

Salvation and Methodist Societies: How Soteriology Shaped Spiritual Formation

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From the beginning of the Evangelical Revival, different subgroups emerged, including Welsh Calvinistic Methodism and Wesleyan Methodism. As John Wesley put it, people “lump together under this general name [Methodist] many who have no manner of connexion with each other.” Meanwhile, Howell Harris joined George Whitefield in objecting to Wesley “monopolising the name Methodist to himself only.”¹ The ability of Methodists to jump from one type of society to another indicates the existence of common Methodist ground, enough to warrant the shared Methodist title.² Yet the two movements clearly saw themselves as distinct, forming separate connections. In fact, besides Howell Harris, all the Welsh leaders kept their distance from Wesley. The welcome they gave George Whitefield demonstrates their willingness to overcome cultural and language barriers, so their reluctance to coordinate with Wesley seems to have stemmed from doctrinal and organizational concerns.³ The Welsh

1. John Wesley, “A Short History of the People Called Methodists,” in *Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies in *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1989), 9:367; Tom Beynon, ed., *Howell Harris’s Visits to London* (Cambrian News, 1960), 229. After each initial citation, further references to the critical editions of Wesley’s works will be to “Wesley, Works,” followed by the volume and page numbers.

2. For example, see National Library of Wales, Calvinistic Methodist Archive (CMA), Trevecca College MS 3050. The CMA records will be cited throughout this article. A brief description of the archive can be found in Eryn M. White, *The Welsh Methodist Society: The Early Societies in South-West Wales 1737–1750* (University of Wales Press, 2020), 7–8.

3. Problems in Neath and Pembrokeshire after Wesley’s involvement seemed to confirm these concerns. See CMA Trevecca College MSS 2978, 3023:36–38; Beynon, *Harris’s Visits to London*, 20, 25; W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, vol. 19, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1990), 231–32;

Methodists, like Whitefield, were Calvinistic in their soteriology, whereas Wesley affirmed an Arminian scheme. In February 1741, the Welsh Revival's leaders gathered at Llandoverly, and Harris shared two letters, one he had written to Charles Wesley and the other written to John Wesley by George Whitefield. Taken together, they detailed disagreements with the Wesleys' views on Arminianism and Christian perfection. Those present gave their assent to the letters, thus making clear the "Calvinistic foundations" of Welsh Methodism.⁴

This article will examine the Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist movements, their similarities and differences, starting with their overlapping but distinct soteriologies and proceeding to their respective societies. These surveys culminate in an evaluation of the extent to which their differing soteriologies led to distinct approaches to spiritual formation in their societies. The focus on Welsh and Wesleyan Methodism is warranted for two primary reasons. First, though other Methodist movements existed, these two possessed sufficient internal stability not only to persist as recognizable movements, but even to grow into thriving denominations. Second, these two movements differed in soteriology, and their relative independence allows the extent and effects of their differences to be examined.

As will be demonstrated, some practical differences between Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist societies can indeed be traced back to their distinctive soteriological perspectives. Specifically, three meaningful differences will emerge from the evidence. First, John Wesley's doctrines of prevenient grace and repentance led him to open society membership to all desiring salvation, while the Welsh Methodists restricted it to those converted to faith in Christ, believing that heart-change by faith must precede progress in holiness. Furthermore, Wesley's view of the way of salvation, culminating in Christian perfection, shaped his societies into a hierarchical

W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries III (1743–1754)*, vol. 20, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1991), 130, 211–12; W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries IV (1755–1765)*, vol. 21, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1992), 425–26.

4. For this reason, the present study will refer to Welsh Calvinistic Methodism simply as "Welsh Methodism." In the eighteenth century, there was little need to differentiate further. The Wesleys established a few scattered societies in Wales, which often struggled to survive, but these were part of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, not the Welsh Methodist Connexion. See Geraint Tudur, *Howell Harris from Conversion to Separation: 1735–1750* (University of Wales Press, 2000), 78; Wesley, *Works*, 20:265, 472; Wesley, *Works*, 21:425; W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries V (1765–1775)*, vol. 22, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1993), 461.

structure. The Welsh Methodists, on the other hand, lacked the theological impetus to divide societies based on levels of spiritual maturity. Finally, Welsh Methodism assessed spiritual growth by inward markers, whereas Wesleyan Methodism looked primarily to outward, behavioral indicators.

Two Methodist Soteriologies

Both Methodisms drew upon a Puritan heritage and expressed their beliefs in the new evangelical milieu, especially as Puritan heart religion was recast into a theology of instantaneous new birth. David Ceri Jones correctly notes Welsh Methodism's use of the Puritans and calls their engagement "highly selective."⁵ Yet it must be remembered that Puritanism itself was not a theological monolith, and Puritan emphases such as election, assurance, and heart-religion permeated Welsh Methodism. Harris, for instance, claimed the theology of "ye Good old orthodox Reformers & Puritans." Even the lesser-known Welsh Puritan tradition had an effect.⁶ As for Wesley, his family tree included high church branches and deep Puritan roots. Both his parents came from Puritan homes but rejected Puritan ecclesiology and Calvinism for establishment Anglicanism, inculcating in John a high view of the early church and the sacraments, along with an abhorrence of predestination.⁷ Nonetheless, the Puritans exerted their influence through Epworth's moral and devotional discipline, an emphasis furthered as the young scholar John explored the "holy living" writings of Jeremy Taylor, Thomas à Kempis, William Law, and others. Despite these other influences, Bruce Hindmarsh suggests Wesley "probably owed his largest debt" to Puritan spiritual writers, indicated by their prominence in Wesley's editing and publishing program.⁸

5. David Ceri Jones, "'We Are of Calvinistic principles': How Calvinist Was Early Calvinistic Methodism?" *Welsh Journal of Religious History* 4 (2009): 53.

6. Gomer M. Roberts, ed., *Selected Trevecka Letters (1742–1747)* (Calvinistic Methodist Bookroom, 1956), 166; R. Tudur Jones, "The Healing Herb and the Rose of Love: The Piety of Two Welsh Puritans," in R. Buick Knox, ed., *Reformation Conformity and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall* (Epworth, 1977), 178–79.

7. For Wesley's mother Susanna, see her letter to John dated August 18, 1725. Frank Baker, ed., *Letters 1: 1721–1739*, vol. 25, *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 178–80. For his father, Samuel, see the discussion in Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought (Paternoster, 2001), 74–78.

8. D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in the Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 97; See also W. Reginald Ward and Richard P.

In addition to this shared Puritan heritage, the well-established idea of a religious society provided clay from which all Methodists molded their own society meetings. The concluding decades of the seventeenth century brought a general turn toward piety, with a “societary impulse,” resulting in the rapid expansion of religious societies.⁹ Many similarities existed between Methodist societies and these predecessors, but they carried significant differences as well, Methodist societies being less formal in a variety of ways. The result was an “untidy” relationship between Methodist societies and the older societies, the latter sometimes supporting or embracing Methodism and sometimes maintaining their distance.¹⁰ Yet by the mid-eighteenth century, Methodist societies of all types were clearly distinguished from societies of the older sort.

Furthermore, David Bebbington’s four markers of evangelicalism provide a helpful summary of the beliefs and values Welsh and Wesleyan Methodism held in common. Both sought to follow the Bible; both looked to Jesus’s death to provide salvation; both practiced their faith in active, public ways; and both expected conversions to change lives.¹¹ The emphasis on conversion particularly distinguished them, as both Calvinist and Arminian Methodists delighted in recounting their dramatic, instantaneous conversions.¹² These shared emphases encouraged opponents like Theophilus Evans to lump all the revivalists together as targets of his criticism.¹³

Heitzenrater, eds., *Journals and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, vol. 18, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1988), 213.

9. Henry D. Rack, “Religious Societies and the Origins of Methodism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987): 587. See also D. E. Jenkins, “Introduction,” in *Religious Societies (Dr. Woodward’s “Account”)* (Hugh Evans & Sons, 1935), 6–11.

10. Methodist societies were mostly led by laypeople and favored extempore prayer with confession and examination over set prayers and devotional readings. See Josiah Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London, &c. and of their Endeavours for Reformation of Manners*, 6th ed. (London, 1744), vii, 53, 120, 129; John Walsh, “Religious Societies: Methodist and Evangelical, 1738–1800,” in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood, eds., *Voluntary Religion*, *Studies in Church History* 23 (Basil Blackwell, 1986), 284, 288; Rupert E. Davies, “Introduction,” in *Wesley, Works*, 9:6.

11. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Baker, 1992), 5–17.

12. It should be noted, however, that sometimes Arminians shared narratives of their conversions from Calvinism. See D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 242–45.

13. Theophilus Evans, *The History of Modern Enthusiasm, from the Reformation to the*

On a surface level, Welsh and Wesleyan Methodism also shared doctrinal convictions regarding original sin, justification by faith, and assurance. These doctrines received affirmation and attention from both movements. Yet a close examination exposes significant variations in their perspectives even on these shared doctrines. Though Wesley declared “there is not a hair’s breadth difference between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield” regarding *original sin*, his comment was only true theoretically.¹⁴ On a practical level, Wesley’s doctrine of prevenient grace led to a distinct approach to the unawakened person, enabling him to affirm original sin without also affirming unconditional election. Though humanity is fallen in Adam—spiritually dead, corrupted, and condemned—yet, argued Wesley, “there is no man in a state of mere nature” but rather “through the obedience and death of Christ” all “recover a capacity for spiritual life” and “an actual seed or spark thereof.”¹⁵ Christ’s universal redemption universally cancels original guilt and begins the healing of original corruption. Practically, prevenient grace shows itself in the restoration of “a measure of free will” and “a general knowledge of good and evil.”¹⁶ These abilities imply, Wesley concluded, “some tendency toward life, some degree of salvation.” Hence, though all humanity is corrupted and guilty in Adam, all also receive the beginnings of God’s gracious work, enabling them to respond and take steps in the way of salvation, the first of which is repentance and the second faith.¹⁷

Present Times, 2nd ed. (London, 1757), 108-120. Welsh Methodist leader William Wilkins served for a time as Evans’s curate. It was not a good match.

14. John Wesley, “What Is an Arminian?” in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, ed. Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, 13:407.

15. Wesley also called this “preventing grace” because it precedes the human response. See John Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” in Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Abingdon, 1991), 491; Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, vol. 10, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 2011), 129, 153; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3d ed. (Epworth, 2002), 389; Randy L. Maddox, “Introduction to the Doctrine of Original Sin,” in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, Randy L. Maddox, ed., vol. 12, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 2012), 140–142.

16. Wesley did not simply mean natural conscience, emphasizing rather the *supernatural* gracious origin of these abilities. See John Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” in *Works*, 13:287, 290; John Wesley, “Original Sin,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 328; Wesley, “Working Out Our Own Salvation,” in *ibid.*, 488.

17. For Wesley, repentance meant “conviction, or self-knowledge.” The repentant fear God, having entered the “legal state” of being “under the law.” The pattern of repentance and its works preceding faith was present quite early in Wesley’s writings. See John Wesley, “The Way to the Kingdom,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 128; John Wesley, “The

Regarding *justification by faith*, there was enough shared ground for Wesley to defend Calvinist writers against Sandemanian critique.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Wesley introduced three qualifiers that distanced his teaching from that of the Welsh Methodists. First, he defined faith so as not to exclude works. In 1738, he insisted that true faith is “necessarily productive of all good works and all holiness,” and if he would have continued to describe works simply as the products of faith, he may have avoided objection.¹⁹ Yet Wesley increasingly spoke of works as necessary for salvation in a more direct sense, describing them in the mid-1740s as “necessary to the continuance of faith” and justification, and culminating in the 1770 *Minutes* which said “every believer... works *for* as well as *from* life.”²⁰ Second, largely through fear of antinomianism, he declined to affirm the imputation of Christ’s active righteousness.²¹ Finally, he distinguished between present and final justification. The former was granted through faith and maintained by works, while for the latter works were a condition.²² These differences struck at the heart of what the Welsh Methodists meant by “justification

Scripture Way of Salvation,” in *ibid.*, 376; Wesley, *Works*, 10:126, 393; John Wesley, “The Principles of a Methodist,” in *Works*, 9:62; John Wesley, “Answer to Mr. Church’s Remarks,” in *ibid.*, 95–96.

18. John Wesley, “A Sufficient Answer to *Letters to the Author of ‘Theron and Aspasio’*; in a Letter to the Author,” in *Works*, 13:347–51.

19. John Wesley, “Salvation by Faith,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 44. See also John Wesley, “Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739),” in *Works*, 13:37.

20. For the trajectory, minutes, and controversy, see Wesley, *Works*, 10:128, 392–93, 403; McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 267–70; John Wesley, “The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained,” in *Works*, 9:176; Wesley, “Scripture Way of Salvation,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 377.

21. Wesley seems to have become uncomfortable with such teaching by at least the mid-1740s, a discomfort made very public by later controversy. See John Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 115, 119; John Wesley, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” in *ibid.*, 382–90; Wesley, *Works*, 10:129; John Wesley, “The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works: Extracted from the *Homilies* of the Church of England,” in *Works*, 12:33–35; John Wesley, “Letter to James Hervey,” in *ibid.*, 323–38; Ted Campbell, ed., *Letters III: 1756–1765*, vol. 27, *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 2015), 102.

22. Wesley encountered this distinction in Baxter’s *Aphorisms of Justification*, which he abridged with appreciation in 1745. It remains debatable how far Wesley’s marriage of faith and works departed from traditional Protestant teaching. In fact, Wesley himself seems to have considered this question, concluding a 1767 meditation on justification with, “But if so, what becomes of *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae?*” In 1779, he admitted that salvation must be “(in a scriptural sense) by works.” This was the end of a long trajectory. See John Wesley, “An Extract of Mr Richard Baxter’s *Aphorisms of Justification*,” in *Works*, 12:84–85; Wesley, “Letter to Hervey,” in *Works*, 13:326; John Wesley, “A Letter to a Gentleman at

by faith." They insisted that the imputation of Christ's righteousness, active as well as passive, received through a living faith of the heart, was the only hope of sinful humanity before a righteous God.²³

As for *assurance*, Wesley discussed the similarities and differences in a letter. He agreed with the Calvinists "(1), that an assurance of salvation is not of the essence of faith; (2), that a true believer may wait long before he hath it; and (3), that after he hath it, it may be weakened and intermitted." But then, Wesley wrote, he "saw clearly that by this one phrase, 'assurance of salvation,' we meant entirely different things."²⁴ Both types of Methodists regarded assurance as a wonderful privilege available to believers, but Wesley meant assurance of present acceptance, while the Calvinists meant assurance of final salvation. For the Welsh Methodists, justification and assurance both had their roots in election.

Therefore, even regarding these three soteriological topics in which Wesley and the Welsh Methodists partially agreed, significant variation existed. Regarding predestination, perseverance, and perfection, they differed sharply. Whereas the Welsh leaders subscribed to particular redemption and *predestination*, Wesley affirmed *universal redemption*. Welsh Methodists considered personal election a "fundamental truth," and being "more amazed at... God's distinguishing love" a sign of growth.²⁵ In

Bristol," in *ibid.*, 359; John Wesley, "Thoughts on Salvation by Faith," in *ibid.*, 554; Wesley, *Works*, 10:128, 22:114.

23. For an account from Harris of disagreeing with Wesley about final justification and imputation, see Beynon, *Harris's Visits to London*, 148. See also S. J. Turner, "Theological Themes in the English Works of Williams Pantycelyn" (MTh diss., Aberystwyth University, 1982), 219–24.

24. Wesley, *Works*, 25:562–63. See also *ibid.*, 622. Assurance was simultaneously central and controversial to both parties. As Wesley's views developed, he began to distinguish between degrees of assurance. In Wales, Harris and Rowland differed publicly in early 1742 on whether assurance was of the essence of faith, with Harris defending the affirmative position. Welsh Methodist policy followed Rowland, and eventually Harris moderated his own stance. See John Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley's Sermons*, 143; John Wesley, "A Letter to the Rev. Dr. Rutherford," in *Works*, 9:375–76; Eryn White, "Revival and Renewal Amongst the Eighteenth-Century Welsh Methodists," in Dyfed Wyn Roberts, ed., *Revival, Renewal, and the Holy Spirit*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought 5 (Wipf & Stock, 2009), 5; Tudur, *Howell Harris*, 45–46, 155–57.

25. William Williams's hymns resound with God's salvific sovereignty. Even society reports testify to the importance of this doctrine to Welsh Methodism's leaders. For example, an exhorter once eulogized a recently deceased Methodist as "a hearty resister of ye deniers of free Grace." John Morgan Jones and William Morgan, *The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales*, 2 vols., trans. John Aaron (Banner of Truth, 2010), 1:272–73; William

contrast, Wesley considered unconditional predestination to be a violation of God's attributes. In his controversial "Free Grace" sermon, he called it "the horrible decree" and "a doctrine full of blasphemy," representing God "as worse than the devil."²⁶ Thus, Wesley attacked Calvinism vehemently on this point.

Furthermore, the two movements held opposing views on *perseverance* and *falling away*. Harris, for instance, took refuge in God's declaration, "I change not" (Mal. 3:6) as a promise of preservation.²⁷ But Wesley approached the same text very differently, teaching that God's "unchangeableness itself requires that if [believers] grow high-minded, God should cut them off; that there should be a proportionable change in all the divine dispensations toward them." Hence, he deemed perseverance a "fatal doctrine."²⁸

Finally, the two movements differed over the possibility of *Christian perfection* in this life. Though Wesley's views on perfection shifted somewhat over time, largely in response to experiences, perfection remained a major focus of his ministry. In fact, Wesley saw this as the crown of Methodism, while the Calvinists thought it presumptuous and antinomian.²⁹

Williams, *Gloria in Excelsis: or, Hymns of Praise to God and the Lamb* (Carmarthen, 1772), 49; Gomer M. Roberts, ed., "Early Society Reports," *Journal of the Historical Society of the Presbyterian Church in Wales (JHSPCW)* 52 (1967): 58.

26. As McGonigle demonstrates, "anti-Calvinism" remained "a theological constant throughout [Wesley's] life," a conclusion confirmed by the Free Grace, Imputation, and Minutes Controversies, which spanned from 1739 into the 1770s. Though Wesley sometimes downplayed the differences for reasons of cooperation, his convictions on the subject did not change. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 139–160, 307; John Wesley, "Free Grace," in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley's Sermons*, 56–57; John Wesley, "Dialogue Between a Predestinarian and His Friend," in *Works*, 13:232; John Wesley, "An Extract from the *Shorter Catechism* of the Westminster Assembly," in *ibid.*, 94–109; Wesley, *Works*, 19:332–33; Frank Baker, ed., *Letters II: 1745–1755*, vol. 26, *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford University Press, 1982), 498–99.

27. Rowland and Williams also cherished the doctrine, the latter portraying it in the life of his literary model Methodist, Theomemphus. Eifion Evans, *Pursued by God: A Selective Translation with Notes of the Welsh Religious Classic Theomemphus by William Williams of Pantycelyn* (Evangelical Press of Wales, 1996), 124–25; Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Banner of Truth, 1985), 243; Roberts, *Trevecka Letters (1742–1747)*, 6; Howell Harris, *A Brief Account of the Life of Howell Harris, Esq.: Extracted from Papers Written by Himself* (Trevecka, 1791), 16–17.

28. Wesley, *Works*, 25:563; John Wesley, "Serious Thoughts upon the Perseverance of the Saints," in *Works*, 13:248.

29. Wesley gave the experience many other names, including "full salvation," "entire sanctification," "perfect love," or simply "holiness." Under whatever name, he considered it Methodism's "grand depositum," while Wesley scholars refer to it as his "favourite doctrine"

In Williams's fictional account of Theomemphus, it is "Presumption" who encourages the archetypal Welsh Methodist to believe he can drive corruption from his heart.³⁰ This reflects the value the Welsh Methodists placed on humbly recognizing the remnants of sin. Wesley's distinction between "sins properly so called" and "infirmities" or "mistakes" looked to them like a dismissal of the seriousness of sin. For Wesley, however, the distinction was necessary to ensure the goal of perfection remained attainable. And as for those who might be deceived into thinking themselves perfect, Wesley saw no great danger there, declaring it "a mistake which generally argues great grace, an high degree both of holiness and happiness."³¹ That Wesley called "great grace" what the Welsh Methodists deemed "great presumption" indicates the substantial gulf that separated the movements on this point of doctrine.

In sum, though the Welsh and Wesleyan Methodists concurred regarding salvation by faith in Christ, they veered apart as they worked out the details of this broad evangelical standpoint. The Welsh leaders taught a heart-oriented Calvinism. Everyone hearing their message encountered the reality of sin and the necessity of the new birth. Once convicted and awakened in the heart, the hearer was to receive justification by faith through Christ's righteousness alone. Those who exercised this faith did so because it was given them by the God who elected them. Such a heart-altering conversion would produce good works and, sooner or later, the joy and peace of assurance. This conversion could not be finally undone, due to the unchanging promise and character of God. On the other hand, holiness was Wesley's central theme, indicated in part by his "obsession" with antinomianism. He claimed to carry "a perfect hatred" against antinomian doctrines, abhorring

or his "most distinctive and misunderstood teaching." Complicating matters, Charles Wesley himself did not always agree with John regarding the details of Christian perfection. See John Wesley, "Christian Perfection," in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley's Sermons*, 73; Wesley, "Scripture Way of Salvation," in *ibid.*, 374; John Wesley, "Repentance of Believers," in *ibid.*, 415; Wesley, *Works*, 10:285; John Wesley, "Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection," in *Works*, 13:199; Paul Wesley Chilcote, "Introduction to Christian Perfection," in *ibid.*, 3; McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 146; William J. Abraham, "Christian Perfection," in William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 595.

30. Eifion Evans, *Bread of Heaven: The Life and Work of William Williams, Pantycelyn* (Bryntirion, 2010), 204.

31. John Wesley, "Thoughts on Christian Perfection," in *Works*, 13:78.

them “as hell-fire.”³² Hence, the Wesleyan way of salvation was a way of practical holiness. Wesley expected his followers to be enlightened by prevenient grace, awakened to repentance by convincing grace, pardoned by justifying grace, and then made holy by sanctifying grace, even to the point of perfect love, the ultimate goal of holiness.³³

These distinctives culminated in what Henry Rack calls a “general ethos” of “opposing religious instincts.”³⁴ Likewise, Bruce Hindmarsh argues that the divide was not merely over abstract theological quandaries, but rather over “matters of deep feeling and spiritual seriousness,” as indicated by the intensity of the disputes.³⁵ Hindmarsh develops this by observing distinctive “spiritual aspirations” between Calvinists and Arminians. Revival Calvinists, according to Hindmarsh, reveled in the sublimity of God’s power and love. They expected Christians to be humbled and transformed by contemplating the overwhelming vastness of God’s glory. In contrast, Hindmarsh notes Wesley’s emphasis on agonizing and striving. “The Arminian beliefs of the Wesleys,” he observes, “and their teaching about Christian perfection combined to form a spirituality that sought not so much the rest of contemplation as the victory that follows travail.”³⁶ Wesleyan Methodist Hannah Ball’s record of a temptation experience exemplifies this approach to spirituality: “I was much tempted,” she wrote, “but was enabled by divine assistance to resist, and the tempter fled. Our joys are joys of conquest, not of rest.”³⁷ This emphasis on striving can also be seen in Wesley’s ongoing opposition to anything approaching quietism or stillness: the Lord provides “strength to labour, not to sit still.”³⁸

32. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 270; John Wesley, “A Short History of Methodism,” in *Works*, 9:371. See also John Wesley, “Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in Methodist Societies,” in *Works*, 13:86–87; Wesley, *Works*, 26:30, 27:102; Roberts, *Selected Trevecka Letters (1742–1747)*, 45.

33. Different ways of phrasing these steps appear throughout Wesley’s writings. His summary of Grace Paddy’s rapid experience gives the way in miniature: “A person convinced of sin, converted to God, and renewed in love, within twelve hours!” See Wesley, “Short History of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:487; John Wesley, “Hymns and Sacred Poems (1740),” in *Works*, 13:46–48; Wesley, “Scripture Way of Salvation,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 372–80.

34. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 289, 451.

35. Hindmarsh, *Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 236, 246, 252–60.

36. Significantly, Hindmarsh notes the contribution of Aldersgate and affirms that Wesley’s striving was “an agony of grace.” See Hindmarsh, *Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 260, 265.

37. Thomas M. Morrow, *Early Methodist Women* (Epworth, 1967), 31.

38. Wesley, *Works*, 27:84.

For his comments on Calvinism, Hindmarsh draws mainly from Jonathan Edwards and English Calvinists, but similar themes arose in Welsh Methodism. Rowland preached, for instance, “The Almighty loves to display his sovereignty, and to act freely without controul.” Therefore, humans dare not “lay Righteousness itself, to our crooked line, and find fault, if it doth not agree with our scanty admeasurement.” Rather, “Down...in the dust let us bow before him, and acknowledge our acquiescence in his sovereign will.”³⁹ Likewise, Williams’s writings present “a vision of the majesty of God,” an idea one scholar refers to as “a metaphysical intuition of the sheer Godness of God.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, society reports reference overwhelming experiences of God’s sublime presence and love. “[T]he windows of heaven open,” remarks one such report, “and the dew of God’s love was show’r’d down upon us until we were almost drowned in the ocean.” As a result, explained the exhorter, “I could feel wisdom, humility...flowing into my heart.”⁴¹

Hindmarsh’s observation about varying “spiritual aspirations” provides a helpful summary of how these different perspectives led to distinct approaches to spirituality. As will be seen, these distinctives carried practical implications for spiritual formation in the societies.

Welsh Methodist Societies

One historian of Wales has rightly called the *seiadau*, or societies, “the very life-blood of the movement.”⁴² In the societies, Methodists practiced their beliefs and examined their experiences in the company of likeminded people. When Howell Harris experienced conversion in the spring of 1735, he almost immediately started exhorting his acquaintances around his Trevecka home.⁴³ The spring of 1737 brought multiple milestones for Harris:

39. Daniel Rowland, *Eight Sermons upon Practical Subjects, Preached at the New Church in Llangeitho, South Wales*, 2nd ed. (London: 1774), 55–56.

40. H. A. Hodges, *Flame in the Mountains: Williams Pantycelyn, Ann Griffiths and the Welsh Hymn*, ed. E. Wyn James (Y Lolfa, 2017), 51–52.

41. CMA Trevecca College MS 3003. See also *ibid.*, MSS 3001:10, 3079.

42. Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales 1642–1780* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 354. For a thorough overview of Welsh Methodist society life in one critical region of Wales, see White, *Welsh Methodist Society*.

43. Harris’s conversion took place in three stages: March 30, May 25, and June 18. For these and more details of Harris’s life and early ministry, see especially Tudur, *Howell Harris*, 17–19, 32–33, 64–80; Harris, *Brief Account*, 10–15; William George Hughes-Edwards, “The Development and Organization of the Methodist Society in Wales—1735–1750,” (MA diss., University of Wales, 1966), 72–75, 91, 249–54, 284–85.

he founded at Wernos what he would come to consider the first permanent society, he received his first invitation to exhort outside his home county, and he began exhorting without a book. Daniel Rowland experienced conversion about the same time as Harris, and while the latter grew his ministry from his base at Trevecka, Rowland preached and gathered converts around Llangeitho, farther west. Harris and Rowland met in the middle at Defynnog in August 1737, and from that point the two revivalists joined efforts.⁴⁴

Harris became ill in the spring of 1738, and he utilized his less-demanding schedule to write society rules. In August he received a request for an English version, so rules must have been in circulation by the summer.⁴⁵ In 1739, Harris had a personal and pivotal introduction to George Whitefield, whose works would soon be translated into Welsh and whose presence in Wales would continually be desired.⁴⁶ 1740 brought more discussion about society rules, and the earliest extant set of Harris's rules can be dated to this period. Then, in February 1741, the leaders of the Welsh Revival convened at Llandovery and produced rules of society similar to Harris's earlier efforts.⁴⁷ A partial copy of these Llandovery rules was discovered at Llangeitho, implying their use in Rowland's societies as well. Many other meetings followed, and the end result for the societies was the June publication of *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r Societies*, a guide which influenced the societies second only to the Bible until supplanted by William Williams's *Experience Meeting* in 1777.⁴⁸

44. Unfortunately, the absence of Rowland's personal papers limits investigation into the details of his ministry. See Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 50–55, 93–94; David Ceri Jones, Boyd Stanley Schlenker, and Eryn Mant White, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales 1735–1811* (University of Wales Press, 2012), 13.

45. The exact content of these rules is not known, but a manuscript does carry two sample questions for members from about the same time. See Jones, *Trevecka Letters*, 226–28.

46. Harris then joined Whitefield in London, becoming acquainted with other revival branches and beginning a pattern that would repeat yearly through the 1740s and, over time, diminish Harris's leadership role in Wales. See George Whitefield, *Journals* (Banner of Truth, 1960), 228–30.

47. These rules seem to regulate the two-month society of leaders, but that meeting in this regard functioned as a large-scale model of a typical Welsh Methodist society. The text in English is provided in Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 120–24. Subsequent references will cite this translation.

48. *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r Societies neu'r cyfarfodydd neullduol a ddechreuassant ymgynnull yn ddiweddar yn Nghymru* (Bristol, 1742); David Ceri Jones, "A Glorious Work in the World": *Welsh Methodism and the International Evangelical Revival, 1735–1750*, *Studies in*

The meetings in February 1741 provide a microcosm of the practical side of early Welsh Methodism, which utilized “a more collegiate style of leadership” than Wesleyan Methodism.⁴⁹ Harris held prominence throughout Wales, but other leaders joined in guiding the movement, including Rowland, William Williams, and Howell Davies. Rowland proved especially influential and probably presided over the 1741 Llandoverly meetings. Rowland’s leadership later expanded when Harris’s idiosyncrasies isolated him from the movement for more than a decade.⁵⁰ As a result, no single leader can adequately account for Welsh Methodist doctrine and policy in the same way that Wesleyan Methodism depended on John Wesley. Thus, this survey will consider contributions from a variety of leading Welsh Methodists. The 1741 Llandoverly/Llangeitho rules and *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau’r* give the clearest insight into the leaders’ original vision for the Welsh Methodist societies. Other major sources for understanding Welsh society life included Whitefield’s society writings, which the Welsh leaders endorsed by translating, as well as the array of society reports sent by superintendents to various Associations throughout the 1740s. In addition, Williams’s 1777 treatment of *The Experience Meeting* shows society life and ideals from the other side of the Harris disruption and a re-awakening which took place in 1762.

Purposes

Howell Harris wrote to Daniel Rowland in 1743 to inform his co-leader of accusations against the societies. Harris recommended openness regarding “what we do in our private assemblies.” According to Harris, they met “together to confer abt [about] ye [the] state of our souls to unburthen [unburden] our minds to consult together abt [about] our growth in Grace—to Pray & sing & open our Hearts together.”⁵¹ Harris’s summary hits the high points. Though variation was allowed from society to society,

Welsh History 22 (University of Wales Press, 2004), 210–11. For the full text in English, see John Aaron’s translation in Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:266–73. Subsequent references will cite this translation.

49. Jones, Schlenther, and White, *Elect Methodists*, 53. For the Wesleyan Connexion, see Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 246–49.

50. On this division and its effects, see Eryn White, “‘A Breach in God’s House’: The Division in Welsh Calvinistic Methodism 1750–1763,” in Nigel Yates, ed., *Bishop Burgess and His World: Culture, Religion and Society in Britain, Europe and North America in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (University of Wales Press, 2007), 85–102.

51. Roberts, *Selected Trevecka Letters (1742–1747)*, 86. See also *ibid.*, 112, 166.

singing and praying were constants.⁵² The 1741 rules included hymns, and *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r* considered praise and prayer the starting point of the society. As the movement matured, William Williams and others wrote many hymns to reflect and shape Methodist doctrine and experience, complementing a formal plan of catechesis. Some society reports even mention singing and praying, verifying their importance in Methodist life.⁵³

"After singing praises and praying," the rules explain, "we open our hearts to one another," telling the good and the bad, followed by mutual examination of motives, purposes, and principles.⁵⁴ A willingness to give and receive rebukes was required of every Methodist because "opening the heart" and examining were essential Methodist experiences.⁵⁵ *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r* lists eight purposes for the society, including provoking to love and good works, understanding the devil and one's own heart, bearing one another's burdens, and glorifying God through testifying to "what he has done for our souls."⁵⁶ *The Experience Meeting* repeats most of these purposes, though it adds, with the advantage of decades' experience, that the society should help maintain "this same warmth and liveliness that was ours at the beginning."⁵⁷ Williams recommended using examination only

52. For the emphasis on flexibility, see William Williams, *The Experience Meeting: An Introduction to the Welsh Societies of the Evangelical Awakening*, trans. Bethan Lloyd-Jones (Regent College, 2003), 21, 30–31, 34, 41. For the importance of singing and praying, see Mark A. Noll, "The Significance of Hymnody in the First Evangelical Revivals," in Roberts, *Revival, Renewal, and the Holy Spirit*, 53; Hughes-Edwards, "Development and Organization," 184–93.

53. CMA Trevecca College MSS 3023:1–2, 3079. For the place of catechesis in the societies, see Roberts, *Selected Trevecca Letters (1742–1747)*, 74; CMA Trevecca College MSS 2963, 3023:41–42.

54. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:269–70; Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 123.

55. George Whitefield, *A Letter to the Religious Societies of England Written in His Voyage to Philadelphia 1739, and Now Particularly Recommended to Those Who Have Lately Formed Themselves into Religious Societies in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1742), 17. This is a summary of Whitefield's earlier sermon on the subject, which can be found in Lee Gatiss, ed., *The Sermons of George Whitefield* (Crossway, 2009), 152–67.

56. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:266–69. Whitefield emphasized the latter sentiment when defending the societies to the Bishop of Bangor: "In Wales they have little fellowship meetings, where some well-meaning people meet together, simply to tell what God has done for their souls." See George Whitefield, *The Letters of George Whitefield: For the Period 1734–1742* (Banner of Truth, 1976), 493.

57. Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 13–16. A society report by Thomas Williams portrays what seems to have been the society ideal: "[S]o far as I understand they all know the Lord Jesus Christ & believe in him, they are light, strong, Lively souls, who adorns their

if members will not share proactively, yet the society's reports indicate a dependence on regular examination to correct misinformed self-assessments.⁵⁸ Outsiders objected to these Methodist practices, and the leaders were aware of dangers such as inappropriate sharing and spiritual pride.⁵⁹ But nevertheless they saw great benefit in close spiritual evaluation. In fact, William Williams remarked boldly, "Of all the means of grace, I know of none more profitable than the special fellowship meetings, called private societies, to correct, to direct, to edify and to encourage weak members who are ever ready to stray aside... or to be carried about... to false and erroneous doctrines."⁶⁰

Admission

Membership in a Welsh Methodist society carried a combination of doctrinal, ethical, and experiential expectations. Regarding the first, Whitefield warned against "Bigotry or Party-zeal" and encouraged a catholic outlook.⁶¹ Likewise, Williams cautioned about the danger of "Zeal for obscure issues."⁶² *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r* goes so far as to claim, "[W]e do not hinder anyone of whatever opinions from becoming a member of the Society, as long as they can find it in their hearts to agree with the aforementioned Rules, and to answer the following questions." Yet the "following questions" themselves display the limits of this catholicity. "Do you believe and assent to the fundamental truths," the document asks: "firstly, concerning the Trinity; secondly, election; thirdly, original sin; fourthly, justification by faith; fifthly, perseverance in the state of grace."⁶³ The Welsh

profession, and are orthodox in their Judgment, & have ye power of Godliness...." See Roberts, "Early Society Reports," *JHSPCW*, 52:57–58.

58. Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 36, 39; CMA Trevecca College MS 3023:1–2; Roberts, *Selected Trevecca Letters (1742–1747)*, 22; Gomer M. Roberts, ed., "Early Society Reports," *JHSPCW*, 53 (1968): 20.

59. The Dissenters objected especially to "opening the heart," and Jenkins, a modern historian, calls this preoccupation with the state of souls the "dark side of Methodism." William Williams, for his part, gave specific guidance regarding what to share and what to avoid. See Roberts, *Selected Trevecca Letters (1742–1747)*, 32; Jenkins, *Foundations of Modern Wales*, 369; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 39, 51–57.

60. Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 12. This parallels a Williams society report from 1745, in which he said he keeps "a private society to know their Doctrine & State." CMA Trevecca College MS 2945:140–41.

61. Whitefield, *Letter to the Religious Societies*, 14–15.

62. In youth, Williams had witnessed doctrinal controversy split his family's chapel. See Evans, *Bread of Heaven*, 2; Evans, *Pursued by God*, 81.

63. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:271–72. The prior Llandoverly/

Methodists intended to include Calvinistic Dissenters in their membership, but not Arminians.

As for behavior, Harris's early rules ask the member to "watch over his own conduct," keep society secrets, be consistent in private and public life, attend Lord's Day worship and assemblies of the brethren, and not foster suspicion.⁶⁴ *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r* speaks more generally of a "change in...life" regarding "character and behaviour."⁶⁵ Williams's *Experience Meeting* reiterates these early themes, exhorting members to make other believers their closest companions, to attend services, to refrain from "empty talk" and gossip, and to be willing to give and take rebukes. It also highlights the need for generosity.⁶⁶ Society expulsions provide further clues to behavioral standards. Some accounts speak in generalities about bringing "some reproach upon religion" or walking "contrary to the Gospel," but others refer to specific violations such as marrying unbelievers or being dishonest in work.⁶⁷ Though discipline seems to have been a regular occurrence, most of the leaders were not eager to "turn out" a member. "It is better to err on the side of mercy," Williams counseled, and they looked for concrete and unrepentant sin before removing the wayward.⁶⁸

As important as doctrine and lifestyle were, experience was the critical criterion. Harris lamented that the Dissenters stopped at examining "the Orthodoxy of their Principles, and...the Morality of their Lives."⁶⁹ The Welsh Methodists, Harris claimed, would receive "none but such as have

Llangeitho rules make a similar statement, while *The Experience Meeting* includes an affirmation of justification by faith and the imputation of Christ's righteousness among entrance questions. Election is implied but not explicit. It should be noted also that, apparently, the societies gave room for a member to grow in doctrinal understanding and commitment. Thomas James reported on one who "Has been in much doubt about the divinity of Xst [Christ], but now believes not only yt [that] he is God but that he is his God." See Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 124; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 34–36; Gomer M. Roberts, ed., "Early Society Accounts," *JHSPCW*, 51 (1966): 68.

64. Jones, *Trevecka Letters*, 247.

65. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:272.

66. Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 34–38.

67. White, *Welsh Methodist Society*, 241–56; CMA Trevecca College MSS 3016, 3052, 3062.

68. Howell Harris was the exception, but it is noteworthy that the other leaders opposed Harris's expulsions when he based them on his "spiritual eye," concluding that his criteria were too subjective. See Tom Beynon, ed., *Howell Harris's Visits to Pembrokeshire* (Cambrian News, 1966), 139; Beynon, *Harris's Visits to London*, 181; Tudur, *Howell Harris*, 166, 181; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 44, 46.

69. Similarly, a Welsh Methodist exhorter described the Dissenters as having "great

experience as spiritual travelers, and spiritual soldiers.”⁷⁰ Williams made a similar contrast in *Theomemphus* when he employed allegory to highlight the inadequacy of “Orthodoxus” and “Christ in the head.” His hymns provide the Methodist alternative in their repeated use of “enjoy,” “feel,” “taste,” and “prove.”⁷¹ This emphasis came through clearly enough for Griffith Jones to warn the Methodists about “looking too much to the inward work and too little...to the outward word.”⁷² Yet for the Welsh Methodists, the inward work was the heart of the matter, and they sought in members a genuine experience of conversion. The rules reflect this, the Llandovery/Llangeitho version opens membership to “whoever is able to give us satisfaction that he savingly knows Christ, and is a genuine believer.” *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r* calls it “vain” to unite in society “unless our souls are united to God in Christ, and to one another in the Holy Spirit.” Prospective members, it requires, are to be convinced of their lostness and awakened to the necessity of the Spirit’s work. This included counting the cost, being ready to part with everything, and desiring assurance if not already possessing it.⁷³

Despite these high standards, the Welsh Methodists acknowledged a difference between “weak and strong faith.”⁷⁴ Those with the beginnings of grace were not to be refused. Hence the society reports overflow with remarks like this one from Williams: “[S]ome strong believers, others pretty legal.”⁷⁵ In *The Experience Meeting*, he advised that “the light of faith and assurance” will vary between new members and those more mature, so none seeking eternal life “should be shut out, however faint may be the revelations and visitations of God to him.”⁷⁶ Shortly before his death, Wil-

heads and little experiences.” See CMA Trevecca College MS 3023:8–9; Roberts, *Selected Trevecca Letters (1742–1747)*, 12–13.

70. D. E. Jenkins, *Calvinistic Methodist Holy Orders* (Calvinistic Methodist Bookroom, 1911), 71.

71. Evans, *Pursued by God*, 79, 132; Turner, “Theological Themes,” 280–82.

72. Beynon, *Harris’s Visits to Pembrokeshire*, 89.

73. Jones, *Trevecca Letters*, 246; Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 124; Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:267, 271–72. See also Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 34–36.

74. Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 123–24. See also Jones, *Trevecca Letters*, 247; Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:272.

75. Similarly, Morgan John Lewis reported about two who “could not say that they have found the Lord, but I believe they have and so did the Rest of the Brethren believe the Same...their Hearts Seem’d to be broken.” See CMA Trevecca College MSS 3001:3; 2945:140–41.

76. Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 34, 37.

liams observed “that true religion consists of three parts”: first, “true light respecting the plan of salvation”; second, “being in intimate fellowship with God”; and third, “life and conduct.”⁷⁷ It was this true religion—involving belief, experience, and behavior—that the Welsh Methodists desired in their members.

Structure

The Welsh Methodists distinguished members from hearers, mirroring this distinction by holding both private and public meetings. For instance, in George Whitefield’s letter to the Welsh leaders, he advised that public exhorters are “called to awaken” and private exhorters “to establish and build up.”⁷⁸ Hearers attended the “public” exhorting and could, in time, give their names and “offer themselves to the Society.”⁷⁹ *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau’r* only requires giving one’s name “in the previous meeting,” but it also asks the length of time since coming under conviction and receiving “this change in... life.”⁸⁰ The society reports display a pattern of potential members being “on trial,” and Morgan John Lewis’s reasoning seems to have been the common thought: “I don’t see it right to receive any Immediately except their Experience be very clear.”⁸¹ When the society as a group gave consent, the new member was received.

At the formation of the *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau’r* rules, the leaders allowed for a subdivision within the members between a “general” and “private” society, giving a set of questions for assessing when a member is ready

77. Evans, *Bread of Heaven*, 322.

78. Whitefield, *Letters*, 511. When evaluating the call of George Gambold, a July 1745 Association noted that “his gifts are rather for edifying the s[ain]ts than of conviction,” probably implying the same distinction between the private and public work. Eryn White employs the term “society meeting” for the private and “preaching meeting” for the public, as the private work constituted the society proper. See CMA Trevecca College MS 2945:147; White, *Welsh Methodist Society*, 191.

79. CMA Trevecca College MSS 3001:6, 3023:34–35. See also Roberts, “Early Society Reports,” *JHSPCW*, 52:9.

80. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:272.

81. Sometimes it took a while for experiences to become clear, and Thomas Williams recorded the reception of four “who had been long on trial.” These and the following references come from Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Monmouthshire, and Glamorganshire, indicating a common practice throughout Welsh Methodism. Roberts, “Early Society Reports,” *JHSPCW*, 52:10; Roberts, “Early Society Reports,” *JHSPCW*, 53:86–87; CMA Trevecca College MSS 2945:123–25, 2945:140–41, 2992, 3002, 3004, 3023:9–10, 3027:47, 3033, 3065, 3073; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 36–37.

to move from the former to the latter.⁸² The first and final questions ask about assurance, while the middle six look for growth in various graces. Some have taken this subdivided society structure as definitive for Welsh Methodism, but there is good reason to doubt whether an unassured-in-general/assured-in-private distinction ever became the norm.⁸³ Those who take it as typical seem to assume the implementation of the structure described in *Sail, Dibenion a Rheolau'r*, yet even in that document, a separate private society is not mandated but merely permitted. Eifion Evans provides only one further reference, an account by Harris of his ministry in Bala in 1749.⁸⁴ In it, Harris recommended “to some select Brethren” that they have “a Separate Band where alone Secrets are to be handld [handled]” because “some are Fathers in ye [the] house and some are Babes.” Harris’s reason for the suggestion, he made clear, was to keep Dissenters in a “general” meeting and protect Methodist secrets. Hence, even in Bala, such a society subdivision did not yet exist, and it was specifically recommended because of problems with Dissenters. Furthermore, in this account, Harris used “private Society” and “publick Work” in the typical ways, differentiating the gathering of Methodist members from the preaching to all who would hear. Thus, this does not constitute evidence for a subdivided society.

On the contrary, a single-society structure finds abundant support in the reports. Superintendents utilized the distinction between those who had grown to assurance and those who had not, but both the assured and the unassured were included together in the private society. Morgan John Lewis reported that some “have not yet received great manifestations of the Love of God,” yet concluded, “They meet in private so often as possible.”⁸⁵

82. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:272–73. The Welsh Methodists were not systematic about terms. They also referred at times to the Association of leaders as a “general society.” See, for instance, CMA Trevecca College MS 2953.

83. For examples, see Eifion Evans, *Howel Harris Evangelist: 1714–1773* (University of Wales Press, 1974), 24; Eifion Evans, “Adding to the Church—In the Teaching of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists,” in *Fire in the Thatch: The True Nature of Religious Revival* (Evangelical Press of Wales, 1996), 112–15; F. F. E. Aubel, “The Revivalist Movement in South Wales from Griffith Jones to the Schism of 1750” (MTh diss., University of Lampeter, 1987), 68. White (*Welsh Methodist Society*, 226–28) notes that Williams presented an undifferentiated society by the time of writing *The Experience Meeting*. This is certainly true, yet the evidence put forth in this study indicates the subdivided structure was never the normal practice.

84. JHSPCW Manuscript Supplement 1 (1941): 472. Aubel also cites two Association reports, but both refer to bands (which will be discussed below) and not to a general/private society subdivision. See CMA Trevecca College MSS 2945:102–3, 2992.

85. CMA Trevecca College MS 3001:12. The following reports are found in CMA

Likewise, Thomas Williams explained, “[H]ere are about 7 or 8 of weak ones who are diligent in hearing ye [the] word, & meet in Private.” Richard Tibbot told of “6 members in the private society,” two of whom “believe weakly,” with the other four “pretty dark, concerning their justification.” William John associated members “in bondage,” a favorite Welsh Methodist term meaning lacking assurance, with the private society. The various reports overflow with positive (“in great liberty,” “in full assurance of faith,” “Witness that they are justified”) and negative (“under the law,” “under Doubts and fears,” “Groaning for delivery”) assessments, but all seem to be full members of the private society.⁸⁶ Some reports refer to members’ spiritual fluctuations, a reality that contributed to the intermingling of different spiritual states within a society. Three decades later, William Williams’s *Experience Meeting* provides examination questions to assess whether someone “is under the law or under grace,” but without a hint of a society subdivided along those lines.⁸⁷ Rather, the expectation seems to be that both the unassured and the assured, the weak and the strong, would come together in a single undifferentiated “experience meeting.”

The one subdivision for which some evidence exists is “Bands,” society subgroups based not on spiritual condition but on sex and, sometimes, marital status. Though the concept never gained widespread support in Wales, it was implemented in some societies, even to the time of Williams’s *Experience Meeting* in 1777.⁸⁸ Whitefield recommended a band structure in his letter to the societies, and Harris initiated it in various places.⁸⁹ The Welsh-English Watford Association officially “Agreed that men and women...meet in separate Bands as the Spirit of the Lord shd [should] lead them.”⁹⁰ Yet only a minority of the society reports mention bands, and some scholars conclude that the Welsh societies were simply too small for

Trevecca College MSS 2945:135–37, 3008, 3023:3–4; Roberts, “Early Society Reports,” *JHSPCW*, 53:46, 49.

86. CMA Trevecca College MSS 3001:4, 3001:9, 3002, 3005, 3007, 3011; Roberts, “Early Society Accounts,” *JHSPCW*, 51:65; Roberts, “Early Society Reports,” *JHSPCW*, 52:54, 85; Roberts, “Early Society Reports,” *JHSPCW*, 53:46, 86.

87. Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 55.

88. Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 130.

89. See Whitefield, *Letter to the Religious Societies*, 16; Beynon, *Harris’s Visits to Pembrokeshire*, 43, 70, 161; Gomer M. Roberts, “Calvinistic Methodism in Glamorgan, 1737–73,” in Glanmor Williams, ed., *Glamorgan County History* (Glamorgan County History Trust, 1974), 4:505, 518.

90. CMA Trevecca College MS 2955.

widespread implementation.⁹¹ However, many Welsh societies were indeed large enough, fifteen to twenty-five being the average society membership, with many recording memberships above forty.⁹² Inadequate size may have prohibited some from subdividing into bands, but a more basic reason seems to have been a lack of interest. In the very month of the Watford meeting, Harris observed that “some of ye Dear Lambs are to some wise ends permitted to scruple about ye Classical Divisions of ye Brethren and Sisters.”⁹³ Harris’s visits to London acquainted him with what he termed the “Classical Divisions,” but to others in Wales bands may have seemed like an unnecessary English or Moravian innovation.

In March 1749, Harris tried again, this time recommending bands based on spiritual condition.⁹⁴ But the directive does not seem to have been carried out. Hughes-Edwards attributes this failure to the smallness of Welsh societies, but a more probable reason is that the directive was not representative. The association in question was merely a monthly association of exhorters from the region of Howell Harris’s home, led by Harris himself. Given his increasingly estranged status, it is not surprising the other leaders ignored this recommendation.

Where they existed, then, bands were practical rather than spiritual subdivisions. They fostered openness and propriety. But the main division within Welsh Methodist meetings was between the “publick” meeting for preaching at which hearers were welcome and the private meeting for the society proper. Abraham Williams told of a place where “they do flock to hear the word but there is no private society.”⁹⁵ Morgan John Lewis described those who “come together to hear the Word in the Publick Society,” of which “14 have given their names” and “just begin to meet in private.”⁹⁶ Examples could be multiplied, as society reports speak often of

91. See, for instance, CMA Trevecca College MSS 3001:1, 3016, 3023:22–23. For small size being a factor, see CMA Trevecca College MSS 3008, 3019; Gomer M. Roberts, ed., *Selected Trevecca Letters (1747–1794)* (Calvinistic Methodist Bookroom, 1962), 33; Glanmor Williams et al., *The Welsh Church from Reformation to Disestablishment, 1603–1920* (University of Wales Press, 2007), 173; White, *Welsh Methodist Society*, 210, 230.

92. Aubel, “Revivalist Movement,” 67; Hughes-Edwards, “Development and Organization,” 181; CMA Trevecca College MSS 2945:123–25, 3005, 3014.

93. Roberts, *Selected Trevecca Letters (1742–1747)*, 77.

94. This may well have been an example of Harris’s Wesleyan-mindedness. See Hughes-Edwards, “Development and Organization,” 179, 430; Beynon, *Harris’s Visits to London*, 211.

95. CMA Trevecca College MS 3085.

96. CMA Trevecca College MS 3001:6. For more examples, see CMA Trevecca

these two types of meetings utilized by the Welsh Methodist societies to pursue their spiritual purposes.

Other Methods and Meetings

Besides these regular elements, the Welsh Methodists shepherded their converts through special meetings and various writings. They regularly emphasized the need for the Lord's Supper and dotted the calendar with days of prayer and fasting. Harris brought Moravian meetings, such as letter days, love-feasts, and watchnights, to Wales, and among these, it seems, love-feasts took root.⁹⁷ As for writings, the leaders guided the Welsh Methodists by letters, magazines, hymns, and translations.⁹⁸ Letters and periodicals like Whitefield's *Weekly History* connected Welsh converts with like-minded believers in other parts of the transatlantic world. The accounts also provided models for understanding spiritual experiences. The Welsh Methodists themselves translated or re-emphasized English books for the benefit of the societies, including Bunyan's *Holy War*, Cole's *Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty*, and multiple works by Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. Later, William Williams would compose his own collections of writings, blending doctrine and practice together to interpret and guide Welsh Methodism.

Summary

The Welsh Methodists were Calvinistic Methodists. Their Calvinism was reflected in their requirement that members affirm election and perseverance. More than that, their admission standards highlighted their conviction that only those who had hearts renewed by the new birth could progress in true holiness. Society membership would not benefit the unregenerate. But the mutual support of the society enabled those who had experienced evangelical conversion to grow together in sanctification.

College MSS 2945:25–26, 3003, 3008, 3023:1–2, 9–10; Roberts, "Early Society Reports," *JHSPCW*, 52:16; Roberts, "Early Society Reports," *JHSPCW*, 53:19, 87; Beynon, *Harris's Visits to Pembrokeshire*, 76, 124, 140.

97. See Hughes-Edwards, "Development and Organization," 208–14; Whitefield, *Letters*, 511; CMA Trevecca College MSS 2945:145, 2989, 3023:13; Beynon, *Harris's Visits to Pembrokeshire*, 76.

98. CMA Trevecca College MS 3023:13; Jones, "A Glorious Work", 18, 109, 262–63; Susan Durden, "A Study of the First Evangelical Magazines, 1740–1748," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27 (1976): 260–62; D. Densil Morgan, *Theologia Cambrensis: Protestant Religion and Theology in Wales* (University of Wales Press, 2018, 2021), 1:383–85; 2:14.

Wesleyan Methodist Societies

In the summer of 1748, Howell Harris recorded in his diary: “Praying for Bro. Wesley seeing his temptation, so many bowing to him, wholly submitting to him, preachers, people great and small. O Lord keep my brother!”⁹⁹ The sympathetic Harris recognized that John Wesley alone held ultimate authority in Wesleyan Methodism and that the Conference served merely as his advisor.¹⁰⁰ The movement did at times depart from Wesley’s ideal; nonetheless, a study of Wesleyan Methodist doctrine and discipleship centers on John Wesley.

Early Development and Structure

Wesleyan Methodism’s mature structure reflected the progressive holiness of Wesley’s way of salvation. Yet Wesley reached this end through a series of experiences, additions, and modifications. As he put it, “everything arose just as the occasion offered.”¹⁰¹ He has been called a pragmatist and a borrower, but his genius showed in his ability to incorporate disparate ideas into a thoroughly Wesleyan whole.¹⁰² Wesley grew up around a religious society of the old style at Epworth, and he read about those societies at an early stage. From that foundation, Wesley developed his own type of society, influenced at first by the Moravians. He visited their base in Germany, writing *Rules of the Band Societies* upon his return.¹⁰³ Though Wesley would officially part ways with Moravianism in July of 1740, he adapted Moravian structures for his United Societies, the first of which he formed at Bristol in 1739, followed by the Foundery in London. Looking back, Wesley attributed the formation of these societies to requests from converts that he advise them. However, the circumstances surrounding the origins of

99. Beynon, *Harris’s Visits to London*, 189.

100. Davies remarks, “He was Methodism, in person and in power.” Davies, “Introduction,” in *Wesley, Works*, 9:20.

101. John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:254.

102. Kevin Watson notes that the class meeting was the only meeting original to Wesleyan Methodism, yet even that idea did not originate with Wesley. Kevin M. Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness: The Band Meeting in Wesley’s Thought and Popular Methodist Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 56. See also Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, xx, 237–38, 584; Walsh, “Religious Societies,” in Sheils and Wood, *Voluntary Religion*, 281, 291; Davies, “Introduction,” in *Wesley, Works*, 9:8–9.

103. Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Kingswood, 1989), 124–26. For overviews of the development process, see Wesley, “Short History of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:428–30; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 16–17, 29–34; Heitzenrater, *People Called Methodists*, 37–67.

various societies differed, with Wesley serving as “co-ordinator or cannibaliser of a wide range of renewal groups under local leaders.”¹⁰⁴

Methodist society meetings were open to visitors and included preaching, prayer, and singing.¹⁰⁵ From almost the start, the society’s serious members were divided by sex and marital status into small bands for confession and accountability.¹⁰⁶ In early 1742, a suggestion to raise contributions to pay a society’s debt laid the foundation for Wesley’s class meeting, a division of all society members into groups of about twelve determined by geography.¹⁰⁷ In time, class membership defined membership in Wesleyan Methodism. Other society subgroups filled out the Wesleyan plan, reflecting Wesley’s “tendency towards the proliferation of small groups.”¹⁰⁸ The various groups flowed from Wesley’s conviction that Christianity teaches a “social” and not a “solitary” religion. Therefore, preaching without establishing societies “is only begetting children for the murderer,” for the awakened will fall asleep again without the support of others.¹⁰⁹ Hence, Wesley referred to the classes and bands as “the very sinews of our Society,” and from this basic structure, the movement expanded.¹¹⁰

104. Rack, “Religious Societies,” 584–86. For various perspectives, see Wesley, “Plain Account of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:256; Wesley, “Short History of the Methodists,” in *ibid.*, 421; Jones, Schlenker and White, *Elect Methodists*, 31–34.

105. Frances Pawson, for instance, attended Methodist society meetings for seven years before joining. See Morrow, *Early Methodist Women*, 49; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 51–52.

106. Wesley, “Principles Farther Explained,” in *Works*, 9:169; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 2–3.

107. Wesley seems to have delighted in retelling this account. See Wesley, “Plain Account of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:260–62; Wesley, “Short History of the Methodists,” in *ibid.*, 434; Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works*, 9:528–29; Wesley, *Works*, 19:251, 258; David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Wipf & Stock, 1985), 93.

108. See the Select Society and Penitent Bands described below. Walsh refers to this as a “quasi-military organisation.” See J. D. Walsh, “Origins of the Evangelical Revival,” in G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh, eds., *Essays in Modern English Church History: In Memory of Norman Sykes* (Oxford University Press, 1966), 161; Davies, “Introduction,” in Wesley, *Works*, 9:13.

109. Wesley, “Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739),” in *Works*, 13:39. See also John Wesley, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount (IV),” in Outler and Heitzenrater, eds., *Wesley’s Sermons*, 195; Wesley, *Works*, 19:318, 21:424; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 39–43.

110. John Wesley, “Farther Thoughts upon Christian Perfection,” in *Works*, 13:120.

The Class Meeting

Class membership distinguished a Methodist from an observer in the society, and the only prerequisite for membership was “a desire to flee from the wrath to come.”¹¹¹ No strict doctrinal or experiential standards were required of those seeking membership, beyond a basic admission of one’s personal need for salvation from sin. There were, however, behavioral expectations for maintaining membership. Wesley argued that desiring salvation will be evident, “*First*, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind.... *Secondly*, By doing good.... *Thirdly*, By attending upon all the ordinances of God,” such as public worship and preaching, the Lord’s Supper, family and private prayer, and fasting.¹¹² These three “general rules” echo through Wesley’s works as a necessary spiritual step, even as he points out their inadequacy as a spiritual stopping place.

One of the class’s purposes was to help Methodists move along in the way of salvation. Each member described their soul’s condition, and the class leader sought to respond appropriately. Classes also served financial ends by providing the setting in which Wesleyan Methodists gave their contributions for the poor. Furthermore, discipline was kept through mandatory attendance and the renewal or otherwise of quarterly tickets.¹¹³ The combined emphasis on accountability and spiritual growth can be seen in Wesley’s description of Methodists uniting “to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”¹¹⁴ Since any repentant, awakened person could seek class membership, the class was a place where those with the beginnings of grace sought justification and those who were justified sought further sanctification.¹¹⁵

111. This admission requirement predated the class as such, but persisted in Wesleyan Methodism. See John Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” in *Works*, 9:34; John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies,” in *Works*, 9:70; John Wesley, “Thoughts upon a Late Phenomenon,” in *Works*, 9:536–37; Wesley, *Works*, 10:277; Wesley, *Works*, 21:384; Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 106–8.

112. Wesley, “Nature, Design, and General Rules,” in *Works*, 9:70–73. See also Wesley, “Character of a Methodist,” in *Works*, 9:35; John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:254–55; Hindmarsh, *Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 84–86.

113. John Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works*, 9:528–29; Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 104–7, 115, 218; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 3, 68–69.

114. Wesley, “Nature, Design, and General Rules,” in *Works*, 9:69–70.

115. David Watson presents disciplined accountability as the main purpose of the class meeting, treating the emphasis on seeking salvation and spiritual growth as secondary. More balanced, Thompson argues that the class meeting had “a decidedly soteriological intent” while recognizing the importance of discipline in Wesley’s structure. See Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 95–104; Andrew C. Thompson, “‘To Stir Them Up to

The Band Meeting

Those who experienced justification were invited, though not required, to take a further step by joining a band.¹¹⁶ Bands were about half the size of classes and were divided by sex and marital status. Besides the experiential requirement of justification, band membership also demanded some degree of assurance and a desire for sanctification. The 1738 “Rules” present attitude requirements as well, asking prospective members if they are willing to confess their sins and hear their faults “plain and home,” as well as the thoughts of others concerning them. As for behavioral requirements, when Wesley published new “Directions” for the bands in 1744, he reminded them that since they had the faith of justification, it was not “grievous” for them to keep the “general rules” given to all Methodists: do no evil, do good, and use the ordinances.¹¹⁷

In the band meeting, prayer preceded and followed mutual confession and examination.¹¹⁸ To help band members evaluate their hearts and experiences, Wesley provided five guiding questions: “1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting? 2. What temptations have you met with? 3. How was you delivered? 4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not? 5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?”¹¹⁹ Theoretically, these questions facilitated the “closer union” and further sanctification of band members, indicating that band meetings aimed at the soteriological goals of growth in holiness and the pursuit of perfection. For instance, Wesley counseled Jane Catherine March to share her experience of perfection with her band in order to “help

Believe, Love, Obey’—Soteriological Dimensions of the Class Meeting in Early Methodism,” *Methodist History* 48 (2010): 167–76.

116. Despite Kevin Watson’s contention that, before the addition of the class meeting as the basic Methodist small group, bands tended to be open to those “earnestly seeking forgiveness,” the early *Rules* included justification as an admission requirement. See Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 3, 63–64, 70–71, 102–3, 199. See also John Wesley, “Rules of the Band Societies,” in *Works*, 9:77; John Wesley, “Directions Given to the Band Societies,” in *Works*, 9:79; Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works*, 9:529; Wesley, *Works*, 10:285–86.

117. Davies notes that some “were downgraded from band membership to society membership” under the 1744 “Directions.” See Davies, “Introduction,” in Wesley, *Works*, 9:13.

118. The Scriptures were not expounded in band meetings. See Wesley, “Rules of Band Societies,” in *Works*, 9:77; Wesley, “Principles Farther Explained,” in *Works*, 9:192.

119. Late in Wesley’s life, the fifth question was removed. See Wesley, “Rules of Band Societies,” in *Works*, 9:78n.

their souls” through her honesty and example.¹²⁰ Kevin Watson, in examining the practical evidence, notes several ways in which “popular Methodist practice” differed from Wesley’s plan.¹²¹ Nevertheless, bands served through Wesley’s lifetime as a step in the way of salvation, intended to move Methodists from justification toward perfection.

The Select Society

In 1786, Wesley reviewed his movement and remarked that “innumerable blessings” stemmed from band meetings, especially for those seeking perfection. “When any seemed to have attained this,” he explained, “they were allowed to meet with a select number” who had likewise received perfection.¹²² In 1770, he referred to a noteworthy select society consisting of sixty-five members, all of whom possessed Christian perfection.¹²³ It seems, however, that some select societies broadened membership to include those seriously pursuing perfection, even if they had not yet attained it. Rules were less extensive than in the other groups, merely requiring confidentiality, submission, and generosity.¹²⁴ These select societies formed the apex of Wesley’s society structure and were intended to serve as examples to the rest of Wesleyan Methodism.

The Penitent Band

Some, however, regressed rather than making progress toward salvation. For these, Wesley offered the “penitent band.” Penitents were to pray, hear preaching, and sing hymns, seeking restoration to holiness. Sometimes penitent bands proved so successful in restoring the fallen that their

120. Wesley, “Plain Account of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:266–67; Wesley, *Works*, 27:396.

121. Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 13, 108, 120, 182, 184. See also W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *Journal and Diaries VII (1787–1791)* in *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 2003), 24:106.

122. It seems that Wesley’s original goals for the select society also included having “a select company to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions, without reserve.” See Wesley, “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in *Works*, 9:529; Wesley, “Plain Account of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:269–70.

123. Wesley, “Short History of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:491.

124. Davies, “Introduction,” in Wesley, *Works*, 9:13–14; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 157–59; Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 120. On the challenges of the select society, see also David Stark, “Beyond Perfection: A Redemptive Reading of Retracted Holiness Testimony in John Walsh’s Letter to Charles Wesley, 15 August 1762,” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 5 (2013).

members passed straight into perfection.¹²⁵ As Heitzenrater notes, penitent bands were “the organizational manifestation” of Wesley’s theology of tentative justification.¹²⁶

Other Meetings and Methods

By addition and adaptation, Wesleyan Methodism accumulated a busy calendar. The band meeting typically served as a gateway to three further meetings: public bands, prayer meetings, and love-feasts. In addition to these meetings, Wesley’s societies also carried on works of charity, watch-nights, public fasts, and “covenant renewal services.”¹²⁷ Furthermore, Wesley expected and exhorted his people to participate in the Lord’s Supper, the other means of grace, and parish worship, from each of which Wesley claimed to derive spiritual benefit.¹²⁸ Beyond these meetings and ordinances, Wesley shepherded his Methodists with many publications, the most significant of which were probably Charles’s hymns and John’s *Arminian Magazine*. Hymn-singing permeated the societies, and as the structure and preface of the 1780 hymnal show, Wesleyan hymns served as a catechism of “experimental and practical divinity.”¹²⁹ The *Arminian Magazine*, founded by Wesley in 1778 to counter Calvinist periodicals, gave Wesley a tool with which to bolster his Methodists against rival theologies on the

125. Davies observes that though select societies and penitent bands “gradually ceased,” the “elaborate organization that Wesley had favoured in the early years lingered on...until the 1780s in many areas.” See Davies, “Introduction,” in *Wesley Works*, 9:13; Wesley, “Plain Account of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:269; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 67–68; Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 121.

126. Heitzenrater, *People Called Methodists*, 136.

127. Public bands, also called “body bands,” were all the bands meeting together. The love-feast was a simple meal of bread and water at which attendees testified to God’s work in their lives. It was eventually opened to all members. Wesley, “Plain Account of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:264; Wesley, *Works*, 19:257; Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 117–20; Walsh, “Religious Societies,” in Sheils and Wood, *Voluntary Religion*, 288–89; Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 52–54; Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Kingswood, 1994), 210–11.

128. Since Wesley believed the Lord’s Supper should be used by the awakened, calling it a “converting ordinance,” every Methodist was therefore fit to partake. See John Wesley, “Means of Grace,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 165, 168–69; Wesley, “Answer to Mr. Church’s Remarks,” in *Works*, 9:112; Wesley, *Works*, 19:158.

129. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge eds., with the assistance of James Dale, eds., *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, in *The Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1983), 7:73–75; Noll, “Significance of Hymnody,” in Roberts, *Revival, Renewal, and the Holy Spirit*, 47, 49.

one hand and spiritual lethargy on the other.¹³⁰ “God begins his work at the heart,” Wesley believed, “then the inspiration of the Highest giveth understanding.”¹³¹ Wesley’s writing and editing tasks were one way he pursued this educational end.

Summary

Similar to his theological mixture of the “holy living” and heart-oriented Reformed traditions, Wesley attempted a practical union of elements from Anglican and Moravian religious societies. The Wesleyan result provided a place for those seeking justification as well as for those seeking or enjoying perfection. Starting in 1749, Wesley’s assistants kept lists of society members and their respective spiritual states. Different signs indicated whether each was awakened, doubtful, justified, or perfect.¹³² Given Wesley’s soteriology, the category of “doubtful” or “seeker” (as Heitzenrater terms it) probably applied to those having some faith but no assurance of their justification. According to Wesley, these may or may not have been justified, making it fitting for this category to come between “awakened” and “justified.” Such categorization not only confirms awakening as Wesley’s basic requirement for society membership, but also supports an understanding of Wesley’s societies as places to pursue holiness by taking the next step of salvation.¹³³ Wesley believed that everyone was enlightened by prevenient grace, a conviction which undergirded his open-air ministry and invitation for all to attend society *preaching*.¹³⁴ Those awakened to repentance Wesley placed in *classes*, and when they experienced justification, he encouraged them also to join *bands*. In the bands, they would pursue Christian perfection with the goal of entering a *select society*. Finally, *penitent bands* existed

130. *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 1 (1778): iii–viii; Durden, “First Evangelical Magazines,” 275.

131. Wesley, “Short History of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:452; Hindmarsh, *Spirit of Early Evangelicalism*, 97.

132. For examples and discussion, see Watson, *Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 109, 212–14; Heitzenrater, *People Called Methodists*, 194.

133. Without detailed elaboration, Rack observes a “theological dimension underlying the differences between the various types of society.” Lindström likewise notes the connection between Wesley’s soteriology and society structure, though he neglects the fact that Wesley’s Methodists never spiritually outgrew the classes. These involved members from all spiritual states together. See Rack, “Religious Societies,” 594–95; Harold Lindström, *Wesley & Sanctification* (Francis Asbury, 1996), 122.

134. Wesley, “Short History of the Methodists,” in *Works*, 9:463; Wesley, “Means of Grace,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 168.

to help the fallen get back on the way to salvation. Hence, Wesley's mature society structure directly reflected the steps in his soteriology.

Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist Societies: Commonalities and Distinctives

Commonalities

The shared elements of Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist societies form a backdrop against which their differences stand out. The most basic area of similarity is that both types of society pursued the same general purposes: sanctification, disciplined accountability, and fellowship. These three purposes conjoined, with togetherness critical to accountability and growth in holiness. Also, both movements employed similar activities. They preached publicly to reach the unconcerned and the masses. Those who met in society began with singing and prayer. And for both movements, the heart of the society meeting was some combination of testimony, examination, and exhortation.¹³⁵ Notably, both produced rules appealing to James 5:16, indicating the centrality of confession.¹³⁶

The two movements also shared certain logistical strategies. For instance, Wesley commissioned Class Leaders to watch over attendance and collect funds to pass on to the society's Steward. Welsh Methodism did not have classes, but the Steward functioned in a similar role, noting absences and collecting contributions.¹³⁷ Furthermore, both groups employed lay preachers/exhorters to carry on the work. This similarity set apart Methodists of every type from the common ecclesiastical patterns of the day. As for other meetings, Wesley's Connexion scheduled more of them, yet the Welsh Methodists' acceptance of love-feasts and watchnights implies a general openness.¹³⁸ It seems possible that geography accounts for the different scale of such events. Wesleyan Methodism's more urban settings would more easily facilitate extra meetings than would rural Wales.

135. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:268–73; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 31–43; Wesley, "Rules of the Band Societies," in *Works*, 9:77; Wesley, "Nature, Design, and General Rules," in *Works*, 9:69.

136. Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 123; Wesley, "Rules of the Band Societies," in *Works*, 9:77.

137. Wesley, "Nature, Design, and General Rules," in *Works*, 9:70; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 22–24.

138. Charles Wesley recorded an interesting account of a watchnight in 1756 at which both he and George Whitefield preached. See Frank Baker, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and Randy L. Maddox, eds., *The Journal Letters and Related Biographical Items of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* (Kingswood, 2018), 372.

When Mark Noll calls Charles Wesley and William Williams “the great early masters” of evangelical hymn-writing, he touches on another element shared by Welsh and Wesleyan Methodists.¹³⁹ Both movements produced hymns in abundance and sang them with fervor. They also published other works, especially on doctrinal and devotional subjects. Susan O’Brien sums up the literary output as including past Reformed and Puritan works, new “sermons and discursive writings,” and “revival news.”¹⁴⁰ Especially in the early years, the Calvinists excelled at the latter category, reflecting the international dimension of the Calvinist wing of the revival. Meanwhile, Wesley produced practical treatises in greater abundance.¹⁴¹ Indeed, Wesley pursued publication on a generally larger scale than did the Welsh Methodists, but this may have been simply a matter of resources and readership. Both sought to shepherd converts through literature.

These similarities reveal a remarkable degree of common ground, relating to both purpose and methods. Regarding society life, therefore, the overlap was immense. This helps explain why it was common and relatively easy not only for ordinary converts but even for revival leaders to move from one branch of the revival to another. This happened less often in Wales, given the natural barriers noted earlier, but Neath, Cardiff, and Pembrokeshire nonetheless provide examples. Yet, given their differing soteriologies, these common factors existed alongside significant differences.

First Distinctive: Admission Requirements

Someone wishing to become a Methodist would encounter the first Welsh/Wesleyan society distinctive from the very beginning of the process. The two movements employed different admission standards. While Welsh Methodism demanded a conversion experience as a prerequisite to society membership, Wesley’s Methodism only required a “desire to flee from the wrath to come.” Their differing uses of “under the law” as a descriptor help illustrate their distinctive approaches to membership. To Wesley,

139. Noll, “Significance of Hymnody,” in Roberts, *Revival, Renewal, and the Holy Spirit*, 58.

140. Susan O’Brien, “Eighteenth-Century Publishing Networks in the First Years of Transatlantic Evangelicalism,” in Mark A. Noll, David B. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds., *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1900* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 43.

141. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 383.

“under the law” indicated someone not yet brought to justifying faith.¹⁴² The Welsh Methodists, however, employed the same description mainly to indicate someone not yet enjoying assurance.¹⁴³ Both groups welcomed people “under the law” into society membership, looking for spiritual seriousness. But they viewed this seriousness from differing soteriological perspectives. To the Welsh, it would imply the beginnings of God’s efficacious, gracious work, granting faith to the applicant’s heart. To Wesleyans, it would indicate the applicant’s responsiveness to prevenient grace and openness to faith.

Therefore, despite similar terminology, there were practical, and not merely theoretical, differences between the two movements on this point. For instance, a Welsh society report gives the following membership update: “[N]one added but there is three that seems to be under something of concern for theyr souls but we cant receive them as members yet till we see farther what our Lord is pleas’d to do for them and with them.”¹⁴⁴ Here, the applicants are said to be in Wesley’s required condition, but they are not accepted. The Welsh Methodists leaned on preaching to bring people to conversion, opening the society to those who already possessed some measure of faith in Christ. Wesley, meanwhile, expected the society itself, in addition to preaching, to be a means of justifying grace.

Second Distinctive: Structure

Perhaps the most obvious distinctive between Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist societies is Wesley’s “proliferation of small groups.”¹⁴⁵ Wesley developed layers of groups within his movement, culminating in the select society for the pursuit and continuance of Christian perfection. Thus Wesleyan Methodism incorporated a hierarchical structure that mirrored Wesley’s view of the way of salvation. Each step from repentance to perfection, including the step backward, had its own place. Welsh Methodism, on the other hand, had all levels of maturity together in an undifferentiated society, similar only to Wesley’s class meeting. Though the Welsh occasionally utilized bands, these were not divided by spiritual status but simply by

142. Wesley, “Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley’s Sermons*, 137–40.

143. See, for example, CMA Trevecca College MS 2945:152–54.

144. CMA Trevecca College MS 3033. Jones, Schlenther, and White (*Elect Methodists*, 49) speak of the Welsh Methodists’ “rigorous” standards and “probing interrogation” into prospective members’ spiritual states.

145. Davies, “Introduction,” in Wesley, *Works*, 9:13.

sex and sometimes marital status. Even when the Welsh societies settled into bands, therefore, the bands did not constitute a further step of spiritual growth. The Calvinists had no opposition to confession and examination in a more private setting, yet their bands would be different than Wesley's by virtue of their differing soteriologies. The Welsh Methodists did not affirm the possibility of perfection in the present life, and therefore would not have designed a group intended to foster perfection or, as with the select society, maintain it. Nor would they have employed Wesley's idea of the penitent band, because they did not believe a convert could fall from true grace. Rather, they would confront the wayward and seek repentance, expelling from membership if no evidence of heart-change followed. In short, wherever Welsh Methodists found themselves in their spiritual pilgrimage, their general ongoing pursuit of holiness and repentance would be carried on in the same private society.

Rack's description of the contemporaneous Evangelical Anglican societies provides an illuminating parallel to the situation in Wales. Evangelical Anglicans, like the Welsh Methodists, tended toward a moderate Calvinism, and they were "extremely suspicious of perfectionist doctrine."¹⁴⁶ Therefore, Rack observes, it was "natural for [Evangelical Anglicans] to use undifferentiated religious societies." Wesley's view of perfection, it seems, energized his system of societies, and those who rejected perfection teaching saw no need to develop different societies for different levels of spiritual development. A simplified illustration will accent the distinct approaches. The Welsh Methodists envisioned a spiritual pilgrimage with ups and downs all along the way forward.¹⁴⁷ Converts with different levels of strength would walk together on the same pilgrim path. Wesley, on the other hand, presented his Methodists with a stairway of societies, leading toward a summit of perfection which itself continued to slope upward. On this Wesleyan journey, there were two ever-present realities. There was always a higher step to take, and the risk of falling backward. Wesley did not intend to provide a place to settle.

146. He further notes the Anglicans' concerns over schism and "lay power," and these concerns applied far less in Welsh Methodism. See Rack, "Religious Societies," 594–95.

147. This analogy is not arbitrary. Pilgrimage served as one of William Williams's favorite images for the Christian life. See Glyn Tegai Hughes, *Williams Pantycelyn* (University of Wales Press, 1983), 93–98.

Third Distinctive: Approaches to Spiritual Growth

A third aspect distinguished Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist societies, less concrete than the other two, but nonetheless fundamental. In short, they differed in their respective approaches to spiritual growth. The general atmosphere of spiritual life in the societies varied because the two movements employed different criteria for marking sanctification. Two parallel criticisms highlight the difference. In 1741, John Wesley complained to Charles that the Moravians “make inward religion swallow up outward in general.”¹⁴⁸ Two years later, Howell Harris recorded a very similar criticism from Griffith Jones, directed toward the Welsh Methodists: “[L]ooking too much to the inward work and too little regard to the outward word.”¹⁴⁹ What Wesley lamented in the Moravians, Jones feared in the Welsh Methodists. This indicates the differing focal points of the two movements. While Wesley emphasized outward religion, the Welsh Methodists prioritized inward religion.

This distinction shows clearly in their various rules for the societies. The Welsh leaders provided lengthy lists of questions to discern one’s spiritual state.¹⁵⁰ Wesley, on the other hand, gave a long list of required behaviors, summed up in his three famous categories: do no evil, do good, and use the ordinances.¹⁵¹ The Welsh Methodists pictured the mature as those becoming more compassionate, more aware of their sinfulness, more sensitive to sin, more amazed at God’s love, and more at peace in Christ. Wesley expected his Methodists to exhibit their maturity by avoiding evils like sabbath-breaking, quarreling, and dishonesty, while doing good to others in body and soul and using ordinances such as public worship, the Lord’s Supper, family prayer, and fasting. Thus, their respective societies emphasized inward and outward spirituality, respectively.

Though this was a significant difference, it remained a difference of degree and not fully of type. The Welsh Methodists did indeed care about their converts’ behavior, even though their primary attention remained elsewhere.¹⁵² For instance, they removed from membership those whose

148. Wesley, *Works*, 26:56–57.

149. Beynon, *Harris’s Visits to Pembrokeshire*, 89.

150. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:270–73; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 31–43.

151. Wesley, “Nature, Design, and General Rules,” in *Works*, 9:70–73; Wesley, “Directions Given to the Band Societies,” in *ibid.*, 79.

152. The ordinances provide an instructive example. Wesley emphasized the ordinances repeatedly and even set aside a weekly day of fasting. The Welsh too valued the

behavior proved unacceptable, and William Williams employed the Wesleyan-sounding word “striving” as a positive characteristic among society members.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, Williams specifically directed converts to speak of spiritual things rather than physical things, looking for the motivation and volition that lay behind behavior. For his part, Wesley too cared about motivations, yet he tended to direct attention to actual deeds as reflective of the heart’s condition. Even Wesley’s band rules, which give a list of questions for evaluation, focus on sins actually committed.¹⁵⁴ Hence, though both types of society examined both heart and life, their areas of emphasis differed: one prioritized inward religion, the other outward.

This inward/outward distinctive reflects the theological differences between the two movements. For instance, their disagreement on the role of works in justification proved relevant to the societies. Because the Welsh Calvinists believed in salvation only by imputed righteousness, they directed their followers to look to Christ to find assurance and security. But since Wesley taught a tentative salvation and considered human works, a condition of final justification, he trained his Methodists in the necessity of doing good works. Similar practical implications flowed from their opposing views on perfection and perseverance.

For example, the disagreement over Christian perfection manifested itself in how the two movements approached sin. Focusing inwardly, Welsh Methodists repeatedly warned about the heart’s deceitfulness and recommended confession and examination as means of ascertaining the heart’s condition. They praised Mary Evan, for instance, as “a plain experienced Christian knowing much of herself,” and growth in grace was evidenced in others who “see much of the deceitfulness of their own hearts” and “grieve at this sight of their own vileness.”¹⁵⁵ To the Welsh Methodists, a more sensitive conscience was a sign of spiritual growth.¹⁵⁶ Consequently, Wesley’s perfection teaching, hinging on a distinction between “sins properly

ordinances, esteeming the Lord’s Supper in particular, but they only recommended a monthly day of fasting and the ordinances in general receive far less attention in their writings. See Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 124; CMA Trevecca College MSS 3019, 3072; Wesley, “Nature, Design, and General Rules,” in *Works*, 9:73; Wesley, “Directions Given to the Band Societies,” in *Works*, 9:79.

153. CMA Trevecca College MS 3023:10. See also *ibid.*, MS 3062; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 47–48, 55.

154. Wesley, “Rules of the Band Societies,” in *Works*, 9:78.

155. CMA Trevecca College MSS 3002, 3016.

156. Jones and Morgan, *Calvinistic Methodist Fathers*, 1:273; Williams, *Experience Meeting*, 40.

so called” and “infirmities,” would strike them as a hindrance to spiritual maturity. Wesley, on the other hand, considered an achievable perfection as essential motivation for spiritual growth.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, they gave different directions to their members due to their alternate positions on perfection and sanctification.

Also, given their contrasting views on perseverance, the two movements approached God’s promises from varying perspectives. Wesley declared, “Perform the condition. And the promise is sure.” He even argued that many seemingly unconditional promises nonetheless carry an implied condition.¹⁵⁸ To Wesley, with his characteristic combination of faith and works, such conditionality motivated the necessary lifestyle of holiness. The Calvinists would have reversed Wesley’s remark: “The promise is sure, so perform the commandment.” As Harris put it, directly contradicting Wesley’s 1770 *Minutes* thirty years before they were written, Calvinists affirmed: “working from and not for life.”¹⁵⁹ To them, “faith in the promises... subdued Satan’s temptations.” Far from seeing unconditional promises as impediments to holiness, the Calvinists taught their followers to look to the promises for the power to obey.

These examples, some direct and others indirect, combine to indicate the differing focal points of Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist societies.¹⁶⁰ The Welsh leaders, through their teaching and social rules, guided their converts to distrust their own hearts and to look constantly to Christ’s faithfulness and righteousness. Wesley’s societies, on the other hand, provided discipline and accountability to help his Methodists put holiness of heart into living, striving practice. Comparatively with the Welsh Methodists, Wesley focused more on outward religion as the gauge of spiritual growth, while the Welsh Methodists gave greater attention to inward religion.

157. Wesley, *Works*, 27:369–70.

158. Wesley, “Serious Thoughts upon Perseverance,” in *Works*, 13:249.

159. Evans, *Daniel Rowland*, 129n.

160. Might the disagreement about strictness and “levity” between Harris on the one hand and Rowland and Williams on the other have been rooted in a similar difference of emphasis? A definitive answer may prove elusive, especially in the absence of Rowland’s papers, yet Harris was certainly the most Wesleyan of Welsh Methodism’s top leaders. It seems possible that what Harris condemned was, to the others, a practical application of the Calvinist idea of secure salvation and, therefore, another example of a soteriologically-informed approach to spiritual formation. See Harris, *Brief Account*, 57, 62; Hughes-Edwards, “Development and Organization,” 329; White, *Welsh Methodist Society*, 101.

Conclusion

This third distinctive had perhaps the most far-reaching consequences of any of the factors distinguishing Welsh and Wesleyan Methodist societies. Though the two movements had much in common, their differences were not negligible. The societies reflected their leaders' differing views on soteriological subjects such as the state of humanity before faith, the possibility of perfection, the certainty of perseverance, and the role of works in salvation.

Wesley opened membership to all the repentant, who "desire to flee from the wrath to come," and he structured his societies into a hierarchy for the pursuit of holiness, focusing on outward, practical markers of spiritual growth. Such a focus fit well with Wesley's union of faith and works in the way of salvation, and it seems to have strengthened as his ministry developed.¹⁶¹ The Welsh leaders also prodded their Methodists toward holy living, but they did so from the Reformed footing of "faith alone" and imputed righteousness. Prospective members were only accepted if they seemed to possess such faith, and members all met together in one private society. They focused on inward spirituality, the heart's faith being primary and the lifestyle of faithfulness secondary.

Their shared evangelical emphasis on experience did not diminish the importance that the various Methodists attached to doctrine. On the contrary, it seems to have made their doctrinal commitments deeply personal. Since both movements were convinced that doctrine should be "experimental," their shared emphasis on experience actually widened the practical differences between them. Therefore, though Welsh and Wesleyan Methodism each remained recognizably Methodist, their respective soteriologies shaped distinctive approaches to the common goal of spiritual formation.

161. For instance, compare Wesley's 1739 preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* with his 1787 sermon, "The More Excellent Way." See Wesley, "Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739)," in *Works*, 13:37; John Wesley, "The More Excellent Way," in Outler and Heitzenrater, *Wesley's Sermons*, 512–15.