

Definition: **Wesley, John** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

English theologian and evangelist who founded Methodism. In 1729, with his brother Charles Wesley, he founded the Holy Club at Oxford. In 1738, he underwent a personal, religious experience during a Moravian meeting and this laid the foundation upon which he built the Methodist movement. Wesley's *Journal* (1735–90) records the great extent of his itinerant preaching.

Summary Article: **Wesley, John**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

1703–91, English evangelical preacher, founder of Methodism, b. Epworth, Lincolnshire.

Early Life

Wesley was ordained a deacon in the Church of England in 1725, elected a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1726, and ordained a priest in 1728. At Oxford he took the lead (1729) in a group of students that included his younger brother, Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield. They were derisively called “methodists” for their methodical devotion to study and religious duties.

In 1735, the Wesleys accompanied James Oglethorpe to Georgia, John to serve there as a missionary and Charles to act as secretary to Oglethorpe. During John Wesley's two-year stay in the colony he was deeply influenced by Moravian missionaries; upon his return to England he made many Moravian friends. On May 24, 1738, at a meeting of a small religious society in Aldersgate St., London, Wesley experienced a religious conversion while listening to a reading of Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. This experience of salvation through faith in Christ alone was the burden of his message for the rest of his life.

Evangelist and Founder of Methodism

After his conversion, Wesley became involved in evangelistic work, in the course of which he is said to have preached 40,000 sermons and to have traveled 250,000 mi (400,000 km). On the advice of Whitefield, Wesley undertook open-air, or field, preaching, first in Bristol, then elsewhere. In 1739 a group in London requested him to aid them in forming a society and to act as their leader. An old foundry at Moorfields was purchased; it remained until 1778 the center of Methodist work in London. Because of his Arminianism (see under Arminius, Jacobus) and belief in Christian perfection, Wesley repudiated (c.1740) the Calvinist doctrine of election. This led to a break with Whitefield, although the personal friendship of the two Methodist leaders remained firm.

In 1784, Wesley executed the deed of declaration by which the Methodist societies became legally constituted; it was in essence the charter of the Wesleyan Methodists. In the same year he became convinced that he must ordain a superintendent to administer sacraments and to serve the Methodist societies in America, although he had long hesitated to assume the authority of ordination. Wesley ordained Dr. Thomas Coke to this office; Francis Asbury was to serve as associate superintendent.

It was not Wesley's intention to found a separate church, but toward the end of his life the Methodist Episcopal Church had already come into existence in America, and it became apparent that in England the Methodists could not work within the Anglican Church. He therefore made plans for his societies to

go on independently after his death, although both Wesleys remained clergymen of the Church of England to the end of their lives. During John Wesley's later years admiration for his abilities largely replaced the rejection he had endured in earlier days.

Bibliography

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