

The Development of the Methodist Ministry

John Munsey Turner

Despite Dr John Walsh's statement that 'simple chronology' disposes of the stereotype of the whole Evangelical Revival as a chain reaction from the 'Aldersgate Street experience of 24 May 1738 and of John Wesley as a solitary Moses striking the rock of petrified Anglicanism to release a sudden stream of revival', Methodists still tend to isolate John Wesley and his connexion from much else going on in the trans-continental and trans-Atlantic Evangelical Revival. It was an extraordinary 'networking' of endeavour involving the 'Calvinists of the heart' every bit as much as 'Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism'. Derek Lovegrove has shown the role of itinerancy in Dissent at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and more recently the place of the laity in Evangelical Protestantism with an essay included by Andrew Walls on the relationship of the laity to world mission.

Wesley still comes across as the supreme pragmatist and organizer, able to cannibalise smaller revivalist groups like those of William Darney in Rossendale sweeping them into his 'connexion'. The "Anglo-Calvinists" of various kinds remained outside both in England and especially in Wales, where Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland, William Williams 'Pantycelyn' and others had a free land, supported by Selina, Countess of Huntingdon.

But we must limit ourselves to Wesley's itinerants who were at first, preachers, evangelists and soon pastors to the 'societies' but NOT as yet ministers or clergy 'You have nothing to do but to save souls' said Wesley who saw these mainly young unmarried men as his 'sons in the gospel' under his direct and strict discipline.

Q In what view may the Methodist Preacher be considered?

Ans As messengers sent by the Lord out of the common way to provoke the regular clergy to jealousy (i.e. Zeal) and to supply their lack of service towards those who are perishing for want of knowledge and above all to reform the nation by spreading scriptural holiness over the land. (The "Large Minutes" which were modified over the years).

As early as 1749 the skeleton of Wesley's system was in place. The Conference first met in 1744, a small group then of supporting Anglican clergy and laity with a marvellous agenda: what to teach, what to preach, what to do. In 1746 there were 7 'Rounds' or 'Circuits' covering whole

counties. By 1770 there were 50, in 1786 64, and 114 by Wesley's death in 1791: an alternative voluntary pastoral ministry – though without sacraments unless a clergyman was available – independent of the parishes, even if relating to them if the clergy were reasonably friendly and not Calvinist or liberal.

The itinerants were willing to accept a total availability as tough as any order of Friars or Jesuits. Indeed it is not ridiculous to detect parallels between what Jonathan Swift and in our day, Eamon Duffy called “Peter” and “Jack”. Up until quite recent times the six volumes of the *Lives of the Early Preachers* have been used as the principal primary source. Bishop Gore urged ordinands to plunge into reading them before ordination as examples of what discipleship really meant. The ‘literary turn’ of recent years has shown that some of the material has been given a particular ‘spin’ to fit it for the *Arminian Magazine* and other publications. It represents on the whole the somewhat later stages of the itinerant style as it is developed. Recently Simon Ross Valentine has edited the Diaries and Journals of John Bennet and written a fine biography of this very important early itinerant who stemmed from the Presbyterian tradition. He is best known for marrying Grace Murray - Wesley's ‘last love’. He pioneered the Circuit Quarterly Meeting; he wrote up the first minutes of the conference. His ‘Round’ covered two counties. Methodism in Bolton owed its origin to him. Later he became an Independent minister after an unseemly rumpus with Wesley, and an altercation with Mrs Wesley acting like like a Hogarthian virago! Without men like Bennet and the mason John Nelson there could have been no Methodism.

In 1935 Dr Henry Bett gave, for its time a fine apologia for the Preachers. He pointed out that many who entered “the work” left it after a few years some of them because their health was undermined by ‘the hardships of the itinerancy’. Thomas Olivers (who wrote the hymn The God of Abraham praise) rode the same horse for 25 years, travelling 100,000 miles in preaching the Gospel. It was probable, wrote Bett, that some 200 men or rather more made up the muster of those who can properly be called early Methodist preachers. He seriously underestimated the number of those who for a time however short were itinerant. John Lenton's recent detailed work shows that there were 800 men who were for a time itinerants. Of these 53 became Nonconformist ministers and 47 became Anglican priests, including John Hampson, one of the first biographers of Wesley. Many others reverted to the status of ‘local preachers’ – preachers, that is, accepted by the circuits but not itinerant, maintaining their daily work, a style without which the circuits could, not to this day, possibly maintain the services of the word. Lenton shows how many of the preachers came from the North, especially Yorkshire and Lancashire, from the West Country, and with a surprising number from

Ireland where Wesley's preaching was more successful than in Scotland or Wales. Bett stated – and Lenton confirms this – that with the exception of half a dozen of the earliest preachers who were soldiers, they were nearly all from the social grade which lies between the working class and the middle class – skilled artisans, small tradesman, shopkeepers, small farmers, clerks, schoolmasters. There was too, the almost unique Lincolnshire Squire of Raithby, Robert Carr Brackenbury, an alumnus of St. Catherine's College Cambridge. His home and library were open to the preachers (and he left his pottery to the college).

Clearly some could not cope with the harsh conditions. Not many could (or should!) tolerate the experience of John Furz who, one day rode 70 miles to find his wife dying naked in bed, her clothes being sold for necessities.

What did Christopher Hopper think when, on the death of his wife a letter came from Wesley, telling him he would be able to give more time to the Lord. He did – presiding over conference in 1780 when Wesley was ill, surviving into the next century as the 'apostle of Bolton'; but he had modest private means. Not all the wives of the Preachers were as 'quakerly' as Frances Pawson. Her Journal (partly in French!) gives an honest picture of what it was really like to live in a flea ridden house in Scotland or in Halifax in a grim manse 'under the chapel'. Kingsley Lloyd in an important study, showed that the early style could not continue. £12 was to be paid to all preachers per annum, £10 more if they had a wife. A few preachers managed to marry ladies of means or wealthy widows, but provision soon had to be made for families and for 'worn out preachers' who had to 'sit down', to use the phrase still popularly used of 'supernumeraries'.

At the beginning of the next century it was seen that holiness was not incompatible with normal home life. Kingswood school ensured continuity of education for sons of the itinerant preachers, but not normally as yet their daughters. Woodhouse Grove School, Bradford was to follow and more schools as the nineteenth century gave more of a middle class feel to Methodism. But well after Wesley, things could be very tough in a rural circuit. Here is an account of James Dixon, who became President of Conference in 1841, when he was at Hereford as a probationer. "Hereford, the first circuit to which he was appointed was one of the poorest circuits in Methodism. He covered a vast tract of country, where often lying at great distances from one another, were little places in which a few people gather to hear the Word of God. The Methodist societies in many parts consisted without exception of very poor people. The labour and fatigue of visiting this thin and scattered population was immense. Mr Dixon started on long preaching rounds of a

month's duration. He walked on foot 20 miles or more almost every day, preached nearly every day, and on Sunday walked 20 miles and preached four times. In some places neither food nor bed were offered him. Often he lay in barns and outhouses. Often he purchased some simple food that warranted no cooking, out of his own resources in the villages through which he passed. The circuit was too poor to pay him his nominal stipend and his own little savings were consumed by providing the necessities of life."

The sheer energy and willingness of many to serve anywhere from the Shetlands to the Scilly Isles, followed by the *disponibilité* of the early missionaries overseas, is breathtaking. If the Fiji missionaries of the 1810s – David Cargill, John Hunt, James Calvert and their incredibly brave wives, constantly pregnant, are taken as example, we find an almost unearthly optimism and grace, and a discipline equal to any Catholic missionary order. 'Entire Sanctification' is a proper word to describe the writings of Hunt and Calvert who when asked on furlough 'Were you afraid of being killed' replied simply: 'No we died before we went'. The Government of the Fiji Islands has recently 'repented' of the eating later by cannibals of missionary Brown. Dietrich Bonhoeffer in the 1930s honoured such men and women when he bowed before the memorial at Richmond College London. The remote survival of 'total availability' is the fact that Methodist ordinations take place at Conference not at local level. It symbolizes that the ordinands are representatives of the wider church at circuit level.

We are running ahead! Back to Wesley's day for a while. He sought to remain within the Church of England – that is a story in itself – but the situation in America changed the whole scene in 1784. There was a desperate need for ordained priests. Both Archbishop Secker and Bishop Lowth of London had been refused permission by the Government to ordain priests or to provide episcopacy in America. That came in the end through Scottish bishops late in 1784. Some Americans like William White even suggested that presbyters, in an emergency, might ordain, a view that Wesley held, seeing presbyters and Bishops as essentially one. Modern scholars looking at the diversity of the early church see this as by no means an inadequate conclusion. He was plugging here into a liberal Anglican tradition. So to provide the American Methodists with presbyters, he, Thomas Coke and James Creighton an Anglican priest, ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey. He also 'set apart' Thomas Coke as 'Superintendent' for America, with instructions to ordain Francis Asbury and others. Asbury became virtually bishop of the nascent American Methodist Church which grew rapidly. But what was Wesley really "doing" to Coke? It appeared that he believed he was

acting as an ‘apostolic man’ passing on his leadership. This was a controversial procedure which infuriated Charles Wesley:

‘So easily are Bishops Made
By man or woman’s whim?
W. his hands on C. hath laid
But who laid hands on him?’

Of Coke ordaining Asbury on Christmas Day 1784, he later wrote:

‘A Roman Emperor tis said
His favourite horse a consul made
But Coke brings greater things to pass
He makes a bishop of an.....ass’ (i.e. Asbury!)

The Lord Chancellor – Mansfield – stated that ‘ordination was separation’! This was three years after the setting up of the *Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion* as an independent body. ‘Pope John was following ‘Pope Joan’’. Conference was legally established in 1784 also with the ‘Legal Hundred’ of Preachers at the heart of it. More was to follow – ordinations for Scotland with men like John Pawson appearing there in clerical dress. Wesley said ‘Not south of the border’. Monsignor Ronald Knox called them ‘Gretna Green ordinations’, but unlike Gretna Green, marriages not valid south of the border!

Ordinations followed for Nova Scotia, Antigua, and Newfoundland. The later ordination of Alexander Mather in England appears as if Wesley thought of him, with Coke as ‘Superintendents’ of the British connexion after his death but any kind of episcopacy was quashed by the conference in 1794. It is a muddle difficult to sort out. Partly, it was all a consequence of various schemes thought up by John Fletche., Joseph Benson and others to bring Evangelicals together. Wesley still thought of himself as “Church of England” but Professor Frank Baker could assert that his view of the Church as a sacramental institution with an evangelical mission was slowly transformed into that of a missionary society performing sacramental functions, with the Church of England fulfilling the one task and the Methodist Societies the other.

Wesley died in 1791. The Connexion, while still growing – it had now 72000 members – was almost torn apart. Some led by Alexander Kilham who had served in Scotland wanted independence from the Church of England. We will call this Plan A (“The New Plan”). Kilham was an able but naïve man. In the end he was thrown out forming the Methodist New Connexion with a Conference consisting of an equal number of ordained men and lay men – important for the future. The main body opted for that pattern in 1878. Plan B (“The Old Plan”) was to remain loyal to the

Church of England. Indeed Conference sought to forbid further ordinations – though they occurred – requesting the Preachers not to use clerical titles or dress. This was loyalty to the Church of England, not “low churchmanship”. But Plan C (“Following Providence”) in the end prevailed. This was a copying of the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. It is still the norm. The country was divided into “Districts” with a “chairman” who was a Superintendent of one of the circuits. Separated chairmen (now called “chairs”) became the norm after World War Two. The “Superintendents” had powers most bishops might envy. The confusion – issuing in bitter conflict in Bristol – between the three “Plans” was cleared up in 1795 with The Plan of Pacification which permitted chapels to have the sacraments presided over by their itinerant Preachers if the leaders and trustees agreed which many immediately did though some Wesleyans continued to go to their parish church for worship as well as having “preaching services”, other “means of grace” and Holy Communion in the chapels, usually in the evening avoiding “church hours”. Gas lighting helped that later! The liturgy of the Church of England or Wesley’s Abridgment was to be used by the itinerants for the sacraments.

Gradually the view prevailed that the practise of receiving the Preachers into “full connexion” by the open vote of Conference with raised hands was tantamount to ordination. This was argued cogently by Richard Watson, who became with Adam Clarke the leading Wesleyan theological scholar. It has been claimed, by Raymond George, to be a valid interpretation of the gradual change from “Preachers” to “Presbyters”. The practice of calling the Preacher “the Reverend” became usual after 1818. Ordination by the “laying on of hands”, which had been performed by Thomas Coke for the Mission Field (and not at Conference!), became normative for all in 1836. But those “received into full connexion” before 1836 were not re-ordained. They were considered ministers of the Methodist Connexion. Some kind of “reception into full Connexion” was practised in all the subsequent splits from Wesleyanism such as the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians. As they had women full-time Preachers could they be considered the first women to be considered presbyters in the Western churches? The last Primitive Methodist women itinerant was Elizabeth Bultitude, a formidable lady received as a Preacher in 1830. She died in 1891, having still the status of a retired Preacher with a pension and an official obituary. A Bible Christian woman lived until 1896, almost linking with the Unitarians and Congregationalists who began to ordain women in the next century. Methodists after union in 1932 which received all the ministers from the United Methodists and Primitive Methodist Churches did not ordain women as presbyter until 1974.

So, by 1836 the Wesleyan ministry achieved some kind of maturity but all was far from well. We must now briefly unravel a period of gross division in Wesleyanism beginning at Leeds in 1827 with great divergencies over what should be the power and authority of ministers in circuits and in Conference. To expect a new style ministry in a decade or two to withstand the pressures of revivalism, Sunday schools growing independently of ministerial control, open to gusts of radicalism and lay people who wanted more local power and less clericalism and Conference authority was to expect too much. It might be claimed that a clerical conference was “the living Wesley” but the laity in the North would not tolerate the total authority of Conference and pompous Superintendents.

One way of putting it is to speak of “High” and “Low” Wesleyanism. “High Wesleyanism” stressed the connexional, the National and the international featuring World Mission after the official setting up of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1818. All Wesleyans belonged to it. This illustrated the sheer energy of Wesleyanism at the time and was not, as Bernard Semmel implied, a means of siphoning off energy which might have gone into contemporary politics. Men like Jabez Bunting came to see Wesleyanism as an independent body between Church and Dissent clearly influenced by the secession of the Free Kirk of Scotland under Thomas Chalmers in 1843. “High Wesleyanism” had an exalted view of the pastoral authority of the minister responsible to God and to the Conference.

“Low Wesleyanism” was local, lay, often revivalist, orientated towards the local chapel. Methodism is a strange paradox of an organization fairly democratic in local style but autocratic in its superstructure. This chimes in with a society slowly moving to at least partial democracy. We cannot here detail all the schisms which occurred between 1827 and 1849. The anonymous and malicious “Fly Sheets” (1844-8) attacked Conference for its centralisation, the dominance of London, the autocratic stationing Committee and the style of Jabez Bunting, who was a more representative figure than meets the eye. We can hint at some of the consequences of the disputings.

Firstly there was a move to train ministers more effectively a matter going back to the question about the need for a seminary, paralleling dissenting academies, in the 1740s. Adam Clarke and others constantly stressed the need for change. Wesley had said that if a man stayed too long in a circuit he would bore people to death! He thought to make his Preachers read and study for five hours a day! One preacher said he had no taste for reading – “Contract a taste for it or return to your trade.” The desire for a seminary was part of a whole area of change in education, the law, medicine and the church. The move was from “status professionalism” to “occupational

professionalism” in which skill was more important than status. The ministry in all the churches was involved in the change. Wesleyans established what they called a “Theological Institution” at first at Hoxton, then at specially built colleges Didsbury, Manchester and Richmond, London in 1842 and 1843. Dr John Hannah, the theological tutor produced men of the calibre of William Arthur and William Burt Pope, the one to be dominant in world mission the other in theology. When it was suggested that Jabez Bunting, Secretary of the WMMS should be President of the Institution, Dr Samuel Warren who had supported the idea of a college, caused a minor schism even involving the High Court when he was suspended. The point was not just Bunting wanting more power which is doubtful but the vital link between ministerial training and overseas mission. The colleges produced a genuine brotherhood among ministers, perhaps for some making for far too much uniformity of style. The colleges were “connexional” not “party colleges” as in Anglicanism. This has been a factor in avoiding bitter party spirit. Frequent change of minister prevented the predominance of one style. Ministers learned, chameleon-like, how to tolerate diversity in circuits so long as a generous orthodoxy was exercised. The schisms and splits were over power not theology. But there were those in Wesleyanism and later in Primitive Methodism, who saw colleges as places which could curb evangelical zeal. In the Primitives’ case there was a schism in Sunderland by those who felt they were no longer the church of the people. Richmond College, significantly, from 1868 to 1885 trained only ministers who were to be overseas missionaries. Indeed the Missionary Society purchased the college. but the hiving off of future missionaries, attacked by Hugh Price Hughes was abandoned. J. E. Rattenbury felt that the colleges up to about 1900 represented Methodism’s too close in-breeding, not reflecting enough the changes in biblical interpretation and theology in a post-Darwinian world. Naughtily, he recalled asking Dr Marshall Randles how the Devil kept souls in hell from burning up. He was reminded of asbestos! After some doctrinal controversies – David Bebbington has illuminated the attempt to prevent George Jackson from being appointed to Didsbury. Agar Beet had similar difficulties at Richmond – Methodism was playing soon its full part in biblical scholarship.

Certainly, too, in the later nineteenth century the style of minister changed – more representative, less authoritarian. Preaching became more popular in style. Ministers had to rely more on personality than power. What would Jabez Bunting have thought of Morley Punshon? Here is a sound-bite. “He spoke with immense energy and force – feeling among the audience grew. Enthusiasm was awakened and gathered force as he went on. At last in one of the significant climaxes the vast congregation sprang simultaneously to their feet. Hats and handkerchiefs were waved sticks

and umbrellas were used in frantic pounding of the floor – such a tornado of applause swept through Exeter Hall...”

This is perhaps not entirely typical but new styles of Nonconformity were more than on the horizon. Punshon – like Spurgeon – had a style of Romanticism very different from Bunting or Adam Clarke, or John Wesley for that matter.

More significant changes were afoot. Firstly Conference in 1878 became representative rather than ministerial. The President of the Conference in that year

J H Rigg, was wholly behind the move. A “ministerial session” remained. It is now much reduced in power. This move made the union of the various Methodist bodies a clear possibility even if it took 50 years finally to be consummated with the United Methodist Church having been created in 1907. The first list of UMC circuits included China, followed by Chorley! Rigg was liberal in this area but conservative in that he fought very hard to keep the three year itinerancy as he felt it prevented ministers being dominated by wealthy laymen (which he thought was the case in independency – but there were wealthy laymen in Methodism too). What, said the sociologist David Martin would Methodism have been without “flour and flicks” – the Ranks, father and son and many more like “Imperial Perks” with William Hartley playing the same role in Primitive Methodism it was Hartley who secured A S Peake for the Primitive Methodist College in Manchester. He almost single-handed revolutionised the training and style of Primitive Methodist ministers, assuring them that they could be both evangelistic and liberal in their view of the Bible, of which, as a layman, he was a fine exemplar. The lay businessmen were able to support the Forward Movement linked with the belief of men like Hugh Price Hughes – that unless Methodism changed rapidly it was doomed. The Central Missions – Manchester, West London, Birmingham, Leeds to name a few – needed a very different style of minister from the three year itinerant. The “mission-men” like Hughes and Samuel Collier (1859-1921) at Manchester who was there for decades became managers and administrators of large staff – as many as 2500 lay volunteers in Manchester as well as maintaining a consistent style of weekly preaching embracing evangelism and social concern. That style was typified by Donald Soper in the next century – 36 years at Kingsway Hall. Also there was a new role for women in the Wesley Deaconess Order inaugurated by Dr Thomas B. Stephenson paralleled by the Sisters of the People in Manchester and those directed by Katherine Price Hughes in London. These orders were later merged with groups from the other Methodist churches, ultimately becoming what is now the Methodist Diaconal Order with women and men equally members though not a few still look back to

the Deaconess style with nostalgia. The role of Deaconesses overseas was very significant.

Thinking about ecclesiology cannot be ignored. Wesleyanism, having largely supported the establishment, found itself snubbed by the High Anglicans who denied the validity of its presbyterate as lacking “apostolic succession”. Benjamin Gregory and W B Pope asserted Methodism’s place in the Holy Catholic Church. Yet there was also a clear rejection of the earlier doctrine of Pastoral Supremacy the “living Wesley” and all that. In the very important Conference Report on the Church in 1908 largely the work of G G Findlay of Headingley College, Leeds, the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” is stated in a paragraph which appears in the Deed of Union at the behest of A S Peake undermining any attempt by “high Wesleyans” to maintain their style. *“Christ’s ministers in the Church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of His flock. Some are called and ordained to this sole occupation and have principal and directing part in these great duties but they have no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord’s people and they have no exclusive title to the preaching of the Gospel and the care of souls. For the sake of church order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office the ministers of the church are set apart by ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament”*

If Wesleyans thought some “Primitives” were too “low” and Primitives thought Wesleyans were too “high”, Peake and Scott Lidgett reached conclusive compromises.

Chaplaincy in the First World War opened up new opportunities of ministry including Primitive Methodists of the calibre of R F Wearmouth who became a distinguished historian. This was a factor in the beginning of new styles of ecumenism.

Another matter needs renewed analysis. In the 1890s Henry Lunn (1859-1929) a young minister, later knighted, pioneer of the Grindelwald Conversations on ecumenism, whose mentor was Hugh Price Hughes, claimed with Hughes, that the Methodist Society was becoming pompous, and somewhat out of touch with new needs. They claimed that Wesleyan missionaries in India were enjoying a mode of living isolating them from the Indian people, hindering mission. It was an unpleasant controversy as a result of which Lunn resigned from the Wesleyan ministry. Hughes was put under pressure by C H Kelly and others but, as usual, maintained his position, looking for more radical styles. He can also be called an Imperialist. He supported the Boer War – black South Africans were better under the British than under Boers or the Dutch! All this now needs a new approach as the Missionary Controversy was omitted in Allen Birtwhistle’s chapter in the History of Methodism. Hughes would have

approved of the style of the Bible Christian, Samuel Pollard, as shown in the remarkable story of the mission to the Miao people in China.

What was a minister like in the 1930-60 period? Was he still one of Wesley's "travelling Preachers"? What were his priorities? I take Beckminster Wolverhampton, my home church as one example. Built in 1926, it reflected new styles in Methodism. The minister when I was a teenager was a fine preacher. His theology was liberal evangelicalism, a mixture of the "Jesus of History" school of J A Findlay, his tutor at Manchester and the style of W E Sangster, his mentor earlier. He was a fine pastor, he trained church members with a rigorous six month course, he ran Youth Weekends where we had fun, learned about the faith, were challenged about vocation. Our youth club, started before MAYC and becoming part of it, was the way into the church for me and many. Could one say theologically that the ordained ministry existed to ensure the real presence of Christ in the church – audibly present in preaching, visibly present in the sacrament, effectively present in pastoral care and discipline? He was the enabler of the whole church's ministry. He was not primarily a "manager". He did not need to be a "money raiser" or to worry about property ~ able lay folk did that work well using their professional skills. A later minister, when sent to a Central Hall to seek to revive it, told me the change was traumatic. The minister was expected to do everything! He soon began proper delegation. In contrast a rural ministry where I began in 1956 was very different. I still cycled 3000 miles a year. It was back in the generation of taking meals with people in isolated villages. The lay people had to run things, the minister represented the wider church. We faced the crisis of the rural church in the rather pessimistic but significant *Report on Rural Methodism* of 1958.

New modes were emerging. Two reports on ordained ministry in 1960 and 1974 and a Home Mission Report of 1972 stated a fully representative doctrine of ordained ministry while not ignoring an ontological element – ordination is never repeated. Some sense of an "order" still remained. Methodist ministers were indeed "ministers of the Methodist Church under the direction of Conference" but were also "minister of the Holy Catholic Church of God". The Methodist minister is a priest in company with all God's faithful people but "not all priests are ministers"! Were all ministers still to be full-time in circuits save for college tutors, chaplains or the bureaucrats in the Departments (which became Divisions in 1973 and the Connexional Team in 1996)? By 1970 many worked in the "sectors" of society, from industrial and university chaplaincy – I was one of the first full time Methodist university chaplains in 1968 – to a man who returned to his job as a bus driver while remaining a presbyter. Quite what that said about the laity is not clear. Others became presbyters after retirement from other occupations or minister in local appointments or

non-stipendiary ministers. The “Second Journey”, as a Roman Catholic theologian called it, became normal. In the 1960s ministers became teachers; in the 1990s teachers became ministers. In Bolton we have ex-policemen! But did the minister become more a “manager” and a bureaucrat as lay numbers declined?

Women were finally ordained in 1974 with I think a much more positive response to them than in some Anglican circles. Two women Presidents – Baroness Richardson and Dr Christina Le Moignan have been appointed so far with 21 women lay or diaconal Vice-Presidents. Ministers from other Communion can become “accredited ministers”. More radical experiments produced “group” and “team” ministries as a Notting Hill London and Leeds. At first they were too “clerical” but are now very much more collaborative with increasing numbers of full-time lay workers. Collaborationism is the in-word together with contextual theology – though I think previous generations just got on adapting to their context and used their imaginativeness or sought to. Changes in worship style have also meant new styles of preaching – whether to the growth of the church we have yet to see. Membership in 1932 in Great Britain was 800 000. It is now under 300 000 (but the Labour Party has fewer members than when Ramsay MacDonald was Prime Minister). It is the age of “believing but not belonging” as Grace Davie stated in 1995.

The recent Report *What is a Presbyterian?* attempts to deal with the changes of the last generation and points to what in the horrid jargon are called “New Ways of being Church”. These include, of course, hundreds of Local Ecumenical Partnerships where clergy of all kinds learn to work together, foreshadowed by what is now the Queen’s Foundation at Birmingham the first fully ecumenical theological college established in 1970. This now has special facilities for exploring “Black Theology”.

Another factor is the relationship in Britain and in the world with other churches. Methodism has been prepared to accept episcopacy as long as it is communal and collegial, a sign not a guarantee of apostolicity but that is on hold at the moment where some think it ought to remain! It can still be argued that the Superintendent minister is rather like the “bishop” of the early church – more like them than Anglican diocesans. The recent covenant with the Church of England moves us into new areas like the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and those Lutheran Churches which do not have bishops – as distinct from the Porvoo Agreement with the Scandinavian Churches which do have them, where there is more or less complete acceptance of ordained ministers across the Lutheran-Anglican divide. Meissen does not go that far, but the Church of England has moved considerably in the last 30 years.

Finally what of Mission? The missionary was still a vital factor even after World War II. About a sixth of my contemporaries at Didsbury College, Bristol, in the 1950s went overseas. We saw them off with the traditional “Rolling off” ceremony as if they were going to their deaths in the Bay of Benin! In 1956 some of us said “We are all missionaries now in post-Christian Britain”. So we all got “rolled off”. That was symbolic of the change from “missionaries” to “mission partners” and the total autonomy of most of the overseas churches which are now the growing part of the Christian Church.

We are now moving from the post-Imperialist phase of historiography to a more positive evaluation of what K S Latourette called “the great century”. In a brilliant and massive recent book the *Birth of the Modern World*, Professor C A Bayley has sought to explode (among other “myths”) the secularization theory by showing that Christian mission had two effects – one the growth of new Christian churches but also the unintended revival of the other great world religions – especially Islam and Hinduism so that “religion-dominated states” are more obvious now than a hundred years ago. This cannot be ignored in any history of the missionary society. Britain now becomes a mission field not only by Christians but by Muslims. What would J R Mott with his slogan of the “evangelization of the world in our generation” make of that!

© *J M Turner 2004*