

**A THEOLOGICAL STUDY & COMPARISON
OF THE CONTEMPORARY BRITISH CELL
CHURCH MOVEMENT & THE EARLY
METHODIST CLASS SYSTEM**

DISSERTATION

BY

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'Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.' (1 Corinthians 1:20-21 NIV)

INTRODUCTION

In these uncertain times in the so-called postmodern world, with the apparent break down of morality and close-knit communities many Christians are seeking new and effective ways of being Church which are Christ-centred; socially relevant and free from 'religious baggage'.

In the eighteenth-century God raised up the Methodist movement to 'spread scriptural holiness through the land'. Within the Methodist Class system many were effectively nurtured in the Christian faith through regular fellowship which went beyond the shallow powerless religious customs of the day.

Within the class meetings real heart-felt life-changing faith in Christ was discovered and nurtured. People were strongly encouraged to confess their sins to one another and be completely honest about who they were and their relationship with God. Through this God brought about a social as well as spiritual change in Britain, which some commentators have suggested saved the nation from the kind of upheaval experienced in France.

This dissertation seeks to look at the Methodist Class system and asks whether, or not, the cell church principles imported from elsewhere in the world in the latter part of the twentieth century are enabling Christians here in the United Kingdom to experience that same openness, accountability and honesty which once graced the early Methodists in the eighteenth century.

In looking at the basic values and principles of both there are similarities and differences.

Although society has changed almost beyond recognition from the days of the early Methodists God is still powerfully active in His Church today and is working to bring about true fellowship amongst His people and with Himself. It could be argued that God is using the values and principles of cell church, in some way, to achieve this within parts of United Kingdom today.

PREFACE

i. The nature and scope of this dissertation

This dissertation will seek to look at the similarities and differences between the early Methodist class meetings, with those of the contemporary cell church movement within the United Kingdom.

The cell church seeks to multiply Christians through small communities of faith. The fastest churches in the world are cell churches according to several church growth experts like Ralph Neighbour and William Beckham.

Within early Methodism the class system flourished by multiplying believers and nurturing new converts across Britain. Cell church seeks to emulate this.

ii. Explanation of the sources used

My primary source has been the Journals of Revd John Wesley. I have researched and assessed his views on the origins, importance, structure and content of the class meetings.

Similarly my primary sources for cell church have been accepted foundational works such as *The Second Reformation* by Bill Beckham and from the British perspective *Loving the Lost and Sowing, Keeping, Reaping* both by Laurence Singelhurst of Cell UK and two other leader Cell church pastors – Howard Astin and Phil Potter.

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EARLY METHODISM

History & Origins

The term 'Methodist' was first used in about 1729 when the Wesley brothers and a number of other Christian students at Oxford University regularly gathered together for worship, prayer and Christian fellowship. They were disparagingly nicknamed by their fellow students as 'Bible moths', 'the Holy Club' and also as 'Methodists', because of their strict use of time seeking to use it fully from early in the morning until the evening. It was the later jibe, which endured and as history confirmed became a national movement within the eighteenth century Anglican Church. Today Methodism has become a separate worldwide denomination. Some of the Wesleyan roots remain and some have been lost or eroded over the decades, which followed John Wesley's death in 1796. It must be recorded that it was never John Wesley's intention for 'Methodism' to be regarded as a separate denomination, but rather a 'society' within the Anglican Church. That is why today local Methodist Churches are formally known as 'societies', which are constitutionally broken down into 'classes'.

However, had it not been for Charles and John Wesley's powerful and deeply personal 'spiritual experience' during the early years of their ordained ministry history may have told a different story.

John Wesley had a spiritual experience that redefined his own spirituality on the evening of 24th May 1738. His journal records on that day,

"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the

Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change, which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”¹

As a result of this spiritual renewal, John Wesley was enabled to preach the gospel with new confidence and power. So much so that on the following Sunday and subsequent Sunday's the Anglican Church closed their pulpits to him due to the disturbing power which was affecting the congregations. As church doors kept closing on him due to the extraordinary power of his preaching other more significant ones opened.

Through his contacts with a former 'Holy Club' member at Oxford by the name of George Whitfield, John Wesley was introduced to open air preaching. This was a huge risk for an Anglican clergyman to take in those days as it was regarded as both 'vulgar and dangerous' by the church authorities.

During the decades that followed it is estimated that John Wesley rode some 150,000 miles on horse-back and personally preached to about half the population of England, Wales and Scotland and a significant number in Ireland too.

Unlike several spiritual movements at the time of the eighteenth century Evangelical Awakening Methodism survived due to the organisational skills of the Wesley brothers, particularly John, in grouping together new converts into local 'societies'. These societies were broken down into smaller groups

¹ *The Journal of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, p.475-6

of about twelve called 'classes'². It was almost 'by accident' that John Wesley stumbled across these smaller groups.

²The name *class* originally has no suggestion of teaching in it, but came from the Latin word *classis*, which was the name given to the six divisions of orders of the Roman people under the legislation of Servius Tullius.

What is the Class System?

As many new converts were being added to the Church through the powerful open-air preaching around the country a system was needed to nurture these 'baby' Christians so that they could grow in their faith and be encouraged to pass on their new found faith to others.

Three months after John Wesley's 'Aldersgate experience' he visited a Moravian Church community in Hernhut, Germany. It is interesting to note five particular things about his observations regarding these devoted and serious German Christians: they were organised by gender; they were organised by age; they were split into even smaller groups called 'bands'; the frequency of their meeting (two and three times weekly) and the seriousness of their seeking true Christian discipleship. These five 'core values' were exported back to Britain and became a feature of the Methodist class system, which grew over the next few decades of the eighteenth century.

These different classes and bands were not social gatherings, but regular times of deep discipleship. Wesley noted,

"The Church is so divided, that first the husbands, then the wives, then the widows, then the maids, then the young men, then the boys, then the girls, and lastly the little children, are in so many distinct classes; each of which is daily visited, the married men by a married man, the wives by a wife, and so of the rest. These larger are also (now) divided into near ninety smaller classes or bands, over each of

which one presides who is of the greatest experience. All these Leaders meet the Senior every week, and lay open to him and to the Lord whatsoever hinders or furthers the work of God in the souls committed to their charge.”³

Hernhut was a large Christian community. How could the British ‘Methodists’ be organised into a carefully disciplined movement who would be whole-hearted in their love for God and for one another and who could duplicate this close Christian community in some way? The answer to this question came within months of Wesley’s return to England from Germany.

Wesley did not set about a systematic structuring of the new converts. As I mentioned earlier this came about ‘by accident’. In fact, it was not for another four years that anything was recorded in his journal regarding classes.

This is how the Methodist Class system started. Wesley had personally taken over the whole management of the ‘Room’ (Still known as the New Rooms’) in the Horsefair in Bristol. The ‘public debt’ for its construction needed to be cleared. The local Methodists came up with a scheme, which he noted in his journal on Monday 15th February 1742,

*“Many met together to consult on a proper method for discharging the public debt; and it was at length agreed,
1. That every member of the society, who was able, should contribute a penny a week.*

³ *The Journal of John Wesley*, Vol.2, p.53

2. *That the whole society should be divided into little companies or classes, — about twelve in each class. And,*
3. *That one person in each class should receive the contribution of the rest, and bring it in to the stewards, weekly.*⁴

Captain Foy, a wealthy Christian, proposed that the local Methodists should pay the penny-a-week subscription, which was quite a sum for the poorer members of the local society. However, the Captain offered to take responsibility for eleven of the poorer members and pay their subscription himself if they could not afford such a sum.

A month later in London Wesley was discussing with local Methodist leaders how best to set up some kind of system whereby he could care for all the new converts under his direct pastoral charge. He notes in his journal,

*“I appointed several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found of knowing the people who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed, there could be no better way to come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person, than to divide them into classes, like those at Bristol, under the inspection of those in whom I could most confide. This was the origin of our classes at London, for which I can never sufficiently praise God; the unspeakable usefulness of the institution having ever since been more and more manifest.”*⁵

⁴ *The Journal of John Wesley*, Vol.2, p.528

⁵ *The Journal of John Wesley*, Vol.2, p.535

So the Methodist Class System originally began as a way of clearing public debt for the construction of a 'preaching house', then evolved into a way of giving pastoral care, but more was to follow. Some would suggest that this was the direct leading of the Holy Spirit. From these humble beginnings the Methodist class system began. As the Wesley's and an increasing number of Methodist evangelists went about preaching in the villages, towns and cities within the United Kingdom many people came to a living faith in Christ. They were encouraged to join their local society of Methodists and these societies were split into different classes.

The Function, Purposes and Aims of the Class Meeting

Wesley sought to cultivate groups of people who would not only receive sound biblical doctrine and instruction, but also a ‘religion of the heart’, which fostered authentic inner spiritual growth through open and honest fellowship.

For the application, encouragement in personal devotion and ‘internalisation’ of this instruction Wesley organised the society to meet in separate classes of about five to ten people twice weekly in addition to the Wednesday night meeting. It was at these meetings that the serious business of personal discipling occurred.

The aim of the class was kept as clear as possible. Wesley said in the ‘Rules of the Band-Societies’,

*“The design of our meeting is, to obey that command of God,
“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye
may be healed.”⁶*

This is taken directly from the first part of James 5:16. It was this openness to one another and the serious desire to be real with God that spread what the Methodists termed as ‘scriptural holiness across the land’⁷.

The leader would ask specific personal questions of each member in turn and they were required to answer frankly and truthfully.⁸

Each time a new person joined the class they were read the rules and directions so that everyone knew exactly what was expected of them. If they

⁶ See Appendix A, Part 2

⁷ Still part of the constitutional basis of the Methodist Church today. (See Appendix B)

⁸ See Appendix A, Part 1

did not match up to the high standards they were swiftly removed from class membership.

With his doctrine of Christian perfection Wesley had high standards of those who voluntarily came under his pastoral care. In summarizing the class system Henderson comments,

*'The overall impact of Wesley's system was a massive transformation, even civilisation, of the whole bottom level of England's population...He lived to see it settled as a permanent system, both in the Old World and in the New, with a competent ministry, well-defined theology, considerable literature, rich hymnody, and the most comprehensive scheme of ecclesiastical discipline outside the Roman Catholic Church.'*⁹

Some British Methodists would suggest that this legacy lives on today and is enshrined in the Constitutional Standing Orders of the British Methodist Church, where it states,

*"...As membership of the Methodist Church also involves fellowship it is the duty of all members of the Methodist Church to seek to cultivate this in every possible way. The weekly class meeting has from the beginning proved to be the most effective means of maintaining among Methodists true fellowship in Christian experience..."*¹⁰

Whilst the intentions of this are laudable the reality is different and although the class system is firmly enshrined within the current British Methodist

⁹ *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p.158

¹⁰ CPD Vol. II 2003, Part 1 – Deed of Union, Section 2 Paragraph 9, p.215)

Standing Orders (as above) it is rarely practiced, if at all. Even as far back as second half of the nineteenth century the original vision had been lost or deliberately shrouded as Methodism grew into an autonomous denomination rather than as a society within the Anglican Church. Troeltsch argues that,

*'...as educated and affluent Methodists came to make up an increasing percentage of the (Methodist) membership, their criticism of and opposition to the old ways undermined the traditional status of the class meeting.'*¹¹

Some church leaders have suggested that a fresh approach is needed within the post-modern framework of twenty-first century culture. Cell Church has been likened to a contemporary equivalent of the early Methodist class system. There are many similarities between them, however, there are also some significant differences too. In the next section I will seek to highlight both these similarities and differences.

THE UNITED KINGDOM CELL CHURCH MOVEMENT

Before an accurate assessment can be made of the similarities and differences with the original Methodist class system and contemporary British Cell Church movement it is necessary to consider the following:

1. Cell Church in the UK today: A Brief Overview
2. What is Cell Church?
3. Cell Church values
4. The Cell meeting

¹¹ Henry D. Rack: “*The Decline of the Class-meeting and the Problem of Church-membership in the Nineteenth-century Wesleyanism*”, Proceedings, xxxix, pp. 12-21 quoted in *Proceedings of the*

1. Cell Church in the UK today. A Brief Overview

According to Cell UK, which is an inter-denominational umbrella organisation promoting cell church and its principles, it was Laurence Singlehurst, the then Director of Youth With A Mission England, who heard Ralph Neighbour speak about the cell church concept during a trip to India. He became profoundly affected by the vision and values of cell church and consequently invited Ralph to speak in the UK. In 1995, the first British National Cell Conference took place in Harpenden and was attended by 250 church leaders from different church backgrounds.¹²

Since then the number of cell churches within in the United Kingdom has steadily grown. There are between five- and seven-hundred churches 'going cell'¹³ or already in cell with numbers continually increasing across different denominations and streams.¹⁴ Within British Methodism there is now a growing interest with the cell church concept, which has the backing of the national governing body known as 'The Conference'.

It must be noted, however, there are no churches in the UK that are seeing anything like the growth seen in many nations around the world. Likewise there are no churches within the UK that are seeing growth akin to the 'Evangelical Awakening' through the ministry of the early Methodists in the eighteenth century. However, as stated above there are a growing number

Wesley Historical Society (Issue XLIII Part 3, December 1981).

¹² Source: Cell Church UK web-site introduction as at May 2004. www.celluk.org.uk

¹³ 'Going cell' is a technical cell church term for conventional churches which are transitioning or have transitioned into cell churches.

¹⁴ Source: Cell UK email from Trevor Withers – 11th June 2004

of churches within the UK who have transitioned to cell and are seeing continued growth.¹⁵

¹⁵ (For a list of five examples of growing UK Cell Churches see Appendix D).

2. What is a Cell Church?

A Cell Church consists of small groups of people known as 'cells' normally consisting of no more than fifteen people, who form part of the local church community. There are a set of core values and general directions for cell meetings. The cell group is considered to be the primary focus of the pastoral and discipling ministry within the local church. The local church structure is modelled around its cells so that nothing is allowed to conflict with them in the local church programme.

Purportedly the largest and one of the fastest growing churches in the world is a cell church. This is called the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea. Its founder, Dr. David Yonggi Cho converted from Buddhism to Christ in 1958 and began conducting services. He introduced the cell system back in 1967 which then consisted of 7,750 individuals organised into 125 cell groups. Thirty years later the church numbered over 750,000 with 25,000 home cell groups. Cho's emphasis was multiplication. He comments,

*'Our church has become a living organism. The home cell groups are living cells, and they function much like the cells in the human body. In a living organism, the cells grow and divide. Where once there was one cell, there become two. Then there are four, then eight, then sixteen, and so forth. Cells are not simply added to the body; they are multiplied by geometric progression.'*¹⁶

The main emphasis within a cell church is growth through multiplication of its cells. The theory is that if a cell is not growing and multiplying it is

¹⁶ *Successful Home Cell Groups*, p.65

unhealthy and needs attention. It could be stated that the main purpose of the cell church system is evangelism.

3. Cell Church Values

I will now briefly explain the five generally accepted core values and the theory that lies behind them.

1. Jesus at the centre

This core value is the most critical of all. The aim of the cell is for people to encounter Christ in their midst. He is to be the centre of all that happens within the individuals lives, in the life of the cell group and the wider church. There needs to be that 'inward religion' at the heart of all that happens. A Scripture that is often used is Matthew 18:20 where Jesus promises,

“For where two are three come together in my name, there I am with them.”

Within the different elements of the cell meeting it is hoped that Christ will be central. He is the reason and purpose of the gathering and it is all about knowing him, encountering him and introducing others to him. Unlike a housegroup which mainly focuses on what the Bible teaches about him, the cell seeks to bring about an encounter with him through application, rather than knowledge.

2. Every member in ministry (or ‘Everyone using their gifts to help others grow and to reach others’¹⁷)

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12:6-8)

¹⁷ *Cell –It*, p.10

This core value seeks to affirm the different gifts and talents within the cell members. Some church leaders suggest that in many church communities there is what is known as the '80/20 split'. As Laurence Singlehurst says,

*'In the average church, 80 per cent of the work is done by 20 per cent of the people.'*¹⁸

In the cell church there is a great emphasis on seeking to encourage people to develop their different abilities so that every member is serving and becoming involved.

Within the different components of the cell meeting people are given responsibility. Phil Potter, a nationally recognised cell church leader from St. Mark's Anglican Church in Haydock, expresses this succinctly, stating,

*'In the cell-based churches there isn't much room for the multi-talented star who takes on the world and the church almost single-handedly.'*¹⁹

He goes on to suggest that the cell should be more akin to the motto of the Three Musketeers – 'all for one and one for all'.

The fact that the cell meeting is normally hosted in different homes enables everyone to become involved in the gift of hospitality. The different elements of the meeting specifically lend themselves to being led by different people on a rotational basis so that everyone has the opportunity of leading. The aim of this is to draw out the more quiet individuals.

¹⁸ *Loving the Lost*, p.25-6

¹⁹ *The Challenge of Cell Church*, p.52

Another aspect of the 'ministry of all believers' is that the cell should function as a pastoral unit. It is the corporate responsibility of the cell members to make sure that their fellow member is being looked after, prayed for and any practical assistance given.

3. Every member growing

Through the members sharing their gifts and talents for the mutual building up of the cell group the presupposition is that cell members will mature as Christian disciples both as a cell group and as individuals within the cell. The principle is that if a person is given responsibility within the security of their cell group they will discover their gifts, hopefully use them and grow in spiritual maturity through the process.

4. Communities of trust and honesty marked by sacrificial love

'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.' (Eph.4:32)

Cell churches seek to encourage their members to deepen their relationships with one another through their cells. The relationships should extend beyond the cell meeting so that cell members are in contact throughout the week and seek to support one another whenever help is needed. The idea is cell members are there,

*'even when it hurts, and doing what is good for others even when it is costly for us as an individual.'*²⁰

²⁰ *Cell-It*, p.9

Proponents of cell are keen to suggest that without acceptance and trust the cell group cannot move forward. The idea is that when unbelievers do come along to either a social event or cell meeting they experience something different from normal; real people being honest and open with one another without contrivance or pretence. Within the cell group it is hoped that people will be able to say what they really think about themselves and their situations so that the rest of the cell give full support. Through this sacrificial love it is hoped that individuals may grow into mature disciples and be enabled to help others in need. Laurance Singlehurst puts this cell value in a macro-context. He explains that with the growing sense of globalisation and social fragmentation the need for community is all the more important.

5. Every member witnessing

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

(Luke 19:10)

At the heart of cell church and its values is evangelism. Cell church enthusiasts suggest that if the church is to be really effective in fulfilling her ‘Great Commission’ she relies on every one playing their part and growing spiritually. Scripture is clear with regard to the sin of spiritual lukewarmness where congregations become apathetic about their own growth and the advance of the Kingdom.²¹ A cell is designed to multiply. It multiplies through growth. Each cell member is encouraged to be committed to cultivating their circle of friends. The theory is that cell members will not be burdened with heavy centralised church management structures which

entail large numbers of church meetings, but be released to mix socially with their 'unchurched' contacts as much as possible.

As with a biological cell, the theory is that if it is alive it will grow and multiply. Evangelism is meant to be at the heart of the cell church concept. There is a sense of personal responsibility and accountability to pray for 'unchurched' friends together by name each week in the cell meetings which makes it a corporate activity. Cells will frequently have social gatherings when these contacts are invited along to meet other cell members in what is hopefully a 'non-threatening' environment.

4. The Cell Meeting

Within the context of the United Kingdom cells normally meet on a weekly basis. A typical cell meeting lasts about ninety minutes, but some go on as long as three hours. Meetings generally tend to operate around the structure known as the 'The Four W's' (i.e. Welcome, Witness, Word &

²¹ See Revelation 3:14-18

Worship) [4Ws], which were developed by Ralph Neighbour and Bill Beckham.

Different cell churches vary their cell meetings according to local demand and custom. Some cell churches have set aside the 4Ws altogether as they believed this hindered the free flow of the meeting.

The grid below shows the 4Ws set against the aims, activity and intended outcome within each particular element:

Table 1 – The Cell Meeting Grid

	Aim	Activity	Outcome or 'Feel'
<u>1.WELCOME</u>	Make everyone feel welcome	Food and drink. Games, chat,	Non-threatening

	and a part of the group.	questions.	
<u>2.WORSHIP</u>	Everyone connect with God – focus on Jesus.	Worship –it does not have to be musical. It might involve some creative skill, such as art, movement or whatever seems appropriate at the time.	Presence of God. Thankfulness. Awesomeness!
<u>3.WORD</u>	Let Jesus and his Word change our lives. Live the life, not just talk about it!	Ask each other searching questions. Prayer, spiritual gifts. Hearing God's voice.	Dependence on Holy Spirit, working with him. Serving one another.
<u>4.WITNESS</u>	To see not-yet-Christians friends reached for Jesus.	Prayer, warfare ²² , planning.	God's heart for the lost. Obedience to Holy Spirit. Faith.

As Singlehurst notes these four elements to the cell meeting are not meant to be a constraining legalistic system, but a suggested flexible framework. They seek to encourage 'every member ministry' amongst and within the different cell members. The idea is that they will be asked to lead one of the different 4Ws. In this way leadership potential can be assessed by the cell leader and the theory is that the other people within the cell will discover their own talents and gifts for themselves.

The cell meeting with its recommended structure seeks to outwork the cell values and the different elements are meant to link in with each other.²³

²² 'Warfare' refers to spiritual warfare. It is believed that there are spiritual forces that oppose people from becoming Christians. See Ephesians 6:10-18

²³ See Appendix D

So having briefly considered the early Methodist class system and the UK cell movement I would like to consider the similarities and differences between them.

Similarities with the UK Cell Church and the early Methodist Class System

In this section I intend to show several similarities with the UK Cell Church and the early Methodist Class system. I emphasize the word 'similarities' as

opposed to exact representations as consideration must be given to their different historical and sociological settings.

Common Purposes & Aims

The primary similarity of the early Methodist class meeting and the cell meeting could be said to be encapsulated in their mutually compatible and inter-related purposes and aims.

As Watson notes,

‘Wesley grouped the components of Christian discipleship under two broad headings: “works of mercy” (doing everything possible to serve God and one’s neighbor, ...; and “works of piety” (doing everything needful to be open to God’s grace).²⁴

However, Dean notes,

‘The class was a fellowship group of sorts, but its functional importance was deeper. The basic function was evangelism and conservation – the recruitment and assimilation of new members.²⁵

Proponents of cell church site these twin emphases linking them into the core values of cell church with its focus on being Christocentric (‘Jesus at the centre’) and outward focussed in witness and service (‘Every member in ministry’ and ‘Every member being a witness’). For these aims to be achieved, both the classes and cells, chief aims are to engender spiritual reality and practical application. There appears to be a desire to strip away the false and powerless ideologies of religion that they regard as having encroached upon the contemporary church and seek to rediscover the

²⁴ *Forming Christian Disciples*, p.7

power of true Christian fellowship and discipleship. Both would regard, within their respective cultures, a syncretistic contentment within the 'established' or 'institutional' churches. Wesley's class system sought to cut directly across the perceived religious hypocrisy of the day as cell seeks to today. Cell church is a reaction to institutionalised religion like the class system, which seeks to empower ordinary individuals through mutual care and a true encounter with God. Through these combined elements the desire is to reverse the steady decline of the church within the UK. This hope for the UK is expressed by Bill Beckham's introduction to Laurence Singlehurst's book *Loving the Lost*,

*'The church has gradually begun to stir from its spiritual slumber induced by institutional religion, academic intellectualism and twentieth-century secularism. A series of movements over the past two decades gives hope that the long hibernation of the church is coming to an end...Among recent movements the cell church uniquely provides a practical design for the church to actually mobilize every member for ministry and evangelism.'*²⁶

This emphasis of cell church is to facilitate personal spiritual growth and through that to impact of society with the Gospel – to turn the church 'inside out'²⁷ as Watson terms it. Cell church, unlike many conventional homegroups, seeks to apply biblical truth in practical ways that impact the local community. For example, a cell church in Lincolnshire has undertaken the huge task of conducting a 'Needs Assessment' of their local village

²⁵ The Methodist Class Meeting Article by William Dean in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (Vol.XLIII Part 3: December 1981), p.43

²⁶ *Loving the Lost*, p.7

(Population circa 5,000) with the blessing of the local parish council to see how they might best serve the people in their area. From this they hope to be able to effectively put their Christian faith into practise having done the necessary research whilst praying that those in the community will be brought to a living faith in Jesus Christ.

The spirit of this enterprise is akin to the early Methodists desire to put their deep and real faith into acts of 'faith' and 'piety'.

Experience & Application versus Theology & Doctrine

The class meeting of the eighteenth century and cell meeting of the twenty-first are not primarily for the function of theological and doctrinal cogitation, but rather application of biblical truth through personal experience. As Henderson comments,

*'The subject matter of a class meeting was personal experience, not doctrinal ideology or biblical information. The only place where conceptual data impinged upon the class process was the struggle which individuals underwent in internalising or applying or incorporating some biblical ideal into their lives.'*²⁸

It is thought by those who subscribe to cell church values that new converts are more likely to be transformed by testimonies of the 'changed heart' from fellow lay people than the intellectual theology of the trained clergy. This particularly applies to the context of the eighteenth century when it was 'fashionable' for the upper classes to be 'in the church'.

²⁷ *Forming Christian Disciples*, p.20

²⁸ *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p.100

In the same way today cell church emphasises experience and application rather than doctrine and theology for their own sake. This is often reflected in the 'Word' section of the cell meeting.²⁹ This time is more focussed on edification than knowledge. As Freestone explains,

*'Usually by using a prepared outline the scriptures are used to bring teaching and encouragement to others in the group. Leads into discussion on "How does this relate to me and my life?"'*³⁰

Cell churches seek to move on from the 'housegroup mentality' which can focus on merely answering questions from a given Bible chapter, rather than directly applying it into the reality of the believers life.

Lay Leadership

Another feature, which encompasses both the class and the cell, is the emphasis on lay leadership.

Although Wesley, who was an ordained Anglican priest, instituted the class system it soon become evident, due to the rapid expansion of the movement, that he would not be able to personally oversee them. He put in local lay leaders to oversee the work of discipling the new converts to each society with his strict guidelines (as per Appendix A). As Snyder notes,

*'By the time Methodism had reached 100,000 members at the end of the century, the movement must have had over 10,000 class and band leaders, with perhaps an equal or larger total of other leaders.'*³¹

²⁹ See Appendix C for an example.

³⁰ *A New Way of Being Church*, p.46

³¹ *In a class of their own*, p.5 Cell UK Magazine - Issue 13 (2001)

Similarly within the UK, lay leaders are the ones who lead the estimated 6000-plus cell groups every week. This system would be completely unmanageable if it was in the hands of the 'professional' church leaders, pastors, ministers, vicars; etc. Carl George makes this point in his book *Prepare Your Church for the Future*,

*'The task of the professional clergy in the Church of the future will not be to provide primary pastoral care... [it] will be to build and support carers and leaders.'*³²

Howard Astin, the senior leader of one of the first churches to transition to cell in the UK during the nineteen-eighties at St. John's, Bowling adds,

*'This goes against what is taught in most of our theological training colleges for clergy (!)'*³³

As with the class system in the eighteenth century (noted above) and as with the cell system in the twenty-first century growth should be a natural outcome. As also previously mentioned cell churches are expected to grow and cells are expected to multiply. Multiplication could be severely restricted if it was dependant upon 'professional leaders' doing the leading. Instead the philosophy of 'every member in ministry' means that cell members can receive 'on the job' training. As Liz West notes,

*'We have discovered that developing leaders is at the heart of the cell model. In fact, creating a pool of trained cell leaders encourages growth and multiplication of cell groups.'*³⁴

³² *Prepare Your Church for the Future* quoted in *Body & Cell*, p.59

³³ *Body & Cell*, p.59

³⁴ *Equipping Future Cell Leaders*, p.5

It is obvious that these leaders are going to be ordinary members of the cells and not theologically trained leaders. Growth is can be hindered by lack of leadership.

Mutual Accountability

The Methodist Class system was revolutionary in that it reached different social classes and educational standards by primarily appealing to a person's soul rather than their brain – a warmed-heart rather than a full brain. People of different social standing were grouped together. In the eighteenth century this was revolutionary. As Miley comments,

*'The class meeting was...a means of expression for people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to speak. It afforded some satisfaction for those who in the polity of the Methodist Church had otherwise no place. The servant girl would follow her mistress in telling the people what God had done for her. The leaders of the class might be the manager of the local factory or he might be one of the working men engaged there.'*³⁵

This unique class system gave a voice to the voiceless and broke down the hitherto unassailable social strata of the eighteenth century. In the class meeting there was a sense of being 'one in Christ' rather than, for example, employer or employee. Wesley's rules were no respecter of persons. Either they obeyed the rules and remained members or did not and were put out of the fellowship. The honesty that was required within the class meant the people were all 'in the same boat'. Vulnerability and honest within small

³⁵ *A Treatise on Class Meetings*, pp.46-7

groups fosters a real sense of 'togetherness' and mutual accountability. As each class member shared their concerns with their fellow class members as Watson points out,

*'...This in turn gave rise to a dynamic of mutual accountability, which in and of itself came to be a significant means of pastoral support and oversight...In their weekly meetings the members shared their experiences. They prayed together. They affirmed and, if need be, corrected each other.'*³⁶

This honest and openness was magnetic. The early classes flourished because of the depth of relationships and the reality of spiritual experience. Similarly the cell meetings seek to foster this mutual accountability through their core values expressing them in terms of '*Communities of trust and honesty marked by sacrificial love*'. As noted in one of Cell UK's training booklets,

*'Cells are not a meeting, but a group where dynamic loving, caring and accountable relationships facilitate discipleship and outreach.'*³⁷

Within the British-psyche it would appear that there needs to be a vehicle to enable people to be really honest with one another. Cells are meant to be places of safety which enable the members to 'open up' in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Singlehurst believes,

'...the world is looking for people who genuinely care for one another, who will look after each other in good times and bad. Church must be

³⁶ *Class Leaders*, p.26

³⁷ *Equipped to Lead a Cell Community*, p.9

*about community...The cell provides a place where community can be built.*³⁸

Mutual accountability is an essential ingredient within the cell church structure. Without it meetings become a purely academic exercise in spiritual data gathering and will not achieve the growth and life that is necessary to make disciples effectively.

Common Ancestry & Criticism.

Bill Beckham, one of the leading cell church theologians, as mentioned earlier, notes that the historical link of cell church and the Wesleyan Methodist class system must be seen within the bigger picture of the re-emergence of New Testament ways of 'being' church. He believes that there are similarities, because the class and the cell are in themselves true expressions of church rather than an added extra to 'traditional church' normally expressed through the Sunday morning service. He notes,

*'Some traditional leaders accused Wesley of causing a schism by drawing church members into the classes...These small groups functioned as the church. They did what the church was supposed to do. When opposition came, Wesley was not distracted by the traditional church that considered itself to be the real church.'*³⁹

Cell church advocates regard this concept as 'real church' and the 'traditional church' having lost sight of its New Testament roots by regressing into a pre-Christian Old Testament-style focus of temple worship centred around a building rather than expressing true Christian community.

³⁸ *Loving the Lost*, p.29

It must also be noted, however, that criticism of the cell church concept comes from other parts of the church, albeit on the conservative fringes. Tricia Tillin who is the spokeswoman for Banner UK Ministries dismissed cell church as nothing more than a 'viral infection' within the church. She believes,

*'The purpose of cell churches is to transition the Church as a whole into a new order, to create a radical and ground-breaking reformation that will overthrow the established order and bring into being a pattern of apostolic government and prophetic revelation that will change the thinking of all Christians... We are witnessing the complete eradication of what we know and see of the Church today, in favour of the sort of "spiritual revolution" demanded by author William Beckham in "The Second Reformation"... But of what spirit? And what is the aim of this revolution? It is no less than world domination.'*⁴⁰

Many pages on Tillin's web-site are dedicated to warning her readers about the dangers of cell church, along with other established and well-regarded ministries such as Holy Trinity Brompton's Alpha and Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* and *Church* series.

So as in the days of Wesley these small groups are regarded by some as divisive and subversive.

³⁹ *The Second Reformation*, pp.119-20

⁴⁰ Quoted from Banner UK web-site page <http://www.banner.org.uk/apostasy/cell-church7.htm>

Groups Sizes and Frequency of Meeting

In 'The Constitution and Purpose of the Class' which is still contained within the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church it states,

*'There are about twelve persons in every class; one of whom is styled the Leader.'*⁴¹

Wesley gives no explanation as why this number is deemed to be appropriate, but it could be said that there have been good Biblical precedents for such a number. Similarly with cell groups it is generally regarded that numbers should not go too much above twelve and no more above fifteen otherwise people will be prevented from sharing at any depth. From my own research and experience I have found that the smaller the group is the more likely people are to share at a deeper level. Beckham illustrates the importance of small cell groups from his 'Jethro Structure'. The smallest group size being approximately ten. He says that the cell can exist from about five to fifteen Christians.⁴²

The early Methodists met together in their classes at least weekly as per Appendix A. This was so that they could regularly and systematically be accountable to one another and encourage one another in the important aims of the class which Wesley set down.

Within in the UK today cells are strongly encouraged to meet weekly to maintain the sense of community; to be consistent in Bible teaching and

⁴¹ Methodist CPD Vol.1, p.73

⁴² *The Second Reformation*, p.188

build true relationships with each other. Singlehurst calls this 'Equipping and Accountability'.⁴³

So in order to make any judgements regarding the class and cell systems and having considered some of the similarities of these movements I would now like to consider some of their differences.

⁴³ *Loving the Lost*, pp.152-170

Differences between the UK Cell Church and the early Methodist Class System

The first major differentiating factor relates to the socio-historic settings of the two church movements. When seeking to compare like-for-like this consideration underpins all the following criterion.

Socio-historic Setting

As discussed earlier the newly emerging society within the Anglican Church lead by the Wesley brothers and others was set within the birth of the industrial revolution. Henderson describes it as the time,

*'...which whisked England out of the Middle Ages and into the modern industrial era. For those who owned the mills and factories during this economic boom, times were never better...but beneath the belching smokestacks of their factories and in the smoky shadows of their grimy mills a vast horde of impoverished workers eked out a miserable living.'*⁴⁴

Henderson goes onto say how the poor became poorer and how the rich ruthlessly exploited them. Over in France the peasants revolted and stormed the Bastille in 1789. In Britain however, a different revolution occurred through the ministry of the Wesley brothers who by God's leading ushered in an evangelical revolution. The class system was central to the enduring growth over several decades during this period of time. The class system preserved the teachings and ethos of the early Methodist revival. John Whitefield, a contemporary preacher of John Wesley who introduced him to 'field preaching' said,

⁴⁴ *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p.17

*'My Brother Wesley acted wisely- the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labour. This I neglected, and, my people are a rope of sand.'*⁴⁵

Wesley's class system effectively disciplined a huge numbers of converts. Through thousands of lay people who had been suitably vetted for their important task either directly or indirectly by Wesley this system affected the nation. Snyder notes,

*'By the turn of the century around one in every 30 adult Englishmen was a Methodist!'*⁴⁶

The Impact & Growth of the British Cell Church Movement

This is where the difference between the early Methodist Class system and the contemporary British Cell Church movement appear to emerge.

Twenty-first Century postmodern Britain is drastically different from the eighteenth century. Global communications are instant. Distances that took Wesley months can be completed reliably and regularly within only a few hours. Some would suggest that post-modernity, although paying lip service to 'spirituality', is more akin to secular-humanism. The world has radically changed in three-hundred years.

The cell church system, as yet, has not seen the growth that the class system had and it has not seen the growth that other countries have experienced such as South Korea, as previously mentioned. In a recent study 320 UK cell churches were sent questionnaires regarding their growth. Of the 97 who responded the average annual rate of growth was

⁴⁵ *History of Methodism*, p.204

⁴⁶ 'In a Class of Their Own' article by H. A. Snyder (2001) in *Cell UK Magazine*, **13**, p.4

only 3.59%⁴⁷. However, because of the vastly different socio-historical settings it must also be noted that on average between 1980 and 2000 the net UK church decline was in the region of 12% (a net loss of 260 people per day)⁴⁸. Set against these figures the average growth rate of the UK cell churches researched is managing to turn the tide of church decline.

Early Methodist Discipline & Cell Values

Within the socio-historic setting of the eighteenth century the class meetings and system were well organised. By today's standards it would be regarded as authoritarian and controlling. Class 'rules'⁴⁹ were rigid and inflexible. Failure to adhere to any of these requirements would result in the class members ticket being withheld, which would render them excluded from membership and out of the Methodist Society. Wesley was quite ruthless in his high standards and did not permit 'waverers'. As Henderson explains,

*'If there was sound reason why any person should not be admitted, that person was brought face-to-face with his or her accusers. If prospective members repented, or if the accusations were unfounded, they were admitted on two months' trial. If they were belligerent, or refused to work on their problem, they were not admitted.'*⁵⁰

Cell Church in the UK is more conducive to post-modernity. Instead of rules the emphasis is on the core values (mentioned above) and on encouragement and nurture. For example, the cell leader is meant to know

⁴⁷ See Appendix E

⁴⁸ Source: English Church Attendance Survey 1998 and the like studies in earlier years in England, Wales and Scotland quoted in *101 Statistics every Church Leader Should Know*, p.8

⁴⁹ See Appendix A

⁵⁰ *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, p.78

each cell member individually partly with the help of a short booklet, known as a Journey Guide ⁵¹. Singlehurst notes,

'This should be done in an informal, chatty way in a person's home. As you may know, a great deal can be learned about a person by visiting them in their home environment.' ⁵²

'Informal' and 'chatty' are far cries from the virtual church court where the accused is brought in before their accusers for questioning and public scrutiny. The strict discipline of eighteenth century class system has been replaced by a more relaxed approach in the twenty-first. The emphasis on mutual accountability or 'pastoral responsibility'⁵³ has sort to bring in a more culturally relevant form of self-governance. Rather than cell members being called to account by senior church leaders they are encouraged to be self-regulating. The mutual accountability of the early class meeting was different from that of contemporary British cell movement. Within the class system it was a mode of discipline and adherence to an inflexible code, within cell it has a greater emphasis on encouragement and nurture. However, some might suggest that the result of this 'laid-back' post-modern approach has weakened the effectiveness of the church and slowed down her growth. Where churches are set within a more disciplined culture, such as in South-East Asia, the church has flourished.

⁵¹ A 'Journey Guide' is a work book used by cell leader's to help assess new and existing cell members through a spiritual check-up looking at their spiritual journey and experiences so far. This enables the cell leaders to get to know the person.

⁵² *Loving the Lost*, p.101

⁵³ *Loving the Lost*, p.101

Class Meeting & Cell Meeting

In a similar vein looking through the Rules of the Class meetings the emphasis appears to be about weeding out weakness and sin. The questions were specifically set so that the other class members could judge from the answers they were hearing as to whether their fellow class member was continuing to have victory over sin or weakening to 'sin, flesh or the devil'. For example the main four questions to be asked of each class member each week were,

- 1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?*
- 2. What temptations have you met with?*
- 3. How were you delivered?*
- 4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?⁵⁴*

These questions were central to the ethos of the class meeting. However, in addition to these questions were two other important factors as Henderson notes, which were of a slightly different nature. Firstly,

'...exhortations to positive behaviour and, [secondly], helpful practices to be maintained, which were known as the "means of grace". These were not conditions of admission, but behavioural targets...⁵⁵

The different emphasis of class and cell meetings can be likened to a lesson in school. The class system seeks to alter behaviour through strict codes of discipline, whereas the cell system seeks to educate through encouragement, nurture and example. This is not to say that the class

⁵⁴ As per Appendix A

meetings were devoid of mutual care, love and encouragement, but that was a by-product rather than primary purpose. It must also be noted what a great commitment and sacrifice was made by the early Methodists to meet together in their weekly class. As Henderson explains,

The chronicles of early Methodism record heroic tales of pious folk, committed to their class, who would undergo great harassment, walk long distances, endure hardship, and put up with bizarre settings in order to “meet in class.”⁵⁶

There must have been something more than the disciplines of the Methodist system driving these people on, rather a genuine desire to grow in their faith and become more like their Saviour, Jesus Christ, perhaps?

In contrast to the official ethos of the Methodist class system the cell meeting's main purposes are to:

1. Foster personal responsibility;
2. Bring everyone to the next level of Christian maturity;
3. Help develop an accountable relationship with someone who will encourage them, answer their questions and pray for them.⁵⁷

The structure of the cell meeting seeks to develop this through the four 'W's (as previously mentioned) with the emphasis on application of biblical truth in a practical way rather than on theological training.

Evangelism

The primary pursuit of the class system was not to openly evangelise, but to nurture, although there was an evangelistic element to the discipling of new

⁵⁵ *John Wesley's Class Meetings*, p.97

⁵⁶ *John Wesley's Class Meetings*, p.99

converts as noted earlier. The class evolved into a unit of training new converts into the disciplines and rigours of Christian holiness set within the context of eighteenth-century Britain. It was a gathering of those who had already responded to the preaching of the Gospel through the ministry of John Wesley and other Methodist preachers. As Dean notes the classes sought to,

‘...encourage those who had begun the pursuit of holiness to persevere.’⁵⁸

So from that context it could be said that the class was inward focused on the individuals ‘pursuit of holiness’ with fellow Christians within the class meeting structure. The class was a retreating from the surrounding worldliness and the joining together of like-minded people. However, the cell system is more openly evangelistic and seeking to be non-Christian-friendly in the nurture of relationships with those within the community. Rather than retreat from the world it seeks to infiltrate the world with the Gospel. Singlehurst advocates doing this by holding parties and other social events. This would not have been encouraged in the class system of the eighteenth-century, but rather something to be repented of. Cells seek to bring people to Christ through friendship evangelism and networking within their own communities. The emphasis is not so much on personal holiness, but on focusing on the needs and ‘lostness’ of those around them. As Singlehurst explains,

⁵⁷ *Loving the Lost*, pp.153-5

⁵⁸ The Methodist Class Meeting Article by William Dean in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* (Vol.XLIII Part 3: December 1981), p.43

*'It is about empowering each cell member to climb out of their Christian ghetto and into their local environment to make unchurched friends. These are genuine friendships, not just acquaintances for the converting potential... So, during the cycle of the cell, the cell will help each person make friends...'*⁵⁹

So it could be said that the class was inward focused and the cell is outward focused. However, this is where the paradox lies, because historically the class appears to have been more effective in making and nurturing Christians than its twenty-first century, outward focused ancestor.

⁵⁹ *Loving the Lost*, p.90

CONCLUSION

So having looked at the similarities and differences what can be deduced?

From the evidence gathered during the course of my research the class system would appear to have been statistically more effective in multiplying Christian believers on a national basis as compared with the contemporary British cell church movement. As I quoted earlier from the article by Howard Snyder, British Methodism grew in the thirty-year period from 27,341 to 101,712 members. That is a mean average annual growth of over 29%. This is compared with the previously stated approximate annual growth of only 3.59% within the UK Cell Church. However, compared to the current 12% decline the cell church fairs well against this trend.

It could also be said that even though the recruitment and assimilation ethos behind the class and cell systems were similar their modus operandi were different. Some have suggested that the cell system offers a credible post-modern alternative to the eighteenth-century class system. The growing number of churches transitioning to cell within British Methodism over the last two years would seem to support this claim. An increasing number of Methodist members are mindful of the similarities between cell church and its spiritual forbear the class system with its emphasis of encouraging deeper spiritual experience, commitment and the reversal of decline within the denomination. The Methodist Cell Church Network pamphlet introduces the theme with the title 'Resurrecting the Classes'. From this and other previously stated evidence it would appear that there are sufficient similarities to warrant this claim.

Cell church enthusiasts would claim that there are enough similarities to warrant the claim that the cell system is a distant relative of the class meeting, but within a different context. The class meeting emerged within the context of revival. The cell church system is an ideal tool and preparation for the next.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

1. RULES OF THE BAND-SOCIETIES, DRAWN UP DECEMBER 25, 1738.

THE design of our meeting is, to obey that command of God, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”

To this end, we intend, —

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt, since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer, suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations.

Some of the questions proposed to every one before he is admitted among us may be to this effect: —

1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?
2. Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?
3. Have you the witness of God’s Spirit with your spirit, that you are a child of God?
4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
9. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you?
10. Do you desire that, in doing this, we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
11. Is it your desire and design to be on this, and all other occasions, entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers; the four following at every meeting: —

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?

4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?

2. DIRECTIONS GIVEN TO THE BAND-SOCIETIES, DECEMBER 25, 1744.

YOU are supposed to have the faith that “overcometh the world.” To you, therefore, it is not grievous, —

I.

Carefully to abstain from doing evil; in particular, —

1. Neither to buy nor sell anything at all on the Lord’s day.
2. To taste no spirituous liquor, no dram of any kind, unless prescribed by a Physician.
3. To be at a word both in buying and selling.
4. To pawn nothing, no, not to save life.
5. Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop those short that do.
6. To wear no needless ornaments, such as rings, earrings, necklaces, lace, ruffles.
7. To use no needless self-indulgence, such as taking snuff or tobacco, unless prescribed by a Physician.

II.

Zealously to maintain good works; in particular, —

1. To give alms of such things as you possess, and that to the uttermost of your power.
2. To reprove all that sin in your sight, and that in love and meekness of wisdom.
3. To be patterns of diligence and frugality, of self-denial, and taking up the cross daily.

III.

Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God; in particular, —

1. To be at church and at the Lord’s table every week, and at every public meeting of the Bands.
2. To attend the ministry of the word every morning, unless distance, business, or sickness prevent.
3. To use private prayer everyday; and family prayer, if you are at the head of a family.
4. To read the Scriptures, and meditate therein, at every vacant; hour. And,
5. To observe, as days of fasting or abstinence, all Fridays in the year.

APPENDIX B

The Doctrinal Clause of the Deed of Union of 1932

(The Constitutional Basis of the Methodist Church)

"The Methodist Church claims and cherishes its place in the Holy Catholic Church which is the Body of Christ. It rejoices in the inheritance of the apostolic faith and loyally accepts the fundamental principles of the historic creeds and of the Protestant Reformation.

It ever remembers that in the providence of God Methodism was raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land by the proclamation of the Evangelical Faith and declares its unfaltering resolve to be true to its divinely appointed mission.

The doctrines of the evangelical faith, which Methodism has held from the beginning and still holds, are based on the divine revelation recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

The Methodist Church acknowledges this revelation as the supreme rule of faith and conduct."

APPENDIX C

Cell Material

Cell Outlines – Example

Week beginning: 8th February 2004

Theme: Colossians – Part Five (Submission to Christ)

To Get Us Started: Supposing we had a tape-recorder of your conversations today. Consider whether you would be happy playing it to the rest of your cell? Perhaps you'd like to tell the rest of the cell about your day; the difficulties and blessings of it and how you coped/ reacted to the various situations and people who came across your path! (This might be a good time to pray for one another!)

Word

Teaching Material

This is the final cell session on Colossians. The first two chapters were concerning Christian truth and theology; i.e. 'The Supremacy of Christ'.

The second two relate that doctrine to our daily lives; i.e. 'Submission to Christ'. Continual change is necessary in our lives. There needs to be a 'putting off' of our old sinful ways and a 'putting on' of Christ's ways and character. We are no longer living for ourselves, but for Him. This should be reflected in who we are, the way we conduct ourselves, our approach to work and our relationships in the home. Scary stuff!

- Read Colossians 3:1-4:6 together.

According to God's Word our earthly nature consists of the 'vices' mentioned in vs. 5 & 8.

- Look at them for a moment. We are told in v.6, '*Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*' Why do you think this is so?
- Note what Paul says in the next verse, '*You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.*' It is not possible to remain caught in the previous list and be living in a right relationship with God or others. The two 'ways' are completely incompatible. (*Discuss!*)
- Now look at the new spiritual clothes we are to 'put on' in vs. 12 to 14 and notice the overcoat in v.14! What are your clothes like?
- Paul then goes on to explain that we are all in this together and have a role in helping one another to live the life that Christ intends us to in vs. 15 to 17. (*Discuss*)
- In vs. 18-21 there are various rules for households. Do you find these contentious or true? In vs.3:22 to 4:1 we might like to consider these as rules for employment – concerning the relationship to employee/ employer.
- Note the powerful counter-cultural verses of 17 and 23. Do these verses challenge our approach to paid or voluntary work? Do you regard what you do as something worthy of the Lord? (*Discuss*)

Witness

In 4:2-6 Paul gives 'Further instructions'. These relate to missionary prayer and our attitudes to non-Christians. Look at these verses together and perhaps you might like to pray regarding the following things:

- ◇ Being thankful ◇ Openness to the Gospel ◇ Clarity for those who preach ◇ Wisdom in the way we act towards non-Christians ◇ Making the most of the opportunities we have in sharing the Gospel in word and deed ◇ Asking

God to help us with regard to what we say and the way we say it. [Perhaps there are other issues raised by tonight's study that people need prayer for.]

See also <http://lincoln.webspace.fish.co.uk/cellmaterial.htm>

APPENDIX D

Structure of the Cell Meeting

Welcome

As with most British acts of worship or fellowship they must include a cup of tea either at the beginning or the end and the cell meeting is now exception! After people have arrived and settled down the cell leader. Often an ice-breaker may be used. This helps newcomers participate in a non-threatening way, as well as enabling the group to get to know and appreciate one another. It also helps everyone's focus to move from the worries or busyness of the day to sharing in the group. Singlehurst says,

*'This initial welcome achieves two things. First everybody has spoken, there is nobody in the group who is a spectator; everyone has become a participator, and they are given significance as the rest of the group listens without interruption to their answer. Second, community begins. Real community between people begins with the interchange of information and the acceptance that results from this.'*⁶⁰

For example, to get people talking and sharing the following questions might be asked,

- If you could be any cartoon character, which one could you be and why?
- Which shoe do you put on first?

⁶⁰ *Loving the Lost*, pp.84-5

- What is your favourite time of day, and why?⁶¹

The reason such random questions are used is to help new-comers feel involved. Especially within the British culture people needs lots of encouragement to share. With such light-hearted most people will have an experience, story or opinion to share.

Worship

This is the time to focus on the Lord Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit. If possible a few songs of praise and thanksgiving may be offered to God. Many cell churches encourage people to think 'outside the box' with their worship so that they can develop their gifts and talents through art, music and even movement. If the church is open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit⁶² these too can be nurtured and encouraged within the small group setting.

Word

This may be a reflection on the last Sunday message or a follow-up of something that was not concluded in the previous week's cell meeting. Sometimes this period will be extended when there is need for special teaching or training. But generally it will not exceed 10 minutes or the meeting will revert to a Bible study centred on one speaker and several spectators, thus losing the whole dynamic of an inter-relational, sharing, participating cell group.

⁶¹ All questions taken from *303 Ice Breakers*.

⁶² As per 1 Corinthians 12:1-10

Sometimes the brief shared word may generate questions and discussion. At other times there may be a pressing global, or local, or church crisis that has caught every one's attention. At other times individual needs may be shared or become evident and the whole group is invited to offer counsel and prayer at the appropriate time. This is time for each participant to seek the Lord for a word of wisdom or encouragement to give. Whatever the discussion prayer is the concluding element of this part of the evening.

Witness/ Works

This is a time for preparation, planning and prayer for the evangelistic work of the cell group. The close family, friends and colleagues of cell members should be determined and prayed for individually. The group can arrange its own bridge-building events and, later, Alpha or Discovery groups, held instead of the group or as an addition to it.

APPENDIX E

A selection of growing UK Cell Churches (as supplied by Cell UK – June 2004)

- St Johns Bowling, Bradford
- Arnold Salvation Army, Nottingham
- Peterborough Community Church
- Christian Fellowship Church, Belfast
- Open Door Church NFI, St Neots
- Open Heaven Church, Loughborough
- St Mark's, Haydock

Also Nettleham Methodist Church & Threshold Church (which was a split from the Methodist Church in the 1990s).

Table 2 - UK Cell Church Growth⁶³

The figures below show growth rates and sizes of churches by denomination. Only those from the Church of England and New Frontiers International have a large enough size for the sample to be statistically significant.

Denomination	No. of churches ⁶⁴	Growth range % per year (Overall av. = 3.59)			Size range (2002) (Overall av. = 175)		
		min.	max.	av.	min.	max.	av.
Anglican ⁶⁵	29	-3.3	14.8	3.1	29	825	166
NFI	17	-1.8	28.7	4.7	50	1160	291
GroundLevel	7	0.8	7.4	2.8	69	610	207
Elim Pentecostal	6	-0.1	3.1	1.5	46	200	132
Methodist	6	-2.2	6.4	2.2	31	180	99
AoG	4	1.4	10.6	5.7	46	330	153
Pioneer	4	-3.4	3.5	0.7	46	147	78
Salvation Army	2	4.4	9.5	7.0	56	120	88
c.net	2	6.0	8.2	7.6	200	600	439
Baptist	2	-2.0	0.6	1.1	49	261	155
Others ⁶⁶	18	-6.0	16.7	4.1	12	325	108

⁶³ *Do English Cell Churches Grow*, p.38

⁶⁴ Figures for C of E and Methodist denominations each include the same CoE/ Methodist Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

⁶⁵ Two of the Anglican Churches are experimental non-parish based church plants.

⁶⁶ Mostly independent 'new' churches.

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