

I. THE BIRTH OF THE METHODIST MOVEMENT

- A. John Wesley is the founder of the Methodist movement
1. He was born in the rectory at Epworth, Lincolnshire, on June 17, 1703, the 15th child of the Anglican clergyman of Puritan leanings named Samuel Wesley.
 2. He was educated at Charterhouse School and Christ Church, University of Oxford.
 3. He was ordained a deacon in 1725 and became a priest in the Church of England in 1728.
- B. The Holy Club at Oxford
1. Wesley took residence at Oxford in 1729 and joined the “Holy Club” along with his brother Charles.
 2. This club visited the sick and those in prison and were known to be very methodical in their practice of religion (i.e. they scheduled time for prayer and Bible reading).
 3. They were named the “Bible Bigots”, “Bible Moths”, and later called the “methodists” by their classmates.
 4. It should be noted that Wesley did not yet have a profession of salvation at the time he was at Oxford.
- C. Wesley’s Anglican mission to Georgia and his conversion
1. In 1735 Wesley went to America on an Anglican mission to Georgia Indians
 2. It was a very unhappy time according to Wesley
 3. During the trip, Wesley met a group of German Moravians who impressed him with their piety and humble Christian living.
 4. On May 24, 1738 he heard a preacher at Aldersgate Street in London read Luther’s preface to the book of Romans and first understood the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
- D. Wesley and George Whitefield
1. In March of 1739, Wesley joined with Whitefield
 2. They preached in the open air as they were not welcome in Anglican churches
 3. They attracted immense crowds and were very popular
 4. As Wesley was Arminian and Whitefield was Calvinistic, they ultimately parted company by 1741.
- E. The growth of the Methodist movement
1. Methodist “societies” began to spring up in the early 1740’s
 2. A circuit system and itinerant ministry was established to service these needs
 3. In 1769 itinerant preachers were sent to the U. S.
 4. There were 15,000 Methodists in the U. S. at the end of the Revolutionary War
 5. The Methodist Episcopal Church in America was organized at Baltimore, MD on Dec 24, 1784.
- F. In 1751, at the age of 48, Wesley married Mary Vazeille, a widow with four children. The marriage was not successful, and she finally left him; Wesley had no children of his own.
- G. Wesley died in 1790 at the age of 87.



John Wesley

II. DOCTRINAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE METHODISTS

- A. “Methodism is Episcopal in polity and Arminian in theology” (Sargent)
- B. “Wesley’s thought was based on an Arminian interpretation of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England but emphasized personal experience of conversion, assurance, and

- sanctification¹.”
- C. “New birth through the Holy Spirit was the beginning of sanctification, which was to be brought to a “Christian perfection” of entire love towards God and neighbor.”
 - D. “Wesley discarded many tenets of the Church of England, including the doctrine of the apostolic succession but he never voiced any intention of establishing the movement as a new church.”
 - E. One of the clearest demonstrations of Wesley’s inexorable link to the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church was his understanding of baptism (see Works of Wesley, Vol X, p. 188+)
 - 1. According to Wesley, “Baptism is the initiatory sacrament which enters us into covenant with God.”
 - 2. He continues, “It was instituted in the room of circumcision.”
 - 3. “Baptism is performed by washing, dipping, or sprinkling the person in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. – it is not determined in Scripture in which of these ways it shall be done.”
 - 4. The first of the benefits of baptism is “the washing away the guilt of original sin, by the application of the merits of Christ’s death.”
 - 5. “Baptism is the ordinary instrument of our justification.”
 - 6. “By baptism we enter into . . . that new covenant which he promised to make with the spiritual Israel² even to give them a new heart and new spirit.”
 - 7. “By baptism we are admitted to the Church³ . . . The Jews were admitted into the Church by circumcision [in the Old Testament].” Later he says there was a “Jewish Church” in the Old Testament (p. 201).
 - 8. “If infants are guilty of original sin, then they are proper subjects of baptism; seeing, in the ordinary way, they cannot be saved, unless this be washed away by baptism.”
 - 9. Wesley goes on for many pages attempting to wrest the scriptures to prove the validity of infant baptism. He assumes, for example, that the Apostles baptized infants.
 - F. The reader of Mr. Wesley’s writing on baptism is left with the firm conviction that the Methodist movement regarded baptism in exactly the same way as the Roman Catholic Church, and remembers that rejection of this position on baptism was precisely why many Baptist martyrs were burned at the stake.

III. THE METHODIST MOVEMENT TODAY

- A. While it is impossible to stereotype all Methodists into one group, we see an overwhelming trend among Methodists towards liberalism.
- B. A 1963 interview with a leading Methodist (Ralph W. Sockman) provides some interesting insight to this concept.
- C. Dr. Sockman, a leading Methodist, was born in 1889, studied at Ohio Wesleyan University and Columbia University. He was a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.
- D. When asked how Methodists regard the virgin birth, Sockman said, “some Methodists do not feel it necessary to believe that Jesus Christ was born without a human father in order to assert that he is the Only Begotten Son of the Heavenly Father. The Methodist Church does not

¹ References: 1996 Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia, Copyright 1996 Grolier Interactive, Inc. Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia, Copyright 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought, ed. Alister E. McGrath, Copyright 1993 Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

² This statement betrays Wesley’s position as a “covenant theologian” whereby he believes that we (i.e. the church) are the “spiritual Israel” and in which he applies the New Covenant to Gentile believers in this church age.

³ Here we see that Wesley was still a believer in the Catholic (universal) church.

- disown this latter group as long as they believe in the Deity of Christ.⁴
- E. When asked if Methodists believe in Heaven and Hell, Dr. Sockman replied, “the majority of Methodists are emancipated from the prescientific view of a physical heaven ‘up there’ and a physical hell ‘down there.’ Heaven is the realm of mind and spirit where the redeemed keep company with God . . . Hell is the state where such fellowship is absent.”
 - F. Dr. Sockman reiterated the importance of infant baptism
 - G. When asked if Methodists accept Roman Catholic Baptism, Dr. Sockman replied, “yes.”
 - H. Regarding the Lord’s Supper, Dr. Sockman indicated that Methodists believe in consubstantiation.
 - I. Regarding Methodist polity, Dr. Sockman indicated that the Methodist church resembles the government of the U. S. with an executive branch called the Council of Bishops, a legislative branch called the General Conference, and a judicial branch called the Judicial Council.

IV. DEMOGRAPHICS AND STATISTICS

- A. The Methodist Church is currently the third largest group in the USA according to ARDA with 10,350,000 members.
 - 1. This number is down by 750,000 from ten years earlier
 - 2. It also reflects a reduction by 1,500 “congregations” according to ARDA
- B. Texas, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina are the states with the largest number of Methodists today. These are very populous states.
- C. There are a large number of groups that include the Methodist name and theology
 - 1. African Methodist Episcopal Church
 - a. Formed in 1787
 - b. This was the second largest Methodist group in the country in the 1950’s
 - 2. AME Zion Church
 - 3. Many others (over 15)

V. THE WESLEYAN CHURCH

- A. This group is a split off of the Methodist Church led by Orange Scott⁵
 - 1. ‘Orange Scott (1800-1847) wrote in 1841, "I have little hope that the Church [Methodist Episcopal] will ever be reformed in relation to slavery" and in 1842, "There is therefore no alternative but to submit to things pretty much as they are, or secede.”’
 - 2. Choosing not to submit, thousands of Methodists seceded.
 - 3. In 1843, the Utica Convention was called in New York, and with Orange Scott presiding, a federation of churches was formed, called the Wesleyan Methodist Connection.
- B. “Another large stream feeding into The Wesleyan Church was the Pilgrim Holiness Church which sprang from the spiritual awakening and camp meeting movement in America, the last half of the 19th century.”
- C. There are about 120,000 adherents according to ARDA
- D. Doctrinally, the Wesleyan church is quite similar to the Methodist church’s earlier position
 - 1. For example, regarding baptism and the Lord’s supper, they say, “We believe that water baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith.”
 - 2. They also hold a “universal church” position

⁴ Leo Rosten, *Religions in America*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1963, pp. 121-130.

⁵ Taken from the official Wesleyan church web site.