

# The beginning of the methodist movement in england essay sample



The Methodist Church is nowadays described as Non-conformist because it does not conform to the rules of the established Anglican church. Yet it was born out of Anglicanism, and early members continued to receive the sacraments within their local Anglican parish church. How and why did this situation arise? Hans Hillerbrand in 'the Age of Reformation' ( page 185 The of Christian World ) says that Methodism., along with many other branches of the Christian church , was a result of the Reformation, and in the sense that it came out of Anglicanism that is true. John and Charles Wesley had parents who were both from religious backgrounds. Their grandfather had been an Anglican clergyman married to the daughter of a clergyman Their father was a controversial writer and cleric and their mother came from a strongly non-conformist background, so it is not surprising that the brothers were interested in religious matters. As a child John was only religious in a moderate way. However this altered as he matured. Sheldon notes in his 1905 book , 'The History of the Christian Church' that after reading works by people such as Thomas a Kempis he said. ... ' Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts and words and actions.'

By 1726 John had been ordained, but kept his links with Oxford University where by then his younger brother was studying. Charles admitted to wasting his first year, but by the second he, together with a small group of fellow students, began to study and pray methodically. John took charge of the group. Out of this came the nickname 'Methodists'. This was one of several such names such as Enthusiasts and Sacramentarians, but it is the one that stuck. One of the rules of this ' Holy Club' was that every day members were to ask themselves the following questions :- Am I consciously

or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am?

In other words, am I a hypocrite? 2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate? 3. Do I confidentially pass on to another what I was told to me in confidence? Can I be trusted? 5. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? 7. Did the Bible live in me today? Do I give it time to speak to me every day? 9. Am I enjoying prayer? 10. When did I last speak to someone else of my faith? Do I pray about the money I spend?

Do I get to bed on time and get up on time? Do I disobey God in anything?

14. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?

Am I defeated in any part of my life? 16. Am I jealous, impure, critical,

irritable, touchy or distrusting? 17. How do I spend my spare time? 18. Am I

proud? 19. Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the

Pharisees who despised the publican? Is there anyone I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I doing about

it? Do I grumble or complain constantly? Is Christ real to me? John Wesley

emphasized a religion of the heart. Later he was to place stress on the

possibility of entire sanctification. His belief system was Arminian, based on

the beliefs of the Moravian church, a group with a long history in Germany.

The use of the title 'United Society' probably originated in the Moravian

church and was used by Wesley to convey the idea of unity of the local

meetings as one church, though this later became 'United Societies'. There

were of course at this time strong links with Germany through the English

kings of the house of Hanover. Peter Partner in 'The Story of Christianity'

says 9 page 322) that English intellectuals were intrigued by German devotion to intellectual 'system'.

Wesley believed strongly that salvation was possible for all, which is where he differed from Whitefield, who took a more Calvinistic view, although they continued to support each other's work. From 1741 Arminian Methodists followed Wesley's teaching and others followed Whitefield. This message of salvation and the idea of sanctification were at the core of Wesley's preaching. In 1766 he published 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,' Bristol: William Pine . It is quite difficult today to summarize Methodist beliefs because there are many branches of Methodism, but Methodists would normally include the following:- Methodists believe in a living God.

Christianity for a Methodist is not just a set of rules, but is concerned with the individual's relationship with God through Christ by means of the Holy Spirit. They say that it is faith and this relationship that transforms lives.

There is a belief in the love of God as a gift, rather than as something to be earned, but there is also the need to respond to such love, by bestowing love in return on both God and our fellows . A central belief is in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord A belief is held in what is described as a balance of heart and mind - i. e. that though believers may be deeply moved by what God has done for them they are not expected to do something merely because it feels right , but to use their brains as well as their emotions. Methodists believe in the Bible as the guide to both belief and actions. There is a belief that God pours out his grace in a number of different ways, e. g. baptism, holy communion , fellowship etc, but that this is more likely to happen when prayer takes place than when it does not. Methodists believe that the <https://assignbuster.com/the-beginning-of-the-methodist-movement-in-england-essay-sample/>

traditions of the church can reveal deep truths and that it is the job of the church to interpret these in a way that speaks to the present generation. Finally a belief in disciplined living is central – not just running to God when we are hurt, but a continuous commitment. Failure to do this, it is believed, will lead to shallow lives and poor witness. This summary is adapted from the words of Mitchell Williams on the web page ‘ United Methodist Beliefs’.

Wesley remained an Anglican clergyman until his death and is said to have consistently advised people to stand by the established church. He wanted to revitalize the Anglican church, not to split or damage it.

He certainly had no intention of forming a new denomination. In fact he and his brother Charles are commemorated in Westminster Abbey, an Anglican Cathedral . He did not think that it would become a separate entity, but expected it to continue within the Anglican fold . He assumed that converts would attend Anglican churches and receive the sacraments there. But his parish was wherever people were, not just those who lived in a particular area as practiced by the majority of clergy. Even as late as two years before he died he stated emphatically his unwillingness to leave the Anglican church and refused to accept that he had brought into being a large group of dissenters, as they were then seen. However he did seek to make provision for areas unreached by the established church by himself ordaining ministers. Often relatively uneducated men became clergy. In 1784 the Yearly Conference of the People Called Methodists was set up in order that the movement might continue after Wesley’s death. Methodism, though it has its clergy, is and was very much a lay movement in contrast to the parish church where one man was in control of both ritual and preaching.

John Wesley's death in 1791 did not bring an end to Methodism, but a split was inevitable among a group who had moved thus far from its roots. Its method of strong central authority together with very effective local organization ensured its success. Within 4 years Methodists were able to conduct marriages and perform the sacraments legally, despite not being ordained by an Anglican bishop. It had evolved into something new, finally breaking away from its Anglican roots within 11 years of John Wesley's death. There was a golden age of increased membership. Between 1791 and 1850 the number of Methodists in England rose dramatically. Why did it have such success? One reason is that with the dawn of the industrial revolution the English population was on the move. Parishes as they were failed to cope. The city of Leeds for instance was all one parish in 1820, before the huge influx of workers in the 19th century.

Also established religious societies within Anglicanism insisted that members be in communion with it, whereas Methodism only asked at that time that prospective members had ' a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins,' - A. Skevington Wood, page 450, ' A Lion Handbook, The History of Christianity - Methodism was able to fill the gap, by including non-Anglicans. It provided a support group for people who had moved far away from friends and family because of new work patterns. According to the Spartacus web page the religious census of 1851 proved that the non-conformists had more chapels and churches as well as more active members than the established church, this despite the fact that in many ways non-Anglicans were at that time discriminated against until the Test and Corporation Act of 1828. They could not obtain university degrees or hold

public office. When non-conformists, and later Roman Catholics, Jews and atheists, could become members of parliament, it meant that the Anglican church was under the control of a partially non-Anglican government.

From its earliest days Methodism was involved in meeting social as well as spiritual needs. It was one of the largest temperance movements, with ministers encouraged not to drink, though this is now considered a matter for the individual. Gambling is also considered inappropriate. Its methods of organization, with its hundreds of lay preachers and circuits with their superintendents was better organized to meet the needs of the time than was the Anglican church, with only a priest and a curate or two to cover large areas, one church supposed to meet the needs of in some cases up to 10, 000 people. This system of organization had its beginnings when Wesley began to take down the names and addresses of those who gathered in the open air to hear him. This was so that he could visit their homes and so discuss matters in smaller groups. Out of this, in no way pre-planned, came the system of classes where people came together to work out the way of salvation. The Methodist preachers, both lay and ordained, were able to cover huge areas of the country that would otherwise be virtually untouched by the Gospel. Wesley broke with Anglican tradition in one respect when he himself ordained men to the ministry, though he remained a member of that church.

M. Melinsky in 'The shape of the Ministry' page 101, says that its success was in reaction to the dry Deism of the 18th century. It rather offered a religious experience that was both vibrant and experiential. At first they preached wherever pulpits were opened to them, but gradually were

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excluded from the mainline churches and turned to market places and pit heads. Just as preaching became prominent so did the small meeting, an emphasis on personal holiness and hymns and hymn singing. Also the growth of industry brought new wealth. Never had there been such a spate of church building, especially in the new or enlarged towns to which much of the population were moving. All this new industry needed an educated workforce so a national scheme of education came into being. A more literate population responded well to Bible study and hymns as opposed to the former style of worship where only a few people participated actively. The official churches were slow to respond in the new centers of population, but Wesley and his followers did so in what was at first an unofficial way.

He alone traveled more miles than any previous evangelist and addressed crowds of up to 30, 000 people The main new way of meeting the spiritual needs of people in 18th and 19th century England was Methodism, but, according to Owen Chadwick in ' A History of Christianity'( page 240), the ideas that it practiced, such as small class meetings, were originally German, begun by a Frankfurt pastor, Philip Spener, who, from about 1666, included in his church program meetings in the week that were led as easily by church members as by the clergy. The focus of these meetings, which included prayer, Bible study and social action, was on inner holiness. It was ideas like these that Wesley took as his own, aiming for a devout people who were holy without the former stress on ritual. The ' class meeting' was said by Wesley to be of ' unspeakable usefulness.' It suited both city, smaller town and tiny village situations. Classes were originally devised in order, it is said, to encourage good stewardship, each member contributing a penny



each week, but it was quickly realized that those who collected the money were also very able to oversee the spiritual needs of members.

These were known at first as Assistants, and were sometimes backed up by local Anglican clergy. They were later called Superintendents, having some authority, but always under the higher authority of the Methodist Conference. . By 1743 Methodism was a nationwide organization Efforts were concentrated on the industrialized mining areas of the Midlands where new settlements seemed to be springing up almost overnight. The name Methodists was applied to the Societies that were formed with a central organization . This set up was known as ' the Connexion'. Not only did this system have influence in a religious way , but it was continued into the newly formed trade unions down through the 19th and 20th centuries. It also led to the growth of Sunday schools, which were well established by 1835. It might be expected that this new influx of spirituality and concern for the underprivileged would be welcomed by the established church, but it was not always so, and when Wesley and his acolytes were attacked by mobs they were often left to defend themselves. They were denounced both in print and from the pulpits. Yet they thrived.

The preachers, known as circuit riders, would preach wherever they could find a crowd, and then organize a class to meet until they were able to visit again. The theology was easy for people to understand and the disciplined lifestyle that it emphasized was a good thing in the new communities as they struggled into existence. This 18th century Revival was not of course limited to the Methodist church. Within Anglicanism there came about a movement in response to the same spiritual needs that is now called Anglican

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Evangelicalism. At first all those caught up in this spiritual awakening were called either Methodists or Evangelicals whatever their background of church membership. Gradually however those who wanted to continue within the framework of the Church of England came to be called Evangelicals, though nowadays the word has connotations far outside Anglicanism.

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