

THEOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY



RENEWAL AND MISSION



- ❖ What is renewal?
- ❖ How does renewal happen?
- ❖ What is mission?
- ❖ Who does the mission?

RENEWAL

- ❖ Wesley understood Methodism as a new thing even though he 'borrowed' structure and form from the Moravians.
- ❖ The most unique attribute is that it was a reform movement within the church.

“We look upon the Methodists in general, not as any particular party (this would exceedingly obstruct the Grand Design for which we conceive God has raised them up), but as living witnesses in and to every part of that Christianity which we preach, which is hereby demonstrated to be a real thing and visibly held out to all the world.”

- ❖ As such it was also unique because it was centred in Christian life and experience rather than a creed.

“[In] order to their union with us, we require no unity in opinions, or in modes of worship, but barely that they “Fear God and work righteousness,” ... Now this is utterly a new thing, unheard of in any other Christian community. In what church or congregation beside, throughout the Christian world, can members be admitted upon these terms, without any other conditions?... This is the glory of the Methodists, and of them alone! They are themselves no particular sect or party; but they receive those of all parties who “endeavour to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.”

- ❖ Despite the language Wesley used he continued to understand the Methodists as a people or society
- ❖ This made the Methodists an ecclesiola; an evangelical order within the Church of England
- ❖ So Methodism was understood to be authentic Christianity within the larger church
- ❖ So Wesley understood his societies to be churches

- ❖ Wesley's allowing dissenting churches into his societies, his work with the Moravians and other groups shows he understood the Church to be greater than just the Church of England - rather the universal church
- ❖ So, for Wesley renewal was to see: 1) authentic life and witness of visible local community of believers, and 2) universal body of Christ spread throughout the world (without which the local congregation was incomplete)

2 MODELS OF RENEWAL

- ❖ 1) Institutional view
- ❖ 2) Charismatic view

INSTITUTIONAL

- ❖ church is God's saving institution on earth
- ❖ Church history seen positively as unfolding drama of God's purposes
- ❖ structures of church are not fundamentally questioned
- ❖ Periods of decline stem from character of leaders

- ❖ institutional stability in face of decline, opposition, and weakness demonstrate glory and indestructibility of the church
- ❖ they reveal God's providence in the church as institution of salvation, i.e. papacy or preaching
- ❖ nothing fundamentally wrong with church so renewal means spiritual renewal of persons or general body of believers

- ❖ renewal = people returned to belief or action by church
- ❖ renewal begins with leaders and moves to all people
- ❖ So, renewal is viewed with suspicion as criticism of structures

- ❖ Renewal body will react either:
 - ❖ 1) become radical and leave or be forced out by institution
 - ❖ 2) lose vitality to point of no longer being a threat to institution
 - ❖ 3) become accommodated to institutional church

CHARISMATIC

- ❖ church must be in direct contact with God and have clear channel of his grace (charis) to have life and power
- ❖ church is spiritual organism/community
- ❖ institutional forms are viewed ambivalently or rejected

- ❖ history and tradition do not validate present form of church
- ❖ spiritual life is focus so history is evaluated if it contributed to or undermined the church's spiritual life
- ❖ attracted to NT primitive church - idealized
- ❖ seeking to restore to the primitive church picture

- ❖ focus on immediate experience brings it into conflict with institutional view because typically obstacles to renew are in the traditional and institutional forms
- ❖ so, forms must change or a renewed and virile form of community must be implanted so charismatic view can become the reality

- ❖ Same three options emerge for renewal movement:
- ❖ 1) form total separate body/sect
- ❖ 2) dry up and blow away
- ❖ 3) strike a deal with institutional church for legitimacy

MEDIATING PERSPECTIVE

- ❖ institutional church blind to gulf between church's profession and its possession - it underrates the truth of the charismatic claims
“Thus it finds itself in the unfortunate position of fighting in practice the very things it favours in theory.”

- ❖ charismatic have no sense of history (or ideological) and only see God's purposes with their side of renewal debate
- ❖ naive concerning institutional and sociological realities and blind to institutionalizing tendencies in their own movement
- ❖ experience leads to bizarre views - often why renewal folk burnout and seek liturgical worship

- ❖ However, both views have strengths
- ❖ Whatever church's state it still carries: scriptures, sacraments, and deposit of doctrinal truth (historical Christian DNA)
- ❖ Birth of renewal movement demonstrates spiritual life remains in old church
- ❖ This is where Wesley falls and believes

- ❖ charismatic view cannot be rejected - institutions decline and need renewal
- ❖ renewal must spring from renewed experience of God's grace
- ❖ stress on community and charismatic leadership points to problem areas in the institutional church
- ❖ Wesley combines both views to incorporate truth of both

- ❖ Mediating model needs to see both institutional church and renewal movements as valid
- ❖ This model expects renewal to arise and make genuine biblical and spiritual contributions to church's life
- ❖ Analogies: body, tree, vine, marriage, etc.
- ❖ “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse”

MARKS OF MEDIATING MODEL

- ❖ Movement 'rediscovers' the gospel; new dynamic of faith - experience alters perception of nature of faith, which leads to new model of gospel and church, i.e. paradigm shift (heart and power of the gospel)
- ❖ Movement exists as an ecclesiola; smaller more intimate expression of church within church - is itself true church, necessary to large church

- ❖ Movement uses form of small group structure; generally composed of a dozen or less meeting regularly once a week
- ❖ Movement has some structural link with institutional church; crucial for revitalizing impact without division
- ❖ Renewal structure is committed to unity, vitality, and wholeness of larger church; concerned with life from which it protrudes but moves to universal

- ❖ Renewal structure is mission-oriented; renewal of church and part witness to the world - stressing practical ethics combining faith and love, belief and everyday life
- ❖ Movement conscious of being distinct covenant-based community; restricted to community of people voluntarily committed to each other giving it the capacity to exercise discipline, even to point of exclusion of members, stresses koinonia

- ❖ *Movement provides context for rise, training, and exercise of new forms of ministry and leadership; emphasis on gifts of the Spirit and priesthood of believers*

“This consciousness combines with the natural need for leadership within the movement and the outward impulse of witness and service to produce both the opportunity and the enabling context for new forms of ministry and new leaders who arise not through the more restricted, established ecclesiastical channels, but through practical experience and the shared life of the group.”

- ❖ Members of movement remain in close daily contact with society, especially the poor; not cloister off
- ❖ Renewal structure maintains an emphasis on the Spirit and the Word as the basis of authority; stresses norm of scripture and life of the Spirit (danger of becoming legalistic or enthusiastic cult) - while (within limits) recognizes authority and traditions of institutional church

- ❖ Wesley recognizes that God does more with sin than merely forgives it - but could and would actually deliver us from it in this lifetime
- ❖ Wesley and his people were not naive of sin and it's grip
- ❖ Wesley gathered people into bands of 4 - 5 people who were honest with each other and finding deliverance from sin's power.

- ❖ Bands organized by besetting sins
- ❖ Goal of bands: deliverance that began in release from addiction (all sin is addictive) ending in release from 'selfism' resulting in self-abandoned, self-forgetful love of God and neighbour
- ❖ Conditions: 1) know person is loved and will continue to be cherished, 2) group could be trusted, and 3) transparent and truthful

MISSION

- ❖ 4 Themes for Mission
- ❖ 1) Image of God, 2) God's preceding grace, 3) salvation as healing, 4) perfecting Christian character

- ❖ Image of God; because men and women are made in the image of God they have a capacity to know God, being made for this purpose.
- ❖ Even with the fall and resulting depravity, by God's grace we can be restored to deep relationship with God.
- ❖ First word is Good News, not bad; You are made in the image of God, not you are a sinner.

- ❖ Without overlooking the sinfulness of sin - sin is not the first or last word - everyone is worth saving
- ❖ Preceding Grace (Prevenient); As benefit of Christ's atonement all creation is suffused with God's grace
- ❖ God is seeking to draw all to himself (missio dei); making it so all can respond to the gospel

- ❖ Must keep the distinction between preceding and justifying grace
- ❖ Salvation as Healing; from disease of sin.
- ❖ Atonement justification, resurrection new life (healing of sin)
- ❖ Salvation is holistic - all aspects of life

- ❖ Perfecting of Christian Character (maturing); perfect love of God and neighbour.
- ❖ Spirit is forming the character of Christ in us and in us as the church.
- ❖ key to church's effective witness: 1) goal is growing up into fullness of Jesus (body and member) and 2) fullness of the Spirit - deeper life