

Is the 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral' an accurate portrayal of Wesley's theological method? ¹

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In an article entitled 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley' (1985)² Outler argues that:

...we can see in Wesley a distinctive theological method, with *Scripture* as its pre-eminent norm but interfaced with *tradition*, *reason* and *Christian experience* as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in *Scripture*.³

It is Outler's contention that, in appealing to Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, Wesley developed the 'Anglican' theological method, which appealed only to Scripture, reason and tradition. Outler contends that 'It was Wesley's special genius that he conceived of adding "experience" to the traditional Anglican Triad, and thereby adding vitality without altering the substance.'⁴ This generalisation demonstrates that Outler's understanding of the theological context in which Wesley developed is heavily skewed.

Outler's belief that the Anglican triad was 'the Tradition within which Wesley took his stand' oversimplifies matters considerably. It is important to emphasise that the 'Anglican Triad' is a nineteenth century invention.⁵ Although it is frequently associated with the sixteenth century divine, Richard Hooker (1554-1600), it was the nineteenth century editor of Hooker's work, Francis Paget (1851-1911), who contended that Hooker made a threefold appeal to Scripture, reason and tradition. Paget writes:

Thus Hooker's appeal in things spiritual is to a threefold fount of guidance and authority to reason, Scripture, and tradition all alike of God, alike emanating from Him, the one original source of all light and power ... And in maintaining the rightfulness and the duty of thus appealing, Hooker rendered his highest service and did his most abiding work. For on equal

¹ I thank the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship for giving me the permission to republish this essay which forms the first part of the MSF Conference lecture: *Whither Methodist Theology Now: The Collapse of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Portsmouth: Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, 2010).

² Albert Outler, 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley,' in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1985), pp.7-18.

³ Outler, 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,' p.9.

⁴ Outler, 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,' p.10.

⁵ For a useful discussion of this point see: 'Scripture, Tradition and Reason: Hooker's Supposed Three Legged Stool,' <http://www.pbsusa.org/Articles/Hooker%27s%20stool.htm> [Accessed 1.1.2010].

loyalty to the unconflicting rights of reason, of Scripture, and of Tradition rest the distinctive strength and hope of the English Church.⁶

It is clear in the above that Paget (a contributor to *Lux Mundi*)⁷ believes Hooker, and indeed the Anglican Church, gives an 'equal loyalty' to Scripture, reason and tradition. This is not the case.

Hooker does not assert that Scripture, reason and tradition are equal. Had he done so he would have contradicted the Thirty Nine Articles (something he wasn't so keen on doing), which state that the Scriptures contain all things necessary to Salvation.⁸ Contrary to Paget's interpretation, Hooker rarely discusses Scripture, reason and tradition in this way. The nearest that he gets to any sort of triad is where he asserts that:

What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that first place both of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason over-rule all other inferior judgments whatsoever.⁹

Here, Hooker argues that Scripture is the most important source of revelation, reason the next and tradition the last. This clearly differentiates Hooker's position, from that of Paget's 'Anglican Triad.' Unfortunately, Outler considers that Paget is Hooker's best interpreter.¹⁰ Outler's belief, that the Quadrilateral is an innovative theological method

⁶Francis Paget, *An Introduction to the Fifth Book of Hooker's Treatise of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 2nd Edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1899]1907), p.284.

⁷Francis Paget, 'Incarnation and Sacraments,' in *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* ed. Charles Gore (London: John Murray, [1889] 1890), pp.405-436. *Lux Mundi* was an 'attempt to put the Catholic faith into its right relation to modern intellectual and moral problems.' p.vii.

⁸The Thirty Nine Articles (VI) state that: '*Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.*' Wesley would have held a view similar to this. For further discussion see: William J Abraham, 'The Epistemology of Conversion,' in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. K Collins (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon, 2001), pp.175-191, at p.180.

⁹Richard Hooker, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr Richard Hooker*, ed. I Walton, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Univeristy Press, 1850), I, p.446.

¹⁰In fact Outler misquotes Paget (who himself misinterprets Hooker). Paget does not state, as Outler presumes, that "'the distinctive strength of Anglicanism rests on its equal loyalty to the unconflicting rights of reason, Scripture and tradition.'" He writes that '...equal loyalty to the unconflicting rights of reason, of Scripture, and of tradition rest the distinctive strength and hope of the English Church.' Compare the following references: Outler, 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley,' 10 & Paget, *An Introduction*, p.284.

formulated on the basis of the Anglican triad, is based entirely upon Paget's mistake. As a result of this, Outler misinterprets Hooker and fails to understand the different kinds of Anglican influences upon the churchmanship of John Wesley.

Although Hooker is clearly one of the first and foremost of Anglican divines, one should not take him to be the sole representative of Anglican theological method, something Outler appears to do. It is clear that other divines of this period differ quite significantly. Hooker's teacher, John Jewel (1522-1571), gives far more weight to tradition than to reason.¹¹ Hooker's Puritan opponent, Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603), argues that Scripture is the 'only rule of all things which in this life may be done by men.'¹² Therefore it is clear that, while these writers appeal to Scripture, reason and tradition as resources for theological reflection, they emphasise the different sources of revelation in different ways. This difference of emphasis would develop, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, into three distinctive approaches to Anglican theology: that of the Caroline Divines, the Puritans, and the latitudinarians. It is within this ecclesial *mélange*, and not Paget's crass nineteenth century triadic conception of Anglicanism, that John Wesley's theological method and ecclesiology were forged.

The Influence of Puritanism via Susanna Wesley

It is important to emphasise that Puritanism began as a renewal movement within the Church of England. Several Anglican bishops were Puritans, including Edward Reynolds (1599-1676) and James Ussher (1581-1656), and the most influential of all Puritan theologians, William Perkins (1558-1602), was a member of the Church of England. An illustration of the theological method advocated by the Puritans may be seen in the Westminster Confession (1646):

The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of Councils, opinions of ancient writers, Doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.¹³

The above makes clear that the Puritans held Scripture, above tradition, as the complete 'rule of faith and life,' the final authority in the Church.¹⁴

¹¹M Perrott, 'Richard Hooker and the Problem of Authority in the Elizabethan Church,' in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 49 (1998), pp.29-60, at 37n21.

¹²Rudolph Almasy, 'The Purpose of Richard Hooker's Polemic,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39 (1978) pp.251- 270, at 252.

¹³*The Confession of Faith, agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (Downpatrick: S Cummins, 1838), 1.10 (pp.12-13).

¹⁴*The Confession of Faith*, 1.10 (pp.12-13).

The central figure in the transmission of the Puritan Tradition to John Wesley was his mother: Susanna Wesley (1669-1742).¹⁵ Although Susanna was a 'loyal Anglican' convert she remained a daughter of dissent.¹⁶ Her father, Dr Samuel Annesley (1620-1696), was a well known Puritan divine,¹⁷ and the Annesley home was an outstanding example of a Puritan household where 'demanding educational standards accompanied disciplined devotional and moral training.'¹⁸ Thus, Harrison contends that, while the 'Epworth Parsonage had a High Church atmosphere,' it was 'essentially a Puritan home.'¹⁹ While Monk is less enthusiastic regarding 'the Puritan nature of Susanna's personality,' he acknowledges that 'the general character of the [Wesley] home with its emphasis on genuine piety, biblical training, and rigid discipline ... is strikingly similar to puritan prototypes.'²⁰ Therefore, while John Wesley gave his explicit appreciation for the Puritan tradition only after Aldersgate, it is clear that he was suckled on the milk of Nonconformity. According to Newton:

Susanna Wesley incarnated many of the values of Puritanism, bred them in her children, and so transmitted them to Methodism, where they formed part of the rich amalgam which was the result of John Wesley's creative work for English Christianity.²¹

The effect of Susanna's Christian personality upon her impressionable son was life-long. John's conception of the Christian life was understood in the Puritan terminology of 'disciplined living,' moral 'rigorism' and 'method.'²² Susanna's accent on personal holiness permeated every aspect of her son's theology. It influenced John's stringent application of rigorous ethical norms to the Methodist converts, his assiduous desire for Christian Perfection, and (possibly) his reception of the early Christian Tradition.²³

The Influence of Samuel Wesley and the Caroline Divines

The Caroline Divines (from *Carolus*, the Latin form of Charles) lived during the reigns of Charles I (1625-1649) and Charles II (1660-1685). Their writings form a classic expression of the reverence Anglicanism has for the tradition of the undivided Church of Antiquity.²⁴ Their theological method, the *via media*, centred upon the belief that

¹⁵John Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1968), p.15.

¹⁶John Newton, *Methodism and the Puritans* (London: Dr. Williams's Library, 1964), p.2.

¹⁷Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, p.19.

¹⁸Robert Monk, *John Wesley His Puritan Heritage* (London: Epworth Press, 1966), pp.21.

¹⁹Archibald Harold & Walter Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937), p.186.

²⁰Monk, *John Wesley*, pp.22-23.

²¹Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, p.15.

²²*Ibid.*, p.16.

²³Monk, *John Wesley*, pp. 152-153, 168.

²⁴For an excellent discussion see: Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: University Press, 2009).

doctrines unanimously attested by the early Church, whether by consent of Fathers, or Councils, should be received as coming from the Apostles. It is important to emphasise that these writers interpreted Scripture through the lens of Antiquity. They believed that the universal beliefs of the primitive Church should be held as a standard for doctrinal orthodoxy. While there was disagreement as to when the early Church divided, the principle governing this theological method is that, prior to schism, the undivided Church of Antiquity was able to distinguish true belief from error. The following quotation of Thomas Ken (1637-1711) provides a useful illustration of this position:

As for my religion, I die in the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Faith professed by the whole Church before the disunion of East and West; and, more particularly, in the Communion of the Church of England, as it stands distinguished from both Papal and Protestant innovation, and adheres to the doctrine of the Cross.²⁵

As is clear from the above, Bishop Ken believed true religion to be that which was approved by the undivided Church of Antiquity. It is clear that John Wesley's exposure to the writings of Ken, and other Caroline Divines, enabled him to understand the importance of the early Christian tradition. Although Heitzenrater struggles to find sufficient quantitative evidence to show that Wesley was grounded in the writings of Antiquity, he considers that it would be utterly foolish to 'dismiss the influence of the early Church in his life and thought.'²⁶ It is through *Anglican* writers, 'who are themselves plumbing the depths' of antiquity, that primitive Christianity gained a hold on Wesley, writers he was encouraged to read by his father.²⁷

Samuel Wesley senior (1662-1735) was to be the channel through which John became saturated with the Anglican culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.²⁸ Texts that John was encouraged to read were Samuel's *Young Student's Library* (1692) and his *Advice to a Young Clergyman* (1735).²⁹ Both these works contain extracts from the Caroline divines, including George Bull (1634-1710) and William Beveridge (1637-1708), as well as the following Church Fathers; Ambrose (c.338-397), Eusebius (c.263-339), Athanasius (c.293-373), Chrysostom (c.347-407), Augustine (c.354-

²⁵W. L. Bowles, *The Life of Thomas Ken*, 2 Vols. (London: John Murray, 1831), II, p.34.

²⁶Richard Heitzenrater, 'John Wesley's Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers,' in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S T Kimbrough (Crestwood, NY.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), pp.25-32, at p.31.

²⁷Heitzenrater, 'John Wesley's Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers,' p.31. For an excellent discussion of the influence of this group on Wesley see: Cary Balzer, *John Wesley's Developing Soteriology and the Influence of the Caroline Divines* (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 2005).

²⁸Ted A Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* (Nashville, TN.: Kingswood Books, 1991), p.23.

²⁹Samuel Wesley, *Young Student's Library, containing Extracts and Abridgements of the most Valuable Books Printed in England and the Foreign Journals...By the Athenian Society* (London, 1692); *Advice to a Young Clergyman* (London: C Rivington, 1735).

430) and Jerome (c. 347-420).³⁰ Samuel's work exhibits an appreciation of the early Christian tradition characteristic of Anglicanism during this period. Samuel had been a member of the same college as Bishop Bull, and was clearly influenced by him.³¹ Bull placed considerable stress on the importance of tradition. For example:

...in deciding on controversies of faith or practice she has always kept this point fixed and established, (and upon this basis she wished the British Reformation to rest,) that the first authority should be given to the Scriptures, and, after them, the second to the Bishops, Martyrs, and ecclesiastical writers of the first ages.³²

Therefore, Samuel encouraged John to interpret the history of the Primitive Church using the Caroline tradition.

The fact that, between 1711 and 1734, the writings of the Caroline Divines dominated John's reading would suggest that he heeded his father's advice.³³ Wesley's reference to the Caroline Divines in his *Essay upon the Stationary Fasts* (c. 1733) demonstrates the important role these writers played in his theology:³⁴

[Gunning] 'Reason; and experience; and the direction of all wise men in the Church of God ancient and modern, the house of wisdom: Councils; reverend Fathers and writers; and our Church in particular; have directed and commanded us not to interpret Scripture in things of public concernment to the Church's rule of believing and doing, but as we find it interpreted by the Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church, as they had received it from those before them. For that the leaving of every man to make any thing of any text, upon any device out of his own head, to the founding any new and strange Doctrine or practice, as necessary there from, or to the opposing of any constantly received Doctrine or practice of the Church universal, (for in other matters they may happily with leave quietly abound in their own sense,) leaves all bold innovators which can but draw away disciples after them, to be as much lawgivers to the Church by their uncontrollable law-interpreting, as any pope or enthusiast can or need pretend to be; and hath been, and ever will be to the end of the world, the ground of most heresies and schisms brought into the Church by men who,

³⁰Campbell, *John Wesley*, pp.24-25.

³¹*Ibid.*, p.26.

³²George Bull, *Examen Censurae: Or, an Answer to Certain Strictures on a Book Entitled: Harmonia Apostolica* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844), p.234.

³³V H H Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1961), pp.305ff.

³⁴John Wesley wrote an *Essay upon the Stationary Fasts* which has been lost. However, a quotation of Wesley's *Essay* is made in the appendix to Thomas Deacon, *A Compleat Collection of Devotions: both Publick and Private: Taken from the Apostolical Constitutions, the Ancient Liturgies, and the Common Prayer book of the Church of England* (London: 1734).

departing from the teaching and stable interpretation of the Church, in their own instability and science falsely so called, pervert the Scriptures to their own and others' (their obstinate followers) destruction.'³⁵

Wesley's citation of Peter Gunning (1614-1684), a bishop and theologian in the Church of England of the seventeenth century (the era of 'classical Anglicanism'), demonstrates his agreement with the Caroline Tradition of reading the Bible. As illustrated in this extract from Gunning, the Caroline Divines maintained that we should interpret Scripture as the 'Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church...received it from [the Apostles] before them.' Although Gunning's writing is little known today, his work is representative of the Caroline reliance upon Scripture and tradition. Wesley's reference to Gunning shows his acceptance of the idea that Scripture should be interpreted through the lens of undivided Antiquity; the idea being that those 'earliest ages had all the helps of Scripture that we can pretend to now, but withal far more helps for understanding them than can be pretended at this distance.'³⁶

Wesley's time in Georgia also shows that he gave considerable value to tradition. A letter written at the beginning of his mission to America (October, 1735) demonstrates that he saw Georgia 'as a laboratory to implement his vision of primitive Christianity.'³⁷ While commentators argue that Wesley's chief concern was to save his own soul,³⁸ Geordan Hammond's work makes clear that Wesley 'saw his mission as one geared predominantly toward reviving the apostolic faith ... among the Indians.'³⁹ Wesley writes:

I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathens. They have no comments to construe away the text, no vain philosophy to corrupt it, no luxurious, sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths, to reconcile earthly-mindedness and faith, the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. They have no party, no interest to serve, and are therefore fit to receive the gospel in its simplicity. They are as little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God. And consequently they shall know of every Doctrine I preach, whether it be of God. From these, therefore, I hope to learn the purity of that faith which was once delivered to the saints, the genuine sense and

³⁵Peter Gunning, *The Paschal or Lent Fast, Apostolical and Perpetual* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1845), p.18.

³⁶Henry Dowell (1641-1711) cited in Deacon, *An Appendix*, p.69ff.

³⁷Geordan Hammond, 'John Wesley's Mindset at the Commencement of his Georgia Sojourn: Suffering and the Introduction of Primitive Christianity to the Indians,' in *Methodist History*, 47/1 (2008), pp.16-25, at 21.

³⁸Leslie F. Church, *Oglethorpe: A Study in Philanthropy in England and Georgia* (London: Epworth Press, 1932), p.195.

³⁹Geordan Hammond, 'High Church Anglican Influences on John Wesley's conception of Primitive Christianity, 1732-1735,' in *Anglican and Episcopal History* 78/2 (2009), pp.174-207, at 175.

full extent of those laws which none can understand that mind earthly things.⁴⁰

Thus Wesley intended to provide the ‘primitive non-Christian’ Indians with a truly primitive Christianity.⁴¹

Wesley clearly believed that ‘primitive Christianity could be restored by renewing the precise doctrine, liturgy, discipline, and devotional practice of the primitive Church.’⁴² He gave his full approval to Beveridge’s suggestion that devotional practices which were used universally in the ancient Church should be binding upon contemporary Christians.⁴³ Wesley’s *Manners of the Ancient Christians* illustrates this point. Here he gives considerable attention to the ‘Fasts of the Antients:’

The Fasts of the Antients were either yearly, as that of *Lent*, which they observ’d daily ‘till Six in the Evening; or Weekly, as those of *Wednesday* and *Friday*, which they observ’d ‘till Three in the Afternoon ... in Remembrance of his Passion: Because on *Wednesday* the Council against Him was held, and on *Friday* He was put to Death. During the whole of *Lent*, many eat only Bread and Water ...⁴⁴

While Wesley greatly esteemed every aspect of ‘the primitive Fathers, the writers of the first three centuries,’⁴⁵ his attention was focused on the devotional and liturgical practices of the early Church.

While Samuel had hoped that John would use the Primitive Church conservatively, to justify the doctrines and practices of the Anglican Church, his son’s fixation upon the liturgical and devotional practices of the early Christians was clearly influenced by his association with the Non-jurors.⁴⁶ After the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which deposed the Roman Catholic James II (1633-1701) and installed the Protestant William III (1650-1702) as king, the Non-jurors evolved as a group of

⁴⁰Letter to John Burton (Oct 10th 1735), cited in F Baker, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), XXV, pp.439ff.

⁴¹Geordan Hammond, *Restoring Primitive Christianity: John Wesley and Georgia, 1735 – 1737* (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 2008).

⁴²Geordan Hammond, ‘Versions of Primitive Christianity: John Wesley’s Relations with the Moravians in Georgia, 1735-1737,’ in *Journal of Moravian History* 6 (2009), pp.31-60, at 31.

⁴³William Beveridge, *The Theological Works of William Beveridge*, 11 Vols (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847) X, pp.473-489.

⁴⁴J Wesley, *Manners of the Ancient Christians: Extracted From a French Author* (Bristol: Printed by Felix Farley, 1749), p.14.

⁴⁵John Wesley ‘Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church,’ cited in R Davies, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon, 1989), IX, p.538.

⁴⁶It is possible that Susanna’s emphasis on personal holiness may have stimulated this preoccupation with the behaviour of the early Christians. However, while it is conceivable that his reception of Christian Antiquity was funnelled through the puritan sensibilities he had inherited from his mother, it is clear that Susanna’s connection with the Non-jurors may have impacted him also.

Anglican clergy who refused to take an oath to William, believing that it would violate their oath to the previous and lawful monarch.⁴⁷

In order to justify their position, the Non-jurors cultivated a ‘burning desire’⁴⁸ for the ‘doctrine, discipline, and practice of the primitive Church.’⁴⁹ Susanna Wesley herself had refused to look upon William as the lawful sovereign. In response to this, Samuel, a fervent supporter of the king, threatened never to ‘touch’ her again.⁵⁰ In her distress Susanna wrote to a prominent Non-juror, George Hickes (1642-1715), in order to ask for guidance concerning her husband’s behaviour. Hickes’ commitment to the Non-jurors had led him to form a separate Church, arguing that the clergy who pledged allegiance to William III were in a state of schism.⁵¹ Susanna’s association with Hickes illustrates the depth of her Non-juring opinions, and it is conceivable that this intensity had an influence upon John’s ‘participation in the Non-juror’s attempt to revive the primitive liturgy of the early Church.’⁵²

After Hickes death (1715) the Non-jurors split.⁵³ Disagreement arose as to whether the 1549 Prayer Book was a more ‘accurate expression of primitive Eucharistic practice than the revised Prayer Book of 1662.’⁵⁴ Wesley was directly connected with Thomas Deacon (1697-1753), a member of the group favouring Edward’s Prayer Book called the ‘essentialist’ or ‘usager’ Non-jurors. The usagers believed that the ‘primitive Tradition provided an avenue from which they could critique contemporary Anglican practice’ and thus used ‘ancient Tradition as a justification to restore primitive practices they believed were binding on all Christians.’⁵⁵ A reference to Wesley, in Deacon’s *Compleat Collection of Devotions*, demonstrates his affinity with this group.⁵⁶

Hunter argues that the influence of this group on Wesley was ‘wider, deeper, and more lasting than even yet has been recognised.’⁵⁷ However, it is clear that, after the scandal his views caused in Savannah, Wesley’s prejudices began to ‘melt.’⁵⁸ On his way back to England Wesley concluded that he had given Antiquity too much authority:

⁴⁷For a useful introduction see: Thomas Lathbury, *A History of the Nonjurors: Their Controversies and Writings, with Remarks on Some of the Rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Pickering, 1845).

⁴⁸G Hammond, ‘High Church Anglican Influences,’ p.186.

⁴⁹G Hammond, ‘John Wesley’s Mindset,’ in *Methodist History*, 47:1 (2008), pp.16-25, at 16.

⁵⁰Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, p.87.

⁵¹Ibid., pp.86-96.

⁵²G Hammond, ‘High Church Anglican Influences,’ at p.180.

⁵³Frederick Hunter, *John Wesley and the Coming Comprehensive Church* (London: Epworth Press, 1968), pp.13-14

⁵⁴G Hammond, ‘High Church Anglican Influences,’ p.187.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp.189-190.

⁵⁶John Wesley, cited in Thomas Deacon, *An Appendix*.

⁵⁷Hunter, *John Wesley*, p.10

⁵⁸A B Lawson, *John Wesley and The Christian Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1963), p.16.

I bent the bow too far the other way: 1. By making Antiquity a co-ordinate rather than subordinate rule with Scripture. 2. By Admitting several doubtful writings, as undoubted evidences of Antiquity. 3. By extending Antiquity too far, even to the middle or the end of the fourth century. 4. By believing more practices to have been universal in the ancient Church than ever they were so.⁵⁹

While Wesley's views began to change at this point, his 'homeward voyage in 1738' does not, as Wedgwood argues, mark 'the conclusion of his High-Church period.'⁶⁰ While it is clear that Wesley's exposure to the Moravians and the ministry of Peter Böhler (1712-1775) led to his Aldersgate experience,⁶¹ his theology and his conception of the Christian ministry continued to be influenced by writers in the Anglican Tradition.⁶² Nevertheless it is clear that Wesley's reflection on his experiences in Georgia were the beginning of a deeper faith and a latitudinarian attitude toward ecclesiastical order.

The Influence of latitudinarianism

From 1738 onwards it seems that Wesley was drawn to latitudinarian conceptions of ecclesiology and doctrine.⁶³ The latitudinarians were generally Arminian in their theological outlook, possessed a liberal attitude toward issues pertaining to Church government, and placed considerable emphasis on religious tolerance. The theology of the earliest latitudinarians was influenced significantly by the proceedings of the Council of Dordt (1618-1619).⁶⁴ Here Dutch Calvinists sentenced Arminian Christians, such as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), to life imprisonment and even death. The Council, which defined five point Calvinism, is a paradigmatic example of religious

⁵⁹John Wesley, cited in R P Heitzenrater, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN.: Abingdon, 1988) XVIII, p.213.

⁶⁰Julia Wedgwood, *John Wesley and the Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (London: MacMillan, 1870), p.140.

⁶¹It cannot be doubted that the Moravians 'exercised an incalculable influence over John Wesley's spirituality... Whether or not they had any influence over him *ecclesiastically* is another matter.' Lawson, *John Wesley*, p.37.

⁶²'Explicit grounding in the life and thought of the early Church was evident in ... the Holy living tradition of the ... German pietists ... that he read and admired.' Heitzenrater, 'John Wesley's Reading of and References to the Early Church Fathers,' p.31.

⁶³ According to Griffin, it is the general convention of historians that the term latitudinarian, when used with a lower case initial can be used with a wider reference to incorporate groups such as the Cambridge Platonists, the Tew Circle and others. In contrast, when the term Latitudinarian is used with an upper case initial, it is assigned only to the group surrounding John Tillotson. We will follow Griffin and this generally received practice here.

⁶⁴The earliest latitudinarians, including John Hales, Henry Hammond and William Chillingworth were called 'The Circle of Great Tew.' They met at the home of Lucius Cary (c. 1610-1643), Lord Falkland.

intolerance.⁶⁵ This religious bigotry had a profound effect on the latitudinarian John Hales (1584-1656) who, after attending this Council, returned to England imbued with ideas of toleration and principles of religious freedom.⁶⁶

Grotius, who was imprisoned for his Arminian stance, had attempted to determine the essential and inessential elements of Christian Doctrine and had advocated tolerance concerning the inessential.⁶⁷ Like Grotius, latitudinarians such as John Hales attempted to identify the fundamentals of Christianity on which all Christians could agree.⁶⁸ Hales rebuffs those who would make inessential things essential to the faith because he fears doing such will perpetuate schism. Likewise Henry Hammond's (1605-1660) work *On Fundamentals* (1654) tried to find the essentials on which Christians should agree, and may be seen as another example of this Grotian influence in the early latitudinarians.⁶⁹ Other latitudinarians, including William Chillingworth (1602-1644), thought it ridiculous to condemn others for not sharing the same interpretation of obscure passages of Scripture.⁷⁰

It is clear that this latitudinarian emphasis on tolerance, with regard to controversial doctrinal issues, bears considerable resemblance to Wesley's Sermon on *The Catholic Spirit* (1755).⁷¹ Here Wesley's resolve to work with all Christians, even if he differed from them in some doctrinal matters, is most certainly influenced by seventeenth century latitudinarianism.⁷² While Wesley explicitly denies that *The Catholic*

⁶⁵Henry Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), pp.37-39.

⁶⁶Alasdair I C Heron, 'Arminianism,' in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. E Fahlbusch, G W Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1998), pp.128-129, at 128.

⁶⁷For example see: Hugo Grotius, *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, trans. J Clarke (London: William Baynes, 1829).

⁶⁸Ronald Walter Harris, *Clarendon and the English Revolution* (Palo Alto, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1983), pp.16-17. Also see: W M Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (Oxford: University Press, 1988), p.84.

⁶⁹See Henry Hammond, *The Miscellaneous Theological Works of Henry Hammond: Containing: Of the Reasonableness of the Christian Religion; Of Fundamentals; of Schism; And a Paraenesis*, ed. N Pocock, 2 Vols. (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1849), II, pp.188-189. Also See: Trevor Henry Aston, Nicholas Tyacke, *The History of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: University Press, 1984), p.599.

⁷⁰William Chillingworth, *The Works of William Chillingworth*, 3 Vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1838), I, pp.230-231; John Locke, *The Works of John Locke*, 12 edtn, 9 Vols. (London: C and J Rivington, 1824), V, pp.56-57.

⁷¹John Wesley, *Standard Sermons: Consisting of Forty-Four Discourses* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), pp.442-457.

⁷²When Wesley criticises 'speculative latitudinarianism' he refers to the heterodox latitudinarians of the eighteenth century. I am suggesting that Wesley was influenced by seventeenth century latitudinarianism. The seventeenth century latitudinarians remained orthodox whilst emphasising the reasonableness of Christianity. However, eighteenth century deism was caused by the breakdown of the latitudinarian theological method. Griffin argues that 'the Latitudinarianism of [17th] century ... combined orthodoxy with a thorough-going rationalism. This combination was both tenuous and short-lived ...' deteriorating at around 1690. Griffin maintains that, prior to this 'disintegration,' latitudinarians did not advocate heterodox views. For further discussion see: Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century*, p.47; Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.25.

Spirit is ‘speculative latitudinarianism,’⁷³ Rupp’s contention that ‘there was always more of the latitudinarian about John Wesley ... than we always care to discern’ suggests that Wesley ‘doth protest too much.’⁷⁴ Several of Wesley’s statements reinforce this interpretation. In his *Character of a Methodist* (§1) he states that: ‘As to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.’⁷⁵ In his *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* (§2) he writes that: ‘Orthodoxy, or right opinions, is at best but a slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part at all.’⁷⁶ Furthermore, Wesley’s attempts to secure unity on essentials with other evangelicals, and his ‘Caution against Bigotry’ are clear indications of a *latitudinarian spirit*.⁷⁷ It is demonstrable from his writings that Wesley’s ecclesiological practice was influenced considerably by latitudinarian Anglicanism.⁷⁸ Wesley had read Edward Stillingfleet’s (1635-1699) *Irenicum* (1662), which he said convinced him that, originally, ‘Bishops and Presbyters were of the same “order” and therefore as a presbyter he had the right to ordain.’⁷⁹ He writes:

Every presbyter and presbyters did ordain indifferently, and thence arose schisms: thence the liberty was restrained and reserved peculiarly to some persons who did act in the several presbyteries ... without whose presence no ordination by the Church was to be looked on as regular. The main controversy is, when this restraint began, and by whose act; whether by any of the apostles, or only by the prudence of the Church itself ... But in order to our peace, I see no such necessity of deciding it, both parties granting that in the Church such a restraint was laid on the liberty of ordaining presbyters; and the exercise of that power may be restrained still, granting it to be radically and intrinsically in them. So that this controversy is not such as should divide the Church.⁸⁰

From reading Stillingfleet, Wesley concluded that while episcopacy had some justification in the New Testament, no form of Church government was prescribed ‘as of divine ordinance.’⁸¹

⁷³John Wesley, *Standard Sermons*, p.453ff.

⁷⁴Gordon Rupp, *Methodism in Relation to Protestant Tradition* (London: Epworth Press, 1954),p.18.

⁷⁵John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, §1, cited in G R Cragg, ed. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975)XI, pp.22-23.

⁷⁶John Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, §2, cited in Cragg, ed. *Works of John Wesley*, XI, p.22.

⁷⁷John Wesley, *Standard Sermons*, pp.428-441; Hunter, *John Wesley*, p.77.

⁷⁸For an excellent discussion of the influence of Edward Stillingfleet upon Wesley’s conception of the ministry see: Lawson, *John Wesley*, pp.59-98.

⁷⁹Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.292.

⁸⁰Edward Stillingfleet, *Irenicum: A Weapon Salve for the Church’s Wounds* (Philadelphia, PA.: M Sorin, 1842), pp.300-301.

⁸¹Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p.295.

It is also possible that seventeenth century latitudinarians were the predominant source of John Wesley's Arminianism.⁸² Samuel Wesley often quoted the works of Grotius and encouraged John to read the works of Henry Hammond.⁸³ Whether or not Samuel Wesley was first introduced to Grotius via Hammond, it is clear that the Arminianism of his son 'has little to do with the academic writings of Jacob Arminius.'⁸⁴ Keefer argues that Wesley's 'intense emotional vehemence against Calvinism is better understood in terms of seventeenth century English history than it is in strictly theological terms.'⁸⁵ This is amply demonstrated in the latitudinarian materials selected for inclusion in the Arminian Magazine.⁸⁶

It was noted earlier that Outler considers that the originality of Wesley's theological method is that he 'conceived of adding "experience" to the traditional Anglican triad.'⁸⁷ The notion that Wesley was the first Anglican to incorporate experience into his theological method is erroneous. The latitudinarian John Locke (1632-1704) did this half a century before Wesley. In fact, the composition of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was motivated by the breakdown of *Sola Scriptura*, and the resultant standstill on 'the principles of morality and revealed religion.'⁸⁸ Both John and Susanna Wesley were familiar with Locke's work.⁸⁹ Locke's attempt to establish knowledge upon experience was an attempt to prevent the mayhem that was caused in the seventeenth century by conflicting interpretations of Scripture.⁹⁰

In a manner similar to other latitudinarians, Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) tried to simplify the gospel by reducing it to essentials upon which all Christians could agree.⁹¹ Therefore, while it is clear that Wesley was influenced most

⁸²For an excellent discussion see: McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*.

⁸³McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, pp.77, 94.

⁸⁴Gordon Rupp, *Methodism in Relation to Protestant Tradition* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), p.20.

⁸⁵L Keefer, 'Characteristics of Wesley's Arminianism' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1987), 88-100, at 90.

⁸⁶For example see: John Wesley, ed., *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*, 14 Vols.(London: Fry, Para more, et.al., 1778-91),I,v.

⁸⁷Outler, 'The Quadrilateral in John Wesley,' p.10.

⁸⁸James Gibson, 'John Locke', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 19 (1933), 16. 'It is not implausible to see [Locke's] epistemological deliberations and his discussion of the reasonableness of Christianity as directly rooted in the inability of English Christians to solve the problems which divided them by appeal to the Canonical proposals in hand.' William J Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p.219.

⁸⁹Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2003), pp.14, 21.

⁹⁰Several commentators argue that it was in the aftermath of the failure of *Sola Scriptura* - to act as a secure basis for Christian Doctrine - that Locke (like other latitudinarians) proposed alternative criterion. For discussion on this point see: Henry G Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); Hans Aarsleff, 'Locke's Influence,' *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), p.254; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996).

⁹¹Cragg states that the title of Locke's, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* 'epitomizes the basic conviction of the age' in which 'rationalism...was an approach' to the problems of religion, an attempt to solve its disputes.' G R Cragg, *The Church and the Age of Reason 1648-1789* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p.159.

considerably by his experience at Aldersgate,⁹² Brantley is correct when he argues that it was the 'Lockean language of experience' which enabled Wesley to 'raise his ineffable experience of grace to graceful and cogent expressions of methodology.'⁹³ From this it would appear that John Wesley's exposure to the writings of seventeenth century latitudinarian thinkers considerably influenced his conception of ecclesiology, tolerance, religious experience and Arminianism.

Conclusion

From the above it is clear that Wesley's theology is not a development of Paget's make believe 'Anglican triad.' Whilst it is true that Wesley's theology gave value to Scripture, tradition, experience and reason, the emphasis he gave to these four sources of revelation varied according to the different Anglican parties. The Puritan influence on Wesley would emphasise the canon of Scripture and the importance of holiness. The influence of the Caroline Divines and the Non-jurors would lead Wesley to give considerable attention to the doctrines and devotional practices of the early Church. Finally, a latitudinarian emphasis on tolerance provided Wesley with a 'Catholic Spirit' and a liberal view of ecclesiastical orders. Locke provided Wesley with the theoretical tools needed to explore the methodological significance of Aldersgate for theological enquiry. Stillingfleet liberated Wesley from traditional conceptions of ecclesiology and enabled him to pursue irregular forms of Church government. The way in which Wesley utilised the different sources of revelation was influenced by the different parties within Anglicanism.⁹⁴

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⁹²For an excellent discussion of the epistemological significance of Aldersgate see: William J Abraham, *Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and The Foundations of Christian Belief* (Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2010).

⁹³Richard Brantley, *Locke, Wesley, and the Method of English Romanticism* (Gainesville, FL.: University of Florida Press, 1984), pp.22-23.

⁹⁴I want to thank the Revd Ben Haslam for his inspiration and for his constant encouragement.

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