex tempore prayer, which many today take for granted, was in sixteenth-century England a Puritan innovation. It was to become important to the Methodist societies, and John Wesley felt free to break out in ex tempore additions even to the Communion service of the Book of Common Prayer.

What I propose is that the Wesleyan theology and practice were an intermingling of two powerful precedents, Caroline Anglicanism and Elizabethan Puritanism. Present-day Wesleyanism in all of its denominational manifestations needs to come to terms with both. By so doing, it may be able to exhibit a full-orbed evangelicalism in our time.

John Wesley profitably blended two religious cultures throughout his life and touched the lives of many as he did so. It is important that he be understood in his historical context prior to applying his thoughts to present day problems.

In addition, according to a *Diffusion of Innovations* understanding of systemic change, it is the many individual actions of the laity that were the principle cause of conversions in early Methodism rather than the field preaching of Wesley. Although Wesley is of great importance, I regret the lack of information on the evangelistic behaviors of the early Methodists. It is very likely, as the action of laity in ministry was a prime theme in dissenting churches, that much information has been suppressed. They did their evangelistic work in the background with great profit while Wesley drew the criticism of the powerful to himself. It's possible that the best solutions to our current problems lie with the behavior of the Methodist laity, past and present.