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SCHISM AND THE SPIRIT IN HUGH BOURNE'S THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

It is normally argued that theological issues were not at stake in the separation of the Primitive Methodist Connexion from Wesleyan Methodism. While it is true that the flashpoint issues were methodological, there were underlying theological differences that contributed to the schism. Primitive Methodist co-founder Hugh Bourne had a pneumatocentric theology that prioritized the personal work of the Holy Spirit over the Spirit's work through the community. His Spirit-centred perspective led the Primitive Methodists to a more participatory and egalitarian understanding of the church, but offered little reason to resist separation from Wesleyan Methodism when conflict arose. Keywords: Hugh Bourne, Primitive Methodism, Holy Spirit, church, schism

The Primitive Methodist Connexion was founded near the beginning of a fractious era of British Methodist history. For seven decades following Wesley's death, Methodism in Britain splintered into a variety of ecclesial bodies, most of which were eventually reunited. Several significant studies of these divisions were written during the height of mid-twentieth-century ecumenical fervour.¹

1. See, for example, John Kent, *Jabez Bunting, the Last Wesleyan: A Study in the Methodist Ministry After the Death of John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1955); Reginald Kissack, *Church or No Church? A Study of the Development of the Concept of Church in British Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1964); John Kent, *The Age of Disunity* (London: Epworth Press, 1966); Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber, 1968); John C. Bowmer, *Pastor and People: A Study of Church and Ministry in Wesleyan Methodism from the Death of John Wesley (1791) to the Death of Jabez Bunting (1858)* (London: Epworth Press, 1975).

Much of the research into the theological aspects of these divisions has focused on the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion and its emerging theology of ministry. Revivalist offshoots from the Wesleys have not received as much attention. Although they were not the first Methodist schism, the Primitive Methodists would grow to become the second largest Methodist body in Britain. As such, the Primitive Methodists are an important case for understanding the emerging tensions in early nineteenth-century Methodism.

Methodological differences were the most obvious issues at stake in the separation of Primitive Methodism from Wesleyan Methodism, notably the controversy of the introduction of American-style camp meetings. Following the mid-twentieth-century work of Robert Wearmouth, much of the historical scholarship on Primitive Methodism has focused on its significance in relation to democratization and the empowerment of the working class.² While such work has proven valuable, there is a need to further explore the theological underpinnings of Methodist revivalism. Indeed, it is sometimes suggested that theology was not at stake in the separation of Primitive Methodism, nor indeed in any of the divisions in early nineteenth-century Methodism. Writing in 1972, Stuart Mews claimed, 'On the question of methodist [*sic*] doctrine, recent historians have either failed to consider the possibility of doctrinal dissent and theological confusion or have asserted that the great strength of Methodism lay in the consensus reached in theology.'³ More recently, John Tomlinson wrote that the early Primitive Methodists 'were expelled from the Wesleys not because of a difference of doctrine, but rather because of unacceptable practices, chiefly their own involvement in camp meetings.'⁴ It is certainly true that there were no overt doctrinal differences between the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodist Connexions, and no theological controversy occasioned

2. See the summary of Primitive Methodist historiography in Sandy Calder, *The Origins of Primitive Methodism* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016), 15–49.

3. Stuart Mews, 'Reason and Emotion in Working-Class Religion, 1794–1824', in Derek Baker, ed., *Schism, Heresy and Religious Protest*, Studies in Church History, 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 366. In support he notes that Currie makes no mention of theological controversy prior to 1870, and cites John Walsh's claim that Wesleyan Methodism was 'solid' doctrinally at the end of the eighteenth century. Cf. Currie, *Methodism Divided*, 112ff; John Walsh, 'Methodism at the End of the Eighteenth Century', in Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp, eds, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols. (London: Epworth, 1965), I:287.

4. John W. B. Tomlinson, 'The Magic Methodists and Their Influence on the Early Primitive Methodist Movement', in Jeremy Gregory and Kate Cooper, eds, *Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church*, Studies in Church History, 41 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 390. See also John Kent's comment that 'revivalist theology differed very little in content or repetitiousness from Wesleyanism.' John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 60 n. 32.

the separation. However, differing understandings of the Spirit and the church can be discerned beneath the surface of the conflict.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Wesleyan Methodism was strengthening its theology of pastoral authority in the wake of clashes with several revivalistic and reforming groups. The separation of the 'Band Room Methodists' in Manchester resulted in the publication of an 1806 Wesleyan Methodist pamphlet that John Bowmer has called 'the earliest exposition of the Wesleyan doctrine of the pastoral office.'⁵ The Band Room was the centre of a network of revivalistic meeting places established by layman John Broadhurst where services were conducted without ministerial oversight. Tensions simmered between the Wesleyan preachers under superintendent William Jenkins and the Band Room leaders between 1803 and 1806, when the Band Room Methodists defied a leaders' meeting decision that the only Covenant service for the New Year should be held at the Oldham Street Chapel. The result was that in February 1806 the Band Room Methodists separated and became one of the earliest examples of Independent Methodism.⁶ In their response to the incident, Wesleyan Methodists stressed the importance of maintaining discipline against the Band Room practice of admitting people who were not members of the Society:⁷

We object to the plan of indiscriminate admission because it impedes the due administration of ECCLESIASTICAL DISCIPLINE. This is an express ordinance of God—as much His ordinance as the preaching of the Gospel or celebration of the Lord's Supper; and whatever materially interferes with its regular exercise is, for that reason, unscriptural, and highly injurious to the souls of men and to the interests of religion. One grand object of this discipline is to effect and maintain an open and visible separation between *the Church* and *the World*; between those who do, and those who do not make a credible, consistent, and public profession of serious religion.⁸

Many have detected the influence of Jabez Bunting (at that time a local itinerant) in this situation. He had also engaged in similar wrangling with the breakaway

5. Bowmer, *Pastor and People*, 73. Cf. *A Statement of Facts and Observations Relative to the Late Separation from the Methodist Society in Manchester: Affectionately Addressed to the Members of That Body, by Their Preachers and Leaders* (Manchester: S. Russell, 1806).

6. John A. Dolan, *The Independent Methodists: A History* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2005), 21–4.

7. Bowmer, *Pastor and People*, 73–4.

8. *A Statement of Facts*, 18.

'Christian Revivalists' in Macclesfield in 1803. His antipathy toward revivalists is expressed in a 13 December 1803 letter to George Marsden: 'All persons enthusiastically or schismatically disposed are dangerous in our connection to its peace and permanency; and the more pious in their general character, the more dangerous.'⁹ This emphasis on discipline exercised by the Methodist itinerants and connexional leaders as bearers of pastoral authority would continue to develop along a clerical trajectory until the middle of the century.¹⁰

As noted above, the Wesleyan Methodist side of these theological developments has been well treated by a number of scholars, but the theological perspectives at play on the revivalist side have not received much attention. This is certainly true of Primitive Methodist scholarship.¹¹ Hugh Bourne (1772–1852) is generally acknowledged to be co-founder of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, along with William Clowes (1780–1851). While Clowes was the better preacher and more charismatic leader, Bourne was the chief thinker and writer of early Primitive Methodism. He wrote the first history of the movement in 1823, and from 1818 to 1842 he was editor of the connexional magazine, contributing much of the material himself. For that reason, Bourne is the most important source for understanding the theological perspective that prevailed in early Primitive Methodism. Bourne was not a 'systematic theologian' by modern standards, but he did furnish the new movement with much of its first-order theological resources. In discussing John Wesley's status as a theologian, Randy Maddox has argued that prior to the rise of modern European universities, Christians understood theology to be a practical discipline that aimed 'to nurture and shape the worldview or disposition that orients believers' lives in the world.'¹² Taking theology in this broader, classical sense, it is certain that Bourne wrote a great deal of theology and had a profound influence on the theological outlook of early Primitive Methodism.

9. Thomas Percival Bunting, *The Life of Jabez Bunting: With Notices of Contemporary Persons and Events*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1859), 1:200–1.

10. See the discussions in Bowmer, *Pastor and People*, 198–228; Kent, *The Age of Disunity*, 44–85; and W. Reginald Ward, 'The Legacy of John Wesley: The Pastoral Office in Britain and America', in Andrew Chandler, ed., *Evangelicalism, Piety and Politics: The Selected Writings of W. R. Ward* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 147–70.

11. While the Primitive Methodists have received renewed attention recently by historians, including full-length studies by Timothy Woolley and Sandy Calder, theologians have not paid much attention to figures such as Hugh Bourne. See Timothy R. Woolley, 'A New Appearance on the Face of Things: Retelling the Primitive Methodist Creation Narrative', PhD thesis (University of Manchester [Cliff College], 2013); Calder, *The Origins of Primitive Methodism*.

12. Randy L. Maddox, 'Introduction', in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I* [vol. XII of *The Works of John Wesley*], ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 3.

In what follows I will explore Bourne's theology of the Spirit and the church in two sections. First, I will discuss the ambiguity in Bourne's understanding of Christian division. While he defended his movement vigorously against the charge of schism, his quasi-independent revivalistic ministry while a Wesleyan Methodist clearly sowed the seeds of division. I will then show how several important influences pushed Bourne's theology in a pneumatocentric direction, which helps explain the ambiguities in his understanding of ecclesial division. Bourne's pneumatocentric theology led him to an ecclesiology that was more grass roots and participatory than the prevailing Wesleyan Methodist view, but it left him with little reason to resist separation.

Bourne's Defense against the Charge of Schism

At times, Hugh Bourne downplayed the significance of divisions in the church on the basis of a generous version of Wesley's 'catholic spirit', which he embraced at the time of his conversion. In recounting his conversion story, he repeatedly emphasized the importance of three sources.¹³ The first was Wesley's sermon 'On the Trinity', which he encountered in a bound volume of various writings. Bourne drew attention to the opening lines of the sermon, where Wesley contrasted 'right opinion' with true religion:

Whatsoever the generality of people may think, it is certain that opinion is not religion: No, not right opinion; assent to one, or to ten thousand truths. There is a wide difference between them: Even right opinion is as distant from religion as the east is from the west. Persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all; and, on the other hand, persons may be truly religious, who hold many wrong opinions.¹⁴

Bourne discovered this sermon while he struggled to decide which Christian community he should join. His main associations to that point had been Quaker and Methodist, with some Church of England background in his childhood. It was his reading of Wesley's sermon and the stories of the early Quakers

13. See, for example, Hugh Bourne, 'The Autobiography of Hugh Bourne', n.d., B text, 33, DDHB 2/1-3, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester; Hugh Bourne, *Notices on the Early Life of Hugh Bourne, No. 1* (Bemersley: James Bourne, 1834), 5-6.

14. John Wesley, Sermon 55, 'On the Trinity', §1, in *Sermons II* [vol. II of *The Works of John Wesley*], ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 374.

that led him to believe that 'the religion of the heart was alike in all'. Thus, he concluded, 'I might join any really religious society without under-valuing others; and might profit by all.'¹⁵

It is generally recognized that Wesley's theological open-mindedness was balanced by firm and clear boundaries on central issues of classical orthodoxy and vital piety. Wesley's distinctions between 'opinion' and 'doctrine' must also read carefully with attention to context.¹⁶ Bourne's conclusion that he might join any religious society indicates that he took a less nuanced view and tended toward doctrinal latitudinarianism. It is also noteworthy that, although he clearly revered Wesley, this was the only specific idea he claimed to have taken from Wesley at this formative time in his life.

In spite of this generous spirit toward divisions in the church, Bourne was very keen to clear the Primitive Methodist Connexion from the charge that they had divided the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion. In fact, the entire first section of his *History of the Primitive Methodists*, written in 1823, could be read as a defence against the charge of schism. His primary argument was that the emergence of the Primitive Methodists should be considered providential because the formation of a separate connexion was not planned but emerged inexorably through the unfolding of events. As Julia Werner summarizes, 'If its origins owed nothing to human contrivance, he reasoned, then surely God had called the new sect into being.'¹⁷ Thus, Bourne would claim that 'the connexion was begun in the order of Divine Providence, and not in the wisdom of man, nor by the desire of man.'¹⁸ He emphasized repeatedly that there was no 'sheep-stealing' involved. They won new converts in areas that were not well served by the existing Wesleyan structures, and they made every effort to join these converts to the Wesleyan Connexion. Bourne claimed that he did not even want to start a class meeting on his own, let alone a separate society, and did so only after the Wesleyan travelling preachers urged him to do so. 'So,' he wrote, 'the primitive Methodist course was in the Burslem Wesleyan circuit, as it were, a wheel within a wheel.'¹⁹ Even after Bourne was expelled from Wesleyan membership in 1808, he did not form separate societies but aimed to funnel converts to existing bodies. The first separate society, formed at Stanley in 1810, had been started by Bourne and his colleagues months earlier in hopes

15. Bourne, 'Autobiography', B text, 17.

16. See the discussion in Randy L. Maddox, 'Opinion, Religion and "Catholic Spirit": John Wesley on Theological Integrity', *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 47/1 (1992), 63–87.

17. Julia Stewart Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 53.

18. Hugh Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists, Giving an Account of Their Rise and Progress up to the Year 1823* (Bemersley: J. Bourne, 1823), 39.

19. Bourne, 'Autobiography', A text, 241.

that it would unite with the Wesleyans. It was only after this proved impossible that Bourne felt compelled to take it on, despite great trepidation:

This gave extreme trial of mind to J. Bourne, and when H. Bourne came home, he was struck with astonishment on being informed that they should be obliged to take wholly upon themselves the care of Standley [*sic*] society. There was, however, no remedy. Necessity was laid upon them, and they could not draw back without sacrificing conscience; and therefore, with fear and trembling, they entered upon their more extensive charge.²⁰

He also argued that all the main leaders of the early Primitive Methodist Connexion were expelled from the Wesleyan Connexion on shaky grounds and did not leave of their own accord. He notes that Clowes was put out for attending the Ramsor camp meeting in June 1810, though 'his piety was known, his success was great, and many were converted to the Lord under his ministry'. Likewise, James Steele, though he was a 'pillar in the society' at Tunstall of twenty-four years standing, was expelled on a false charge of attending an unsanctioned love feast on Good Friday, 1811.²¹

At the time of his expulsion, Bourne claimed that all he and his revivalist colleagues wanted to do was to use camp meetings to strengthen the converting ministry of the Wesleyan Connexion. Camp meetings, he stressed, were a new means raised up by God for evangelization, proven by the fruit they produced: 'Pious people of almost all denominations look for a general spread of the Gospel, and many powerful institutions have arisen for increasing the work; and among these are the camp meetings, which are likely to go through the world, and become a general blessing.'²² The Wesleyan Conference was thus wrong to reject camp meetings, which were the continuation of the Wesleyan heritage of preaching in the open air. In fact, Bourne and the others considered it 'their peculiar duty as members of the Old Methodist connexion' to promote camp meetings, which they believed upheld the 'primitive' ideals of Methodism.²³

Thus, Bourne concluded that the Primitive Methodist leaders had 'clean hands' when they started their new connexion, having been placed in that position by the unfolding hand of providence. The new body was pure of the stain

20. Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, 29.

21. *Ibid.* 31–5.

22. *Ibid.* 13–14.

23. *Ibid.* 17.

of schism. Again, reflecting on the formation of a separate society at Stanley, Bourne wrote:

It was formed pure. No split out of any religious society, and no man who was a member of the Wesleyan society, or any other religious society, had a finger in it. We knew that the Lord was employing us to fully form a Methodist connexion. Had I been aware of that, I am of opinion that the terror of the Lord only could have caused me to go on with it, as was the case with the camp meeting cause. I dreaded the idea of being concerned in forming a connexion.²⁴

In spite of his protestations, Bourne had engaged in mission in a way that made the Wesleyan Connexion and its structures more or less irrelevant. He became a key figure in a local revival around Harriseahead not long after his conversion, and this continued for several years before the broader movement that would become the Primitive Methodist Connexion took shape. He may indeed have intended his revival to build up the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, and there is no doubt some truth to his claims that he had increased the vitality of the local circuits. And yet the relationship between his ministry and the Wesleyan Connexion had always been tenuous. While he was a Wesleyan trustee and class leader, he led cottage prayer meetings and even built a chapel at Harriseahead without license or direction from the circuit or connexional leaders. He seemed to revel in the freedom from oversight that he and his compatriots enjoyed at this stage of his life. Referring to his cousin, Daniel Shubotham, and Mathias Bayly, two early collaborators, he claimed, 'when he [Shubotham], and I, and Matthias agreed on anything, we were, under the Lord, completely masters. There was none to control us.'²⁵ The initiative to host camp meetings was also undertaken without involvement of the Wesleyan leadership. It is no wonder that this became the flashpoint issue, but it was simply the continuation of the way Bourne and his colleagues had operated for several years. To be fair, it was also a pattern of behaviour that the Wesleyan Connexion had allowed to continue for years. As Tim Woolley has noted, the Wesleyans had been weakened in the area by the establishment of a Methodist New Connexion presence beginning in 1798.²⁶ Furthermore, before he was expelled, Bourne had carried out his own revival prayer meetings and preaching services in a variety of contexts inside and outside the Wesleyan Connexion. This included ministry

24. Bourne, 'Autobiography', A text, 77.

25. Ibid. A text, 103.

26. Woolley, 'A New Appearance', 56–62; Leonard Brown, 'The Origins of Primitive Methodism', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 34/4–5 (1964), 119.

among the Independent Methodists at Macclesfield, the Quaker Methodists at Warrington, and the so-called 'Magic Methodists' of Delamere Forest.²⁷ He operated with little regard for Wesleyan structures and authority. The fact that his ministry as a revivalist was not well integrated with Wesleyan Methodist structures is seen in the fact that he continued this ministry virtually uninterrupted in the aftermath of his expulsion from the Wesleyan Methodists in 1808. Approximately three months after being expelled, he could reflect in his Journal, 'Since I was put out of the Society I have grown more in grace and have been more useful. O Lord let me never live to be useless.'²⁸

While Bourne's inconsistency on this point seems rather obvious, he saw no contradiction between working independently of Wesleyan authorities and seeking the renewal of the Wesleyan Connexion. His attitudes were not unique. He had the example of Lorenzo Dow to draw upon, and many would follow this path of independent or semi-independent revival ministry in the decades to follow. Of course, Bourne could also claim to be following the example of John Wesley, who professed loyalty to the Church of England while leading an evangelistic movement with no direct accountability to the church. In Bourne's case, the apparent ecclesiological inconsistency was rooted in a set of theological convictions that prioritized the direct work of the Spirit in the individual over the work of the Spirit through the community. Bourne's individualistic pneumatocentrism can be illustrated by examining the impact of four seminal influences during his early career: John Fletcher, the Quaker Methodists, Lorenzo Dow, and James Crawfoot.

Bourne's Pneumatocentric Influences

As I noted above, Bourne consistently identified three sources that shaped his thinking at the time of his conversion, the first being Wesley's sermon 'On the Trinity'. The two other sources he identified were John Fletcher's *Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation of the Son* and some early Quaker writings. These second and third influences, in fact, come through more clearly in Bourne's writings than Wesley does. It is interesting that Bourne was converted while he was alone, reading Fletcher on a Sunday morning in 1799. His conversion contrasts with John Wesley's heart-warming experience in a religious society meeting and

27. W. Reginald Ward, 'The Religion of the People and the Problem of Control', in Chandler, ed. *Evangelicalism, Piety and Politics*, 100.

28. Hugh Bourne, 'The Journal of Hugh Bourne', n.d., 25 September 1808, notebook C3, DDHB 3/1-19, Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.

the typical conversion of many early Methodists in a class meeting. Although Bourne had attended various religious services, he was not yet a member of any church body. Bourne also continually stressed that while he learned some things from the Wesleyan Methodists, he did not hear them preaching about the present experience of salvation: 'The doctrine of free, present, and full salvation, I had never heard set forth in the circuit; and I am now of opinion that it was not known in the circuit.'²⁹ In narrating his conversion, he emphasized that he consulted no one, but communicated directly with the Spirit, waiting for the manifestation of the Son.

Though the *Six Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation* are not among Fletcher's most well-known writings, their enduring impact upon Bourne is seen in the fact that Bourne published them as a series in the 1822 *Primitive Methodist Magazine*. In fact, Bourne published excerpts from ten of Fletcher's writings during his tenure as editor of the *Magazine*, including serial publications of longer treatises on Christian perfection.³⁰ The *Six Letters* are not actual letters, but rather a treatise written in the form of six letters. They were written in 1767, but only published in the *Posthumous Pieces*, edited by Melville Horne in 1791.³¹ Patrick Steiff has shown that the original context of the *Six Letters* was a response to the views of Robert Sandeman, who defined justifying faith in terms of a bare intellectual assent, without any personal, subjective element.³² Fletcher set out, therefore, to show 'that the Son of God, for purposes worthy of his wisdom, manifests himself, sooner or later, to all his sincere followers, in a spiritual manner', and he described such manifestations as 'revelations of Christ to your own soul, productive of the experimental knowledge of him, and the present enjoyment of his salvation'. Like Wesley, Fletcher drew on the idea of

29. Bourne, 'Autobiography', A text, 7. See also his Journal entry dated 31 July 1809, in which Bourne wrote of a conflict with a Wesleyan travelling preacher at Leek: 'He objected to an instantaneous work, which may almost be called the soul of Methodism. Yet so it is.' 'Journal', notebook E, 89.

30. Fletcher's *On Christian Perfection* was serialized in the 1840 *Primitive Methodist Magazine*; *An Address to Imperfect Believers* and *An Address to Perfect Christians* were serialized in 1841. Bourne often excerpted other authors such as Richard Alleine, Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Adam Clarke, and Richard Baxter, but he never published any of Wesley's writings during his long tenure as editor. Leonard Brown suggested it is significant that the 'Six Letters' were reprinted in 1822, at the same time that Bourne's *History* was published in the *Magazine*. 'For him the origins of Primitive Methodism were bound up with the springtime of his soul when he sat reading the *Six Letters* one Sunday morning.' Brown, 'The Origins of Primitive Methodism', 83.

31. John Fletcher, 'Six Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation of the Son of God', in *Posthumous Pieces of the Late John William de La Flechere*, ed. Melvill[e] Horne (Madeley: J. Edmunds, 1791), 313–86.

32. Patrick Steiff, *Reluctant Saint? A Theological Biography of Fletcher of Madeley* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2001), 103–4. See also Steiff's summary of the 'Six Letters', 103–7.

the 'spiritual senses' as faculties that 'are to the spiritual world, what our bodily, external senses are with regard to the material world', and that are only available to the regenerate.³³ Though he struggled to define the manifestation of Christ that comes by means of these senses, Fletcher described it as follows:

The revelation of Christ, by which a carnal professor becomes a holy and happy possessor of the faith, is a supernatural, spiritual, experimental manifestation of the Spirit, power, and love, and sometimes of the person of God manifest in the flesh, whereby he is known and enjoyed in a manner altogether new: as new as a man, who never tasted any thing but bread and water, would have of honey and wine, suppose, being dissatisfied with the best descriptions of those rich productions of nature, he actually tasted them for himself.³⁴

Fletcher went on to carefully consider several questions connected to his teaching on spiritual manifestation, such as the relation between ordinary revelations that are necessary for salvation and extraordinary examples given in special cases, and the differing degrees and intensities of such manifestation. The final two letters are devoted to an examination of the Old Testament and New Testament evidence for spiritual manifestation.

As I have already noted, the notion of spiritual sensation is found in Wesley himself, as are claims to the direct witness of the Spirit. However, Fletcher seems to treat the spiritual senses as a real set of faculties, sometimes providing descriptions of how the manifestation might come to the spiritual eye or the spiritual ear or the spiritual feeling.³⁵ Wesley on the other hand was more circumspect and used the language of spiritual sensation as an analogy to speak of something that he could not explain. He noted that these are 'figurative expressions' meant to describe the reality of new birth, the gift of faith, and the witness of the Spirit.³⁶ Furthermore, the term 'manifestation', while not foreign to Wesley, is not typical of his description of the Spirit's work, and leaves the door open to a wider variety of pneumatic phenomena. Thus, although the *Six Letters on the Spiritual Manifestation* were written before Fletcher had articulated his

33. Fletcher, 'Six Letters', 315.

34. *Ibid.* 328.

35. See, for example, *ibid.* 332ff.

36. See Sermon 130, 'On Living Without God', §11, *Sermons IV* [vol. IV of *The Works of John Wesley*] ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 173. For a more general discussion of Wesley's use of this language, see James E. Pedlar, 'Sensing the Spirit: Wesley's Empiricism and His Use of the Language of Spiritual Sensation,' *Asbury Journal*, 67/2 (2012), 85–104.

dispensational scheme, they do bear the marks of a more pneumatocentric perspective than we find in Wesley. Along with other nineteenth-century Methodists, Bourne does not seem to recognize any tension in the thought of Fletcher and Wesley, and his thought clearly bears the marks of an exaggerated Fletcherian strain of Methodist theology.³⁷

Fletcher influenced Bourne's thought in several ways. First, Bourne took up the language of the 'manifestation' of the Son from Fletcher as his particular term for describing assurance of salvation. This is seen most clearly in the way he recounted his first evangelistic appeal to his cousin Daniel Shubotham on Christmas Day, 1800, an event that Bourne saw as the beginning of his revival ministry: 'I pressed the manifestation on him, and it spread to others and the new course of converting became great.'³⁸ Secondly, Bourne often referred to the Baptism of the Spirit, or the 'unction of the holy one', two key emphases from Fletcher. For example, Bourne wrote of the first camp meeting on Mow Cop, 'A flaming zeal was displayed, and a powerful Unction rested during the day.' Likewise, he described the revival led by his colleague James Steele in Tunstall around 1804 as follows: 'Tunstall, which had been one of the dearest places in the circuit, felt the quickness influence; the baptism of the Holy Ghost'.³⁹ Third, Bourne tended to emphasize the instantaneous work of the Spirit in the experience of 'present salvation', calling it 'the soul of Methodism'.⁴⁰ Fourth, in his later years Bourne recorded that he frequently preached on the topic of Pentecost.⁴¹ Overall, while Bourne only occasionally took up Fletcher's dispensational language, his theology certainly reflected Fletcher's more pneumatocentric spiritual theology.

Fletcher's significant influence is not surprising, given his stature in early nineteenth century Methodism. The Quaker influence on Bourne's thought is more unusual. Bourne did not specifically enumerate which Quaker writings he read, though he indicated that he read accounts of early Quaker open-air preaching, and he noted that when he made his first evangelistic visit, he took along some Robert Barclay to read to his prospective convert. John Wilkinson

37. While the relative differences between Fletcher and Wesley are debated, I follow the general assessment of Donald W. Dayton, who argues that Wesley's theology was more Christocentric, and Fletcher's dispensational framework 'pushes Methodism further out of a Christocentric pattern of thought and close to a Pneumatocentric one'. Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 52. For a contrary perspective, see Laurence W. Wood, *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism: Rediscovering John Fletcher as Wesley's Vindicator and Designated Successor*, *Pietist and Wesleyan Studies*, 15 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002).

38. Bourne, 'Autobiography', C text, 57.

39. *Ibid.* A text, 147.

40. Bourne, 'Journal', 31 July 1809, notebook E.

41. Noted several times in his Journal between June and December 1849.

suggested this was likely Barclay's most famous work, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, generally regarded as the standard articulation of early Quaker theology.⁴² While there is no way to be sure that this is the case, it is noteworthy that Barclay began his work with a discussion of the immediate revelation of the Spirit as a 'manifestation':

the testimony of the Spirit is that alone, by which the true knowledge of God hath been, is, and can be only revealed . . . by the revelation of the same Spirit, he hath manifested himself all along unto the sons of men, both Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles, which revelations of God by the Spirit, whether by outward voices and appearances, dreams or inward *objective manifestations in the heart*, were of old the *formal object* of their *faith*, and remaineth yet to be, though set forth under divers administrations . . .⁴³

Thus, during his first evangelistic visit to his cousin Daniel Shubotham, Bourne spoke of conversion using Fletcher's concept of the spiritual manifestation of the Son, and read Barclay, who wrote about the Spirit's objective manifestations in the heart. It is possible that Bourne saw Fletcher's 'manifestation' through Quaker-coloured glasses.

Not only did he read Quaker sources, but Bourne spent a great deal of time in the company of the Quaker Methodists at Warrington. This body formed around 1796 when some disaffected Quakers joined a newly independent group of Methodists, resulting in a blend of Quaker and Methodist spirituality and practice. The Quaker Methodists became part of the Independent Methodist tradition, and their leader, Peter Phillips, is considered a founding father of that denomination. According to John Dolan, the Quaker Methodists 'retained Methodist doctrine, class meetings, love feasts, preaching and hymnsinging, but adopted Quaker speech and dress, times of silent waiting upon God and eschewed sacraments.'⁴⁴ They also rejected paid ministry. Phillips challenged detractors by saying of the Quaker Methodists, 'If it could be shown that a man's preaching was because he

42. Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity, as the Same Is Held Forth, and Preached by the People, Called, in Scorn, Quakers* (Aberdeen?: N.p., 1678). See John T. Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourne, 1772–1852* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 30. Wesley had abridged part of Barclay's *Apology* as *Serious Considerations on Absolute Predestination Extracted from a Late Author* (Bristol: S. and F. Farley, 1741). Wesley drew on Barclay's Logos doctrine as ammunition against Calvinism. See the discussion in J. Gregory Crofford, *Streams of Mercy: Preventive Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2010), 53–66.

43. Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 2–3; emphasis in original.

44. Dolan, *The Independent Methodists*, 16.

was paid for doing it, they would admit their error.⁴⁵ Bourne frequently spent time in worship, ministry, and fellowship with the Quaker Methodists in the crucial period between 1807 and 1811, and the two groups might have merged if not for the Quaker Methodist refusal to accept a paid ministry.⁴⁶

One indication of the Quaker flavour of Bourne's spirituality is the great stock he puts in direct, divine impressions. It is true that attention to dreams, visions, and other extraordinary moves of the Spirit was characteristic of Wesley and early Methodism, as Robert Webster has argued.⁴⁷ However, these tendencies are magnified and individualized in Bourne in a way that reflects the radical Quaker emphasis on being led by the Spirit. For example, Bourne noted in his Journal for 29 May 1808 that he 'spoke by impression' on 2 Kings 2, meaning he spoke without any preparation, believing that he was given a distinct message by the Spirit. He also made decisions about evangelistic engagements in that manner, as he did on 11 August 1808: 'I went to Buglawton by impression.'⁴⁸ He also wrote approvingly of the Quaker-style of meeting at Risley: 'Here each one does what is right in his own eyes. They stand, sit, kneel, pray, exhort, etc., as they are moved. I was very fond of their way.'⁴⁹ One also finds some intriguing references to divine silence in Bourne. For example, in his Journal for 15 March 1809, he wrote, 'I was brought into a solemn silence, and continued a long time. The visionary power was present.'⁵⁰ It is also interesting to note that for some years the Primitive Methodist Conference was also known as the Annual Meeting, a Quaker term. Bourne may have picked this up from the Quaker Methodists, who were influential in so naming the annual gatherings of the Independent Methodists.⁵¹ First and foremost, however, Bourne absorbed the Quaker idea that the Spirit speaks *directly* to each one, irrespective of means or offices. So, in discussing his pre-conversion conviction of sin, Bourne wrote, 'My being convinced of sin had nothing to do with Methodism, as I did then know what Methodism was. That conviction was a matter between God and myself.'⁵²

Two further influences on Bourne's thinking are important for understanding his pneumatocentrism. One is Lorenzo Dow, whose shadow looms

45. Arthur Mounfield, *A Short History of Independent Methodism: A Souvenir of the Hundredth Annual Meeting of the Independent Methodist Churches* (Wigan: Independent Methodist Book Room, 1905), 7.

46. Dolan, *The Independent Methodists*, 30–1.

47. Robert Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous: John Wesley's Idea of the Supernatural and the Identification of Methodists in the Eighteenth-Century* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2013).

48. Bourne, 'Journal', notebook C.

49. *Ibid.* notebook E, 23 April 1809.

50. *Ibid.* notebook E.

51. Dolan, *The Independent Methodists*, 28.

52. Bourne, 'Autobiography', B text, 7.

large in Bourne's Journal during the formative years of Primitive Methodism. Bourne first encountered Dow at a revival service in HARRISEAHEAD in 1807, where Bourne received some tracts on camp meetings that encouraged him and his compatriots in their plan to hold an English camp meeting. In particular, Dow's *Thoughts on the Times, and Camp Meetings* closed with 'A Word to the Methodists' that would have particularly struck Bourne. Dow called for Methodists to 'have recourse to their *first principles*' and 'read the old magazines, to see if there be any contrast'.⁵³ This was near the end of Dow's second visit to the United Kingdom. He had arrived in Liverpool in 1805 and was quickly invited to stay with Peter Phillips, the Quaker Methodist leader from Warrington.⁵⁴ Bourne was soon to come into close relationship with Phillips and his wife Hannah, and much of Dow's influence on Bourne was mediated through the stories and reminiscences that the Phillips family had gathered during Dow's two-year stay at their home.

Dow is well known for his reliance on the direct leading of the Spirit through impressions of various kinds. He was Methodist, but operated under a kind of freelance self-superintendency, which emboldened Bourne and other revivalists while raising concerns about independent evangelists among the Wesleyans.⁵⁵ Dow's individualistic understanding of the Spirit's work supported his lack of regard for connexional authority. Tim Woolley has drawn attention to this telling quote from Dow's Journal, where he recorded his response to a question about what he would do if he was forbidden to preach by his presiding elder, Jesse Lee:

I told him it did not belong to J. L. or any other man to say whether I should preach or not, for that was to be determined between God and my own soul; only it belonged to the Methodists to say whether I should preach in their connexion; but as long as I feel so impressed, I shall travel and preach, God being my helper; and as soon as I feel my mind released, I intend to stop, let people say what they will.⁵⁶

53. Lorenzo Dow, 'Queries, Observations, and Remarks; or Thoughts on the Times, and Camp-Meetings', in *The Travels and Providential Experience of Lorenzo Dow*, 2 vols (Liverpool: H. Forshaw, 1807), II:47; emphasis in original.

54. Dolan, *The Independent Methodists*, 25–8.

55. See the discussion of these dynamics in Tim Woolley, "'Have Our People Been Sufficiently Cautious?'" Wesleyan Responses to Lorenzo Dow in England and Ireland, 1799–1819', *Wesley and Methodist Studies*, 9/2 (2017), 150–5.

56. Lorenzo Dow, *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil: As Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow, in a Period of Over Half a Century* (New York: Sheldon, Lamport & Blakeman, 1854), 21. Cf. Woolley, 'A New Appearance', 71.

The parallels with Bourne's frequent claims that he was led by the Spirit and consulted no man are clear. Dow felt he was being directly led by the Spirit, but had no sense that the Spirit might be working through the decisions of the church. As Woolley summarizes with respect to his discernment of a call to preach, 'events which happened to *him*, such as his illnesses and dreams, were interpreted as direct indications in that process of determination, but decisions of the wider church were not.'⁵⁷ George Herod also recorded a fascinating story of Dow singling out a recent convert in the congregation at East Bridgford Chapel in 1818 and performing an impromptu 'ordination.'⁵⁸ Such claims to a self-authenticating calling from the Spirit would become a common pattern among Wesleyan revivalists throughout the nineteenth century.

The final notable influence on Bourne's theology is James Crawfoot, local Methodist preacher in Delamere Forest and leader of the so-called 'Magic Methodists'. Bourne met Crawfoot in mid-1807, and it was Crawfoot who introduced Bourne to Phillips. The Magic Methodist moniker was due to meetings held monthly in Crawfoot's home, where anyone was free to share as led by the Spirit, and trances and visions were common.⁵⁹ Bourne remained close with Crawfoot for several years, and the two shared in ministry together, prior to a falling out in 1812. During this time Bourne filled his Journal with accounts of unusual spiritual occurrences. The most striking example was a recurring vision of a hierarchy of evangelists, given to several of the young women in the movement in 1810 and 1811. In his Journal, Bourne repeatedly noted the order of the trumpeters (he was among them, along with Crawfoot, Dow, and William Clowes), and kept track of who was moving up or down the order with each occurrence of the vision. In other dreams, he met both Lorenzo Dow and John Fletcher.⁶⁰ Bourne's attention to pneumatic phenomena such as dreams, visions, and other impressions dropped off but did not disappear after 1811, when Bourne broke with Crawfoot and charismatic female evangelist Mary Dunnell. As John Tomlinson comments, 'Supernatural phenomena did remain a feature of the connexion, but in a more controlled way.'⁶¹

57. Woolley, 'A New Appearance', 72.

58. George Herod, *Historical and Biographical Sketches Forming a Compendium of the History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion up to the Year 1823* (London: T. King, 1857), 187–8; cited in Kent, *Holding the Fort*, 49.

59. Dolan, *The Independent Methodists*, 28–9.

60. Noted several times in Bourne's Journal between 29 March 1810 and 5 March 1813, notebooks E and F.

61. Tomlinson, 'The Magic Methodists and Their Influence on the Early Primitive Methodist Movement', 398.

A Church without 'Mastery'

A chastened pneumatocentrism endured and pushed Bourne and the other Primitive Methodists in grass roots, participatory, and egalitarian directions, even as the Wesleyan Connexion was moving in more centralized and hierarchical directions. Bourne wrote in his Journal on 11 October 1811: 'I also see great cause of thankfulness to Almighty God that he has raised us up as a separate society. And while the preachers live who are at the head of our society, I fully believe we shall have no mastery.'⁶² As early as 1801 he had embraced the practice of shared leadership in the Monday night class he established at Daniel Shubotham's home.⁶³ This principle would be clearly seen in the way the Primitive Methodist Connexion eventually organized its conference, with two lay representatives for each clergy representative, but it also comes through in other ways, which on the surface may have seemed more pragmatic or methodological.

For example, Bourne was wary of long sermons, and highly valued prayer meetings and the ministry of what he called 'praying labourers,' even while preaching was taking place. This comes through clearly in some comments he made about a set of guidelines the Primitive Methodists issued on camp meetings in 1819. These guidelines were drawn up in response to a tendency to have preaching go on too long at the Ramsor camp meeting. He outlined the problems as follows:

Long preaching was one of the evils. The course of the camp meetings was preach, preach, throughout the day; in consequence of which, the preachers got a habit of drawing out their sermons to such a length as to weary out all patience.

Idleness was another evil. All the pious praying labourers with the class-leaders and exhorters, were held in idleness nearly the whole time of the camp meeting. Their labours were cut off; and their talents constantly buried. This was a sore evil.⁶⁴

For Bourne, this was not simply a pragmatic issue; the long sermons meant that the Spirit-led participation of the whole people of God was hindered.⁶⁵

62. Bourne, 'Journal', notebook F.

63. John Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, ed. W. Antliff, 2 vols (London: T. King, 1855), I:85-6.

64. Bourne, *History of the Primitive Methodists*, 56.

65. On the participatory character of early Primitive Methodist meetings, see Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in*

His grass-roots vision of the church is also evident in his preference for a variety of 'extraordinary' means of grace, each of which was initiated and practiced by local laypeople without reliance on the Wesleyan travelling preachers. Bourne claimed to have pioneered several of these extraordinary means in his ministry. The first was a conversational style of evangelism, which he practised on his cousin Daniel Shubotham, and then among the colliers at Kidsgrove with a small band of local revivalists. Second was the use of extended cottage prayer meetings, which formed the heart of his early revival ministry. Bourne admitted that the Wesleyans had been holding prayer meetings, but he characterized these as 'talking meetings', and wrote, 'Our people aimed at what they called "feeling the power". If they obtained that they were satisfied.'⁶⁶ Third was his most well-known innovation: the English camp meeting, which was planned and carried out without the travelling preachers and engaged many people as 'praying labourers'. Fourth, he believed he had pioneered the practice of following preaching with an extended prayer service. In sum, Bourne clearly preferred these extraordinary means of grace over the 'instituted means' of regular public worship, the ministry of the Word, the Lord's Supper, and so on, which would have come through the official ministry of the Wesleyan Connexion or the Church of England. Even after the Primitive Methodist Connexion established itself as a separate body, one finds a much greater emphasis on the love feast than on the Lord's Supper, which seems to have played a marginal part in Bourne's spiritual life.⁶⁷

No Intention to Divide, but Little Reason to Remain

Bourne's bottom-up and pneumatocentric theology engaged and empowered ordinary Christians in effective ways, but it left little room for the role of the church in relation to the orders of ministry and ecclesial oversight. Bourne's description of his own calling makes this quite clear. He provided numerous examples of direct impressions from the Spirit, which led him to conclude that he was called by God.⁶⁸ He furthermore saw the conversion of sinners

Industrial England (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 88–9; Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, 57.

66. Bourne, 'Autobiography', A text, 105. On the spread of cottage prayer meetings in the 1790s, see Ward, 'The Religion of the People and the Problem of Control', in Chandler, ed., *Evangelicalism, Piety and Politics*, 96.

67. On the lack of sacramental worship in early Primitive Methodism, see Brown, 'The Origins of Primitive Methodism', 117–18.

68. See, for example, Bourne, 'Journal', notebook E, 27 May 1809.

as clear divine proof that he was so called to preach. Bourne added to this, as a particular point of emphasis, the fact that his call came directly from God himself. As he recounted it in his later years, the moment he stood up and preached his first sermon, he had been ‘raised up’ as a preacher.⁶⁹ He cited, approvingly, from Wesley’s comment on ‘grace, gifts and fruits’ as necessary qualifications for the preacher in the 1780 *Minutes*, but it would seem that there was no role for a ministry of oversight to confirm the reality of such claims—at least in so far as they concerned himself.⁷⁰ The Spirit, in Bourne’s mind, led him directly, and he seemed to view the fact that his guidance came ‘from no man’ as confirmation of the Spirit’s work. It is not difficult to see how one who thought about the Spirit’s work in this way would not listen for the Spirit to speak through the community, particularly through its structures of authority. Indeed, even within his own Primitive Methodist family, Bourne became increasingly difficult to work with, leading Conference to relieve him of his administrative and editorial duties and move him to supernumerary status in 1842.⁷¹

Bourne’s personal experience, no doubt, supported this perspective. Reflecting in his later years on his early relationship to Wesleyan Methodism, Bourne wrote:

It is true, I was born again before I united with the Wesleyans; I was justified by faith and had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. My sins were pardoned, and I had received power over sin which I had not before. Also my knowledge of the converting work was both clear and considerable; and in this respect, I cannot say that my uniting with the Wesleyans, added much, if any thing to me.⁷²

He was converted alone, rather than through a fellowship of believers. His ministry was started and largely carried on without the support of the Wesleyan Connexion. And his ministry continued, with little interruption, in the period following his expulsion from that same Connexion. Though he claimed he had no intention of dividing the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, Bourne’s

69. Bourne, ‘Autobiography’, A text, 93.

70. Bourne, ‘Journal’, 7 February 1820, notebook L. *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference* [vol. X of *The Works of John Wesley*], ed. Henry D. Rack (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 497.

71. Calder, *The Origins of Primitive Methodism*, 101–4.

72. Bourne, ‘Autobiography’, C text, 61.

experience and his individualistic Spirit-centred theology left him with little reason to resist separation.

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