

Revival and the Reformers: James Caughey's Long British Sojourn and the Tensions in 1840s Wesleyan Methodism

James E. Pedlar

There were more than a dozen schisms in the English Methodist family in the sixty years after John Wesley's death, but the 1849 episode that led to the formation of the United Methodist Free Churches and the Wesleyan Reform Union was the most explosive and largest division, taking an estimated 100,000 members from the ranks of Wesleyan Methodism. As in many of the earlier conflicts, the split exposed tensions between the "high Methodist" party, which favoured strong centralized pastoral authority, and "low Methodism," which was more open to revival, lay participation in governance, and less concerned about maintaining Connexional control on all forms of ministry. This "Age of Disunity" was well-treated by several major works in the mid-to late twentieth century, and a host of other studies of the period have dealt the divisions in various ways, typically setting the debates in the social and political context, both nationally and on a local level.¹ Generally speaking, these disputes have received more treatment by historians than by theologians, and the theological theme that received the most attention is the "high" Wesleyan doctrine of the "pastoral office" with its strong view of church discipline and the authority of the ministry.² There is a need for a closer examination of the non-Wesleyan Methodist side of the debates, especially from a theological perspective.

One chapter of such a study would need to deal with James Caughey, the fiery Irish-America revivalist who spent six years campaigning in Wesleyan Methodist churches in the 1840s, and whose exit in 1847 at the request of the Conference was one of the sparks that lit the fire of 1849. Caughey is often remembered for his lasting influence on William Booth, which began when Booth heard Caughey preach in 1846.³ Richard Carwardine and John Kent have both highlighted Caughey's importance, and he is discussed to a lesser extent by a few other scholars.⁴ Still, given the scale of his impact, he remains a slightly neglected figure, and his theological perspective has not been investigated much at all.

¹ John Kent, *The Age of Disunity* (London: Epworth Press, 1966); Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism* (London: Faber, 1968); W. Reginald Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), 135-176, 236-278; D. A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions: The Origins of Free Methodism in Three Lancashire Towns, Manchester, Rochdale, Liverpool* (Manchester: Published for the Chetham Society by Manchester University Press, 1979); David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London: Routledge, 1984), 92-96, 197-202.

² 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 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).

³ Roger J. Green, *The Life and Ministry of William Booth: Founder of the Salvation Army* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 16-19; Norman Murdoch, *Origins of The Salvation Army* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 1-16.

⁴ Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America 1790-1865* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006), 102-133; John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 77-87, 310-315, et passim; Charles H. Goodwin, "James Caughey's Challenge to Wesleyan Concepts of Ministry and Church Growth; 1841-1846," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 49 (May 1994): 141-150; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 614-625; Nigel Scotland, *Apostles of the Spirit and Fire: American Revivalists and Victorian Britain* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 91-115; Todd Webb, *Transatlantic Methodists: British Wesleyanism and the Formation of an*

Caughey was born in Ireland on April 9, 1810, but moved to America as a child. He had Scottish roots and was raised Presbyterian. Not a great deal is known of his early life and conversion, but what we do know is very typical of a young man who found religion the burned-over district of upstate New York in the 20s and 30s. He was working in a Flour Mill in Troy, NY before he was converted at a revival at 19 years of age and joined the Methodists. Not long after he began to find his place in ministry, and in 1834 he was ordained a deacon by Troy Annual Conference, with ordination to elder following two years later.⁵ Daniel Wise, who edited and editorialized some of Caughey's letters and journals, presented the young preacher as a self-educated yet voracious reader, and his later preaching would seem to confirm that assessment.⁶ His early career gave no indication of the significant impact he would later have abroad, though he became involved in several local revival campaigns in his early years while serving in upstate New York before he began his ministry abroad.

Caughey's "special calling," to preach in Canada and Europe came on July 9, 1839, in Whitehall, New York. He repeatedly returned to this "impression of the Holy Spirit" throughout his ministry as justification for his self-supervised itinerancy. Caughey described the divine commission he received as follows:

The will of God is, that thou shouldst visit Europe. He shall be with thee there, and give thee many seals to thy ministry. He has provided thee with funds. Make thy arrangements accordingly; and next Conference, ask liberty from the proper authorities, and it shall be granted thee. Visit Canada first; when this is done, set sail for England. God shall be with thee there, and thou shalt have no want in all thy journeyings; and thou shalt be brought back in safety to America.⁷

At the following Annual Conference in 1840 Caughey requested leave from his regular duties and was given a certificate of good standing signed by Bishop Robert R. Roberts. His first foray was to Canada (as directed in the impression), where he spent several months campaigning in Montreal and Quebec City through the winter of 1841, claiming between four and five hundred converts.⁸

After a brief return home to settle financial matters, he passed through Quebec on his way to catch a steamer from Halifax to Liverpool in July 1841. Not having made any arrangements as to where he would preach, he arrived in time to attend the 1841 Conference at Manchester, where he made contact with Thomas Waugh and William Steward, key Methodist leaders in Ireland who secured his first preaching opportunity in Dublin. He soon attracted sufficient response to his preaching to secure one invitation after another, preaching in Dublin, Limerick,

Evangelical Culture in Nineteenth-Century Ontario and Quebec (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 150–155, 160–162.

⁵ Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 109; James Caughey, *Earnest Christianity Illustrated; or, Selections from the Journal of the Rev. James Caughey*, ed. Daniel Wise (Boston: J. P. Magee, 1855), 9.

⁶ Wise, commenting in *Methodism in Earnest: Being the History of a Great Revival in Great Britain*, ed. R. W. Allen and Daniel Wise (Boston: C. H. Peirce, 1850), 11. Wesleyan Methodist Missionary William Harvard, serving in Canada at the time, described Caughey as "a devoted and intelligent Irishman." Harvard to Jabez Bunting, November 11, 1839, in *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting, 1830-1858* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 236.

⁷ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 46–47. Caughey clarifies that this message did not come in so many words by an audible voice, but as a definite impression that was difficult to express.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

Bandon, and Cork, before sailing to Liverpool in October 1842, having requested that he be “located” by his home Conference so he could continue his ministry indefinitely. To this point Caughey had seen significant success, with approximately 1200 conversions in Ireland, but there was still no indication of the dramatic results he would achieve in England in the following five years.⁹

His principal English campaigns were in industrial communities in the north and the midlands: Liverpool (October 1842-April 1843), Leeds (April-September 1843), Hull (October 1843-May 1844), Sheffield (May-September 1844), Huddersfield (December 1844—April 1845) and Birmingham (December 1845-May 1846). These efforts were interspersed with shorter stays in such places as Nottingham, Lincoln, Sunderland, and Chesterfield.¹⁰ In total Caughey claimed over 21,000 converts, and over 9,000 who had claimed entire sanctification during his ministry in Ireland and England.¹¹ Although these numbers are difficult to verify, Caughey was rather meticulous about record-keeping and seems to have made a sincere effort to discount inflated numbers. Even allowing for some exaggeration, it was a remarkable feat.¹²

While Caughey had many supporters, his techniques were controversial, and attracted opposition from the high Wesleyan party. English Methodism had a somewhat ambivalent relationship with revivalism since the 1790s, stemming from the earlier visits of that most eccentric of American revivalists, Lorenzo Dow.¹³ While Caughey relied on divine impressions and his services could be noisy, he was much less erratic than Dow, and he did not mix republican political sentiments with his preaching. However, for those pushing for the centralization of Conference authority and a high doctrine of the pastoral office, Caughey’s independent ministry was a threat to church discipline. His case was vigorously discussed at the 1843, 1844, and 1845 Conferences, before the 1846 Conference decided to write to Caughey’s bishop in America, requesting that the revivalist be called home.¹⁴ The Conference President, William Atherton, subsequently interpreted this decision as a positive ban of Caughey from Wesleyan pulpits, though many of the Superintendents took a different approach and continued to work with Caughey in the ensuing months, infuriating Bunting and his allies.¹⁵ After nearly a year of continued ministry, Caughey complied with the order and sailed home on 20 July, 1847.

Caughey’s effective dismissal by the Conference enflamed the tensions that had been bubbling for decades, and had intensified since the conflict over the Theological Institution in the

⁹ *Ibid.*, 121–217.

¹⁰ See the summary in Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 111–114.

¹¹ Summarized in Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 426.

¹² He habitually distinguished between converts “from the world” and “from the societies,” and tried to account for actual increase in society membership. So, through his labours in Leeds in 1843, he reported that 1600 had professed justification, but bemoaned the fact that this only meant an increase of 350 to the Leeds circuits. *Ibid.*, 320–1.

¹³ See Tim Woolley, “‘Have Our People Been Sufficiently Cautious?’ Wesleyan Responses to Lorenzo Dow in England and Ireland, 1799-1819,” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 9, no. 2 (2017): 141–162; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 103–107.

¹⁴ Benjamin Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism During the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, 1827-1852* (London: Cassell, 1898), 344–345, 368–369, 390–391, 400–402.

¹⁵ See William Vevers letter to Bunting, March 23, 1847, in Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism*, 350. Caughey’s history with Atherton goes back to his early campaigns in Liverpool. After preaching nine weeks in the north circuit with a supportive Ministry that included Joseph Beaumont, the Leaders from the south circuit invited him to conduct services there. Atherton, Superintendent of the south circuit, “received us politely, and though evidently not at all enthusiastic upon the subject, yielded to the request of the Leaders.” Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 229.

mid-1830s. He appeared in the infamous *Fly Sheets*, where the author accused Bunting of playing lip-service to revival while acting otherwise, and decried the seeming abuses of authority that had led to Caughey's dismissal.¹⁶ The *Fly Sheets* were not primarily focused on revivalism, but the actions of Conference concerning Caughey were open to criticism, and generated significant attention given Caughey's popularity among significant segments of the Wesleyan Methodist constituency. Several pamphlets defending and attacking Caughey emerged at this time, making his ministry a key point of contention in the battle between the Wesleyans and the Reformers.¹⁷ Caughey himself disclaimed all involvement in schismatic actions and he did not personally enter the fray of these debates. He did not preach on matters of church polity, and he kept his services (on this tour, with very few exceptions) to Wesleyan Methodist pulpits, avoiding the other Methodist bodies, where he might have been warmly welcomed. In the heat of the conflict Caughey wrote, "*Peace – no splits – no divisions in Wesleyan Methodism, is my motto – my sincere motto...I have invitations to join another body – the door is wide open – but no! Wesleyan Methodism shall not be injured by me.*"¹⁸ Even if we grant that these were his sincere intentions, Caughey's theological emphases cohered well with the Reformers' message and therefore contributed to the ensuing schism. The Spirit-centred character of his preaching was empowering for the individual and therefore clashed with the doctrine of the pastoral office prevailing in high Wesleyan circles. These tendencies are evident in the way Caughey thought about the personal guidance of the Spirit, the saving work of the Spirit, and the mediation of the Spirit through the means of grace.

The Spirit's Personal Guidance and "the divinity of his mission"

Caughey was well-known for his reliance on "impressions" of the Holy Spirit throughout his life and ministry. The most obvious example was the story of his special calling to ministry abroad, noted above. He also claimed the Spirit's special guidance and direction for his movements at various points during his British sojourn. This included not only positive direction but times of waiting for direction during his initial visit to Liverpool, and upon his return after his Irish campaign.¹⁹ After meeting Waugh and Stewart at the Manchester Conference he recalled, "It was then strongly impressed upon my mind to sail to Dublin, although I did not know a soul there." Likewise, when he faced strong opposition in Hull in the winter of 1844, he wrote, "I am ready to leave England, and to return to America, upon the least clear intimation

¹⁶ *The Fly Sheets: Nos. 1,2,3, and 4, To Which Is Now Added a New Fly Sheet, No. 5.* (Birmingham, UK: William Cornish, 1849), 65ff. See Bunting's claims that he was not anti-revival in Gregory, *Side Lights*, 390, 403.

¹⁷ "A Wesleyan Methodist" (anon), *The Whole Case Stated: Correspondence on the Case of J. Caughey and the British Wesleyan Conference* (London: W. Brittain, 1846); "A Wesleyan Methodist" (anon), *A Brief Memoir of the Labours and a Vindication of the Character and Call of the Rev. J. Caughey* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1847); William B. Carter, *The Case Tested: An Inquiry into the Character and Labours of the Rev. James Caughey, and the Action of the British Wesleyan Conference Thereon* (London: Whittaker and Co, 1847); William Vevers, *Wesleyan Methodism Vindicated, and the "Christian Witness" Refuted: A Reply to the Attacks in That Publication, in 2 Letters* (London: John Mason, 1847), 16–22.

¹⁸ Letter to unknown recipient, dated Sept. 11, 1846, in *Brief Memoir*, 77. Caughey kept his temperance lectures separate from his revival campaigns, and normally gave temperance lectures outside of Wesleyan chapels – sometimes in secular locations, or in other denominational buildings, such as when he spoke on temperance in a Primitive Methodist Chapel in Sheffield on July 3, 1844. Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 396.

¹⁹ Upon first arriving, Caughey lamented "...he commands me no where, and I am doing nothing for God here," and upon his return, "Even up to now, I would gladly retreat, but dare not." Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 123, 226.

from heaven.”²⁰ His belief that the Spirit was guiding him, however, was not purely based on divine impressions. Such leadings were corroborated by the experience of others and the unfolding of events, which were read with a keen eye to discern the hand of Providence. For example, Caughey said he went to Sheffield (the scene of his greatest success) based on a misunderstanding and therefore against his own will, but mused, “Perhaps the future will explain it.”²¹

The Spirit’s guidance certainly included inspiration for preaching. In a typical example he stated that his text had been given to him at eleven that morning, along with “a message from God to some particular characters in this congregation.”²² Caughey’s common practice of “describing particular characters” during his sermons created a lot of controversy and led to accusations of “witchery,” if not simple trickery.²³ Without using names, Caughey would describe a person who he said was in the congregation and then appeal to them directly to respond to his message. In the sermon noted above Caughey described four “characters,” including the following example:

You may be decent in your conduct; you may respect religion – believe in its great, awful, and solemn verities, but you are undecided, you halt. You have a father and a mother unconverted, who, in all probability, would give their hearts to God if you would lead the way. You have been laid on a bed of affliction; you solemnly promised God to serve him, but your resurrection to health was a resurrection to sin. God has been striving to convert you, to make your conversion instrumental to the salvation of your parents, but you have stood out; and my God has sent me to solemnly warn you against the soul-destroying sin of putting off. I tell you, if you refuse, God will speedily send Death – the winding-sheet, – the coffin – the white border around your face, – the shut eye, – the blanched cheek, – the cold, cold grave.²⁴

This prediction of impending death for someone in the congregation was common practice for Caughey.²⁵ He defended his line of attack as the mere public rebuke of sin. If people felt the sting of his description of particular sins, that was only evidence of their guilt. He often had people angrily attack him claiming someone had given Caughey “inside information” about them. But Caughey claimed that these descriptions came from the Spirit, responding to one such complainant, “No human being has told me a single word about you. I have no doubt that it was the Spirit of God,” and to another, “...your sin has found you out,” and to another: “God, my dear sir, has given you a warning; prepare for the blow. It is surely coming.”²⁶ Caughey also routinely made note of other extraordinary manifestations in his life and ministry, such as the fulfillment of dreams, Pentecost-like corporate worship experiences, and seeming miracles in answer to prayer.²⁷ He clearly assumed that “liveliness” in services was a sign of the Spirit’s

²⁰ Ibid., 126, 353.

²¹ Ibid., 384.

²² James Caughey, *A Voice from America, or, Four Sermons Preached in England by the Rev. J. Caughey, the Great American Revivalist*, 2nd ed. (Manchester: Smiths and Wilkinson, 1847), 3.

²³ James Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, vol. 2 (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1845), 135.

²⁴ Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 7.

²⁵ See, for example, Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 339, 343, 362.

²⁶ Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, 2:124, 126, 132. See also Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 395.

²⁷ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 136–137, 403, 340–341, 360–361, 391.

presence, but he affirmed that the work of God was “not dependent upon much noise or little, but upon an influence from heaven.”²⁸

Caughey’s uncouth tactics were in themselves offensive to those looking to build a more respectable image for Methodism, but so were his claims that such statements were divinely inspired. Bunting reportedly mocked Caughey’s claim that the Spirit had not called him home to America. Gregory, who wrote later but no doubt repeated contemporaneous claims, accused him of “delivering an anonymous quasi-supernatural death warrant to whatever youthful member of his congregation might ‘feel like’ appropriating it.” Carwardine seems to follow this approach, claiming Caughey was “essentially a pragmatist, not a mystic,” and describing his purported calling to Europe as a “practical resolution” rather than a move of the Spirit. Even in the introduction to *Methodism In Earnest*, a book made up mostly of excerpts from Caughey’s letters, Thomas O. Summers suggested that “his imagination transported him at times beyond the bounds of strict sobriety.” And yet, Daniel Wise, his editor, argued that Caughey did not grasp his impressions blindly, hastily, or carelessly, but with solemn and serious care, sought to discern what was human and what was divine in his feelings.”²⁹

Caughey was aware of such objections, and sought to defend against them. On one occasion he narrated a dramatic “divine encounter” in Dublin in which “promises, directions, and encouragements, were given in quick succession” and “the communings of an active agent were as perceptible as any conversation I ever had with a visible friend.” He continued,

But you are ready to inquire, “Had you no doubts whether such communications came from God?” No, I cannot say I had, they came in such a way, and with such an holy unction, as to leave no room for doubts. I may also add there was nothing in them to excite my suspicion, nothing contrary to the written word of God; if so, I should have rejected them with horror; nothing that did not lead to purity and entire devotedness to God.”³⁰

The negative criterion of “nothing contrary to the written word of God” may have been enough for Caughey, but it left the door wide-open for a wide array of extraordinary manifestations. The high Wesleyan party, with its preoccupation on pastoral discipline, was much more skeptical of any such experiences, given the potential excesses and strange teachings that could follow.³¹ For Caughey and his supporters, however, the seemingly providential ordering of events and the remarkable success of the campaigns were enough to “demonstrate the divinity of his mission” as given to him in Whitehall, New York. An anonymous 1847 pamphlet even included a point-by-point exegesis of Caughey’s “impression,” noting the ways it was fulfilled in detail.³² No pastoral or Connexional approbation seemed necessary in the light of such evidence, and indeed, it is not hard to see how the actions of Conference against Caughey would seem out go against the leading of the Spirit. Another of his defenders wrote, “Either what Mr. Caughey has narrated

²⁸ Ibid., 154, 173, 386.

²⁹ *The Fly Sheets*, 67; Gregory, *Side Lights*, 390; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 110; *Methodism in Earnest*, vi, 43, 51.

³⁰ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 132–133.

³¹ See Robert Webster’s discussion of the “reluctant death” of Methodist emphasis on the supernatural in the nineteenth century, in *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), 195–202.

³² Daniel Wise, commenting in *Methodism in Earnest*, 148; *Brief Memoir*, 39–43.

was a real manifestation of God in his soul, and an intimation of the will of God concerning him, or it was a delusion,” and went on to answer the dilemma, as follows: “By his six years’ labours in these realms, some thousands of souls have been ‘brought out of darkness into God’s marvellous light.’ Is *that* delusion?”³³

Salvation through the work of the “Holy wooer”

Caughey’s pneumatocentric theology also comes through very clearly in his approach to salvation. While he was famous for “inspiring terror,” such that Carwardine accused him of trying to “frighten his audience in to the kingdom of God,”³⁴ it should be noted that Caughey understood such warnings as means whereby the Spirit would inflict the conscience of his hearers. He affirmed that there would be no concern for our own salvation without the Spirit’s “strivings” with us. “Without the Spirit no conviction of sin, no contrition for the past no softening tendency, no melting view of Calvary, no concern for the soul, ever will be felt.”³⁵ This Spirit-centred view of conversion is also evident in the way he appealed for his hearers to respond by “yielding” to the Spirit, which places priority on divine agency in the way of salvation. In his sermon “The Strivings of the Spirit” he memorably described the Spirit as “the Holy wooer,” and appealed to a backslider: “Will you now yield to God?...you grieve the blessed Spirit, and he will come less and less powerfully every time.” Resisting the Holy Spirit, was, for Caughey, the unforgivable sin of blaspheming the Spirit, which he argued was “not a sudden work, not some one deed, but a quenching of the Spirit – a settled resistance, day by day, till the blessed Spirit is vexed, quenched, driven away.”³⁶ Even the threat of death was sometimes specifically connected to this process, since the ultimate end of quenching the life-giving Spirit is death. Caughey took this to an extreme by making threats of “sudden death” to those who grieved the Spirit, but held out hope for any who were still alive. One might hasten his physical death by resisting the Spirit and yet find eternal salvation before he died.³⁷ By contrast, the prospect of a “happy death” was also the work of the Spirit, for those who died having received the blessing of entire sanctification would face death without any pangs of conscience. One who was justified but not yet entirely sanctified might have their eternal reward, but would face the “sting of death” as they reflected on their life in their dying hours. The threat of such a troubled death-bed was seen by Caughey as the Spirit’s pleading, via the conscience, to go on to perfection and hence a confident death.³⁸

Another indication of Caughey’s Spirit-centred view of salvation was his stress on the instantaneous character of both justification and sanctification, in line with the dominant trend in American Holiness teaching. Caughey said, “...there is no such thing in the Scriptures as gradual conversion, or gradual purity...Pardon and purity are doctrines clearly taught in the Bible; and in

³³ Carter, *The Case Tested*, 15, 18.

³⁴ Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 118–119. Wise wrote, “No unpardoned sinner can avoid a sense of guilt under his appeals...This was his greatest strength.” Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 194.

³⁵ Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7–9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9–10; See also James Caughey, *Showers of Blessing from Clouds of Mercy*, ed. R. W. Allen (Boston: J. P. Magee, 1860), 127–128.

³⁸ Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 19–28.

the very nature of things they must be sudden in their attainment.”³⁹ This was a favourite theme of Caughey, and he often stated that a true Christian ought to be able to identify the place and time of their conversion. “If ever God pardon a sinner, there is a last moment when his sins are unpardoned, and a first, in which, for the sake of Christ, they are all forgiven him. It is a matter of no small consequence that he should be able to distinguish such a period in his past history.”⁴⁰ Likewise, he believed one should be able to make a distinct profession of entire sanctification, which could be claimed by faith in an instantaneous work of the Spirit. Caughey recounted an appeal for entire sanctification in Hull based on the theme, “Why not now?” where he stressed the present availability of full cleansing: “If you dare to believe, he cleanses now...”⁴¹ In Leeds he reported “many witnesses for entire sanctification: and advocated for special weekly holiness services where the holiness message would be “*clearly, pointedly, and frequently* preached.”⁴² Clarity of teaching was essential if the hearers were to be able to exercise their grace-enabled faith in the promises of God. So he observed, “in those congregations where justification by faith and the witness of the Spirit are not preached, few, if any, are raised up to testify that Jesus Christ hath power upon earth to forgive sins; whereas, just the contrary takes place where these are clearly and fully preached.”⁴³ A sermon on “The Omnipotence of Faith” quoted Fletcher’s saying, “Come to a naked promise with *naked faith*” a concept that denoted faith without regard to emotion, and was typical also of Phoebe Palmer’s theology of sanctification. Whereas in relation to temporal matters we must believe with qualifications, “in reference to justification and holiness,” Caughey said, “we may pray with unlimited faith.”⁴⁴ Such faith, while focused on the promises of God as its object, could only be exercised in the power of the Spirit.

The dramatic nature of the instantaneous work of both justification and sanctification highlighted the divine agency and power of the Spirit in salvation. Carwardine claimed Caughey’s requirement for detailed knowledge of the circumstances of one’s conversion “sowed doubt and confusion” among Methodists who “had thought themselves converted” but now responded to be assured of their salvation, pointing out that even moderate Wesleyan voices like James Dixon taught that the Spirit’s work could be “gradual and gentle,” without a conscious beginning.⁴⁵ But this was not simply a clash between American and British understandings of salvation, for the British Methodists were divided on these questions as well, with Adam Clarke and Richard Watson standing at the head of two competing strands of thought, the one emphasizing the dramatic and sudden work of the Spirit’s, the other emphasizing gradual

³⁹ Ibid., 29–30.

⁴⁰ Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, 2:59. See also Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 9–18; Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 130.

⁴¹ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 341.

⁴² Ibid., 288. See also James Caughey, *Revival Miscellanies*, ed. R. W. Allen and Daniel Wise (Boston: J. P. Magee, 1851), 202–203.

⁴³ Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, 2:179.

⁴⁴ Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 34–38; Elaine A Heath, *Naked Faith: The Mystical Theology of Phoebe Palmer* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

⁴⁵ Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 125. See the summary of Dixon’s view in his biography, written by his son, Anglican historian Richard Watson Dixon: “...although his own convictions and experience led him to hold the necessity of conversion to God, yet the greatness of his mind prevented him from ever insisting upon instantaneous and sensible conversion in all cases. The work of the Holy Spirit is often gradual and gentle; the Divine life begins as it were without beginning, and grows with scarcely conscious growth.” *The Life of James Dixon, D.D., Wesleyan Minister* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1874), 482–483.

growth.⁴⁶ Those emphasizing the present possibilities of the Spirit's work in the individual were empowering the individual to seek transformation *now*, and were therefore much less likely to see the need for strong pastoral authority and standardized discipline on the local level or in the broader Connexion. A vision of spiritual life that was predominantly gradual, on the other hand, would lend itself to the need for steady, stable structures that would hopefully facilitate such growth by the maintenance of discipline in doctrine and practice.

The Spirit and the Means of Grace: the “moving power” of the “grand machinery”

Whether Carwardine was right in characterizing Caughey as a pragmatist, he was certainly correct in saying that Caughey was not a mystic, for he espoused a quintessentially active spirituality. He strongly affirmed that the Spirit was the “original and efficient cause” of all soul-winning,⁴⁷ but that the Spirit normally works through means, and his approach to ministry was clear witness to his convictions, for he pursued “a working life that was nothing less than a continuous protracted meeting.”⁴⁸ Indeed, most were convinced that he was too focused on the “machinery” of revivalism, leading to the accusation that he was “*making* revivals.”⁴⁹ While Caughey did not hesitate to speak of the “machinery” of the revival, he would claim that “all the grand machinery of the gospel will do *nothing* without a moving power – *the power of the Holy Ghost*.”⁵⁰ The means must be owned by the Spirit, and this sometimes required a period of persistence in exercising the means while waiting for the Spirit to move. Indeed, it was necessary, he believed, to be convinced of human helplessness even in the midst of such vigorous activity, and to bathe the entire campaign in fervent prayer for the movements of the Spirit.⁵¹

Caughey's focus on the Spirit is shared with that of earlier revivalists such as Hugh Bourne, but Caughey was more fixated on the revival preacher as the instrument of the Spirit's activity than Bourne, who had a more broadly participatory view of the Spirit's work.⁵² The people's role in a revival, for Caughey, was primarily to pray for the anointing of the preacher.⁵³ Caughey believed that “... words are the instruments by which the Spirit of God affects the mind” and argued in response to his critics that the kind of preaching that was needed for results was preaching that appealed “the whole man,” including intellect and passions. He was appealing to beliefs about divine judgment and sin that were already accepted, and attempting to make the hearer “*feel* what they already *know*.” But in order to bring them to this point, he was blunt: “They must be made to tremble, and be broken down before the Lord God of hosts, or they

⁴⁶ John Kent, “The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849,” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert E Davies, A. Raymond George, and E. Gordon Rupp, vol. 2 (London: Epworth, 1978), 237–238; John Munsey Turner, “Victorian Values - or Whatever Happened to John Wesley's Scriptural Holiness?,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 46, no. 6 (October 1988): 165–168.

⁴⁷ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 24.

⁴⁸ Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 118.

⁴⁹ Gregory, *Side Lights*, 344–345, 403.

⁵⁰ Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 4.

⁵¹ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 75, 150, 266.

⁵² James E. Pedlar, “Schism and the Spirit in Hugh Bourne's Theology,” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 10, no. 2 (2018): 177–196.

⁵³ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 40; James Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, vol. 3 (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1846), 266–267.

can never be saved.”⁵⁴ Despite the obvious attention to techniques aimed at effectiveness, he had been committed from an early stage to the “*absolute necessity of the immediate influence of the Holy Ghost to impart point, power, efficacy, and success to a preached gospel*” and stated that without this anointing “the finest, the most splendid talents remain comparatively useless.”⁵⁵ There was indeed, in Caughey, a very close identification of the work of the Spirit and the preached word, which he once described as “the lightning flashes of the Spirit.” In one passage he even told of a “range of influence” of the Spirit in the vicinity of the chapel where the preaching was taking place.⁵⁶

In principle, Caughey affirmed that the Spirit worked both through “ordinary” and “extraordinary” means of grace, and rejected the accusation that his focus on special efforts for revival undermined the regular means of grace. His initial response when arriving in a new town was not to oppose or criticize the local Ministers. In fact, he was generally positive in his assessments of Methodist ministers, until they seemed to oppose his ministry. For example, on hearing Jabez Bunting preach at the 1841 Conference, Caughey commented, “High as were my expectations, I was not disappointed.” He also reacted positively to the sermon of Robert Newton, ally of Bunting and soon to be enemy of Caughey. His only negative comment in those early days followed a powerful sermon by John McLean, which he believed did much good but could have done more if McLean had stayed to lead the prayer meeting and “draw the net ashore.”⁵⁷ As evidence that Caughey was supportive of local Ministers and of the ordinary means of grace, Daniel Wise provided a letter from a layman, recounting Caughey’s last sermon in Dublin.

At the conclusion, he earnestly requested all present, but especially the young converts, to be attentive to the means of grace, more especially those for Christian communion; and urged upon them the necessity of exercising liberality in the cause of God. He then spoke of the kindly bearing of the preachers towards him, and of their brotherly love; and with a delicacy of feeling which did him honor [sic], he expressed his fears that, from the way he had been laboring amongst them, they might expect too much from their ministers. To guard against this he informed them, that if he was stationed among them, as his brethren around him were, it would be utterly impossible for him to fulfil the duties of the circuit, and at the same time carry on the meetings, evening after evening, as he had done.⁵⁸

Caughey’s position was that his “extraordinary” efforts for revival were no discredit to the ordinary means, but rather that the extraordinary means, “if successful, must, in the nature of the case, confer honour upon the ordinary services.” On prayer meetings, for example, he would say, “a lively prayer meeting after the evening sermon greatly promotes the design of the Christian ministry.”⁵⁹ Writing to an American friend from Leeds in September 1843, Caughey recalled a town that had harbored such objections.

⁵⁴ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 234, 238–239, 241.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14–15; see also Caughey, *Revival Miscellanies*, 200–204.

⁵⁶ Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 5; Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 346.

⁵⁷ Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 124.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 145. Note that the letter (from Richard Craig), was dated March 9, 1847 – after the Conference had requested that Caughey be called home to America.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40, 125.

Long and anxiously did they desire a revival; but entertained at the same time an aversion to extraordinary means. And why? Lest the ordinary services, which they admitted were inefficient, should be brought into discredit by the extraordinary; as if another gospel was to be preached in the latter, while in fact, the proposal was, only to preach the gospel a little oftener, — say every night in the week in the same chapel, instead of one or two nights... They did not see that it is with mind as it is with matter — hammer long enough upon a rock, and you will break it in pieces; repeat your strokes upon mind, and it must also break down. Every body [sic] knows, that one day in the week, however heavy the hammer and rapid the blows, cannot accomplish so much, as if the same were wielded every day of the week.⁶⁰

Just as, in the case of preaching, Caughey argued that the truths were the same as regular preaching, though the focus might be on the emotions, he argued that revival services were preaching the same gospel, just with greater intensity and frequency.⁶¹

However, in practice, Caughey's emphasis on extraordinary efforts for revival and his arguments against those who rejected revival techniques were interpreted by some as an attack on the ordinary means. Revivalism was a litmus test for Caughey; though he affirmed the ordinary means, he could affirm with Finney that "Men are so spiritually sluggish, there are so many things to lead their minds of from religion, and to opposed the influence of the Gospel, that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them, till the tide rises so high as to sweep away the opposing obstacles."⁶² Just so, Caughey wrote, "We need a *gale* every now and then to sweep through the streets and lanes of our great towns to carry of the smoke and unhealthy exhalations and in some places nothing but a tornado can clarify the spiritual atmosphere, so as to render it fit to breathe in, or to see heaven through by faith." That being the case, it followed that "neglect upon the part of ministers and leading members to carry out fully a revival... weakens the church of God, and grieves the Holy Spirit." He therefore said of those Ministers who opposed revivalism as he understood it:

I have ever considered an anti-revival Methodist preacher as a phenomenon in Methodism. It would be almost as difficult for a man of that character, unless a consummate hypocrite, to get into the ranks of American Methodism, as for a Jesuit; and I believe the remark will equally apply to Wesleyan Methodism in these kingdoms. I can, however, easily conceive how a minister may lose the life of God out of his soul, and fearfully backslide from first principles. A criminal indifference to zealous efforts for the salvation of sinners may characterize his movements. Is it not possible for him to impart the same feeling to the officers of the church during the years of his stay upon the circuit?⁶³

⁶⁰ Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, 2:241.

⁶¹ But note Newton's charge that Caughey was not preaching the gospel, in Gregory, *Side Lights*, 400.

⁶² Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1868), 10; See also the comment of Thomas O. Summers, in his introduction to *Methodism in Earnest*, iii: "without them, formality and earthly-mindedness will over-spread the church, and it will be consequently powerless as an agent for the conversion of the world."

⁶³ Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, 2:237–240.

He even once suggested, “Many of the Methodists are holding on to sin – indulging in things that grieve the Holy Spirit.”⁶⁴ Thus it is not surprising that even the author of the *Fly Sheets*, in championing Caughey, stated that he “came down upon” the ordinary means of Wesleyan Methodism.⁶⁵

Some of Caughey’s suspicion that revival was not sufficiently pursued came from his surprise that so many of his converts came from the societies.⁶⁶ This made him suspect some weakness in the Wesleyan Methodist system. Caughey’s musings about these issues were interpreted as criticism of the ordinary means of grace and the ordinary ministry as established in English Methodism. Yet his detractors have exaggerated his harshness, for he was somewhat circumspect in his assessments. After noting that many of his converts from Dublin, Limerick, Cork, Liverpool and Leeds had been meeting in class for years without “satisfactory evidence of their adoption into the family of God,” Caughey continued,

I am not sufficiently acquainted with the religious state of the Wesleyan body in this country, to say, whether it is thus with the societies generally, or that similar developments would be exhibited in case of a revival in other towns of the kingdom. My mind has been greatly exercised by it, but in my communications to America I have refrained from speculations, and entertained my correspondents with plain matters of fact, which fell under my own observation.⁶⁷

It was, thus, the extraordinary means of “special services” for revival that Caughey saw as essential to the identity of Methodism, which, he believed, had always been “a system of aggression against the devil and all his works.” He warned, “Whenever and wherever she loses this distinguishing feature in her economy, she must dwindle away into insignificance.”⁶⁸

The Spirit, the Church, and Caughey’s “eccentric orbit”

It is not that Caughey’s opponents opposed revivals *per se*. Caughey claimed support for the importance of revivals from the Conference Address to the Societies in 1840, signed by none other than his opponent Robert Newton (then President), along with Secretary John Hannah: “Some churches regard revivals of religion as gracious singularities in their history: we regard them as essential to our existence. If a regular series of divine visitations, issuing in the conversion of sinners, be not vouchsafed to us, we must either change the spiritual constitution of our discipline, or we shall pine away from among the tribes of Israel.”⁶⁹ However, the high Wesleyans did not support any form of revival that threatened their understanding of church discipline. Bunting complained at the 1845 Conference that it was irregular for a preacher to occupy Wesleyan pulpits without being responsible to give an account of their teaching and conduct to Conference, and yet added: “My feelings have always been of the revival order...But

⁶⁴ Caughey, *A Voice from America*, 35.

⁶⁵ *The Fly Sheets*, 65.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Caughey, *Methodism in Earnest*, 231, 238.

⁶⁷ Caughey, *Letters on Various Subjects*, 2:236.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:239; see also Caughey, *Revival Miscellanies*, 200.

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, from the First, Held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., in the Year 1744*, vol. 9 (London: John Mason, 1843), 119. Quoted by Caughey in *Methodism in Earnest*, 329.

I speak upon a point of ecclesiastical order.”⁷⁰ William Carter, a Lay Minister who wrote in defense of Caughey, nevertheless acknowledged,

The whole of his proceedings in Great Britain and Ireland were anomalous; his whole course was erratic. He had struck out a new line of things. He had come like a comet from another system, moving in an eccentric orbit of his own, and was seen a perfectly new phenomenon in Methodism. That the Conference should have so long tolerated the irregularity was a wonder; that it should tolerate it any longer was not likely.⁷¹

In fact, Caughey’s pattern was not completely erratic, but it rested upon different assumptions about how divine authority was exercised in the church. He never entered a pulpit or engaged in a campaign in any town without permission. In this, he was less offensive (and less aggressive, to use Caughey’s term) than John Wesley, who would preach in the open air when refused a pulpit. Caughey went where he was invited; the invitations sometimes came from the Ministers, but also sometimes from the lay leaders and local preachers, among whom he had strong support, who then approached circuit authorities.⁷² While Caughey’s claims to divine guidance were difficult for many to accept, they were not foreign to the Wesleyan tradition, nor were they wholly subjective, in that his ministry bore fruit and received affirmation from others. The question, really, was *how* such affirmation should be made. Caughey’s Spirit-centred approach read these invitations, and the results that followed, as divine seals of approval for his ministry. The immediate operation of the Spirit through his preaching ministry and the affirmation of godly people was approbation was enough, not to mention his status as a located Minister. Caughey’s practice implied that there was, effectively, no need for the approval and oversight of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. The Spirit’s work was emphasized on the individual level in his own life and the life of his hearers, but he seemed to have little conception of the Spirit speaking corporately through the connexional authorities.

The high Wesleyan party, on the other hand, viewed authority primarily through the lens of the “pastoral office,” which was rooted in a strong commitment to church discipline as divinely mandated. This was a more Christocentric view of authority in the church, in that they argued that the pastoral office was first exercised by Christ, and then handed down to his successors.⁷³ The high church Wesleyans did not claim that they had a monopoly on the discernment of the Spirit, but in giving pastors exclusive responsibility for “ruling” the church, they effectively claimed that they alone could discern the voice of the Spirit with respect to certain questions. Bunting, unaware of this dynamic, ironically complained of Caughey’s self-superintendency: “One of the worst kinds of Popery is this Methodist popery.”⁷⁴ Despite its crude façade, Caughey’s practice of itinerant ministry was based upon a broader (if ad-hoc) discernment of the Spirit’s voice amongst the people of God. However, he swung to another extreme, effectively making the discernment of the Spirit through the Conference an irrelevant afterthought. Thus, one side presumed the discernment of the Spirit regarding the Ministry to be

⁷⁰ Gregory, *Side Lights*, 390; see also 401, 403.

⁷¹ Carter, *The Case Tested*, 9.

⁷² Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 131.

⁷³ John Beecham, *An Essay on the Constitution of Wesleyan Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: John Mason, 1851), 81–124; Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850*, 129–152.

⁷⁴ Gregory, *Side Lights*, 344.

exclusively concentrated in the Connexional authorities, whereas the other side made the Connexional authorities irrelevant to the Spirit's reviving work.

Sadly, some mediating voices in Wesleyan Methodism were drowned out in this polarizing debate. James Dixon offers an example of an approach to the Spirit's work in the church that avoids the extremes of Caughey on the left and Bunting on the right. While Dixon shared Bunting's political conservatism, he was also wary of centralization, so much so that the Reformers asked him to assume leadership in 1849.⁷⁵ At the 1844 Conference he spoke up for Caughey, cautioning, "We should not interfere with the work of God."⁷⁶ Nevertheless, his views of the Spirit took a more moderate tone than those of Caughey.

In his biography of the revivalist William Miller, Dixon argued that revivals were displays of "the primitive power of Christianity," through which the Spirit saves, sanctifies, and makes the ordinances effective. However, revivals were only needed due to the "unfaithfulness of the church" and they were not the ideal, nor were they inevitable. "Continuous good health" was far preferable to the occasional blessings of revivals, and, on an individual level, he wrote, "The piety of the individual Christian should never be suffered to sink into decay, and need a succession of revivals. His state should be always progressive."⁷⁷ He was wary of putting too much hope in revivals and thereby neglecting to seek and expect the Spirit's presence in all of life and ministry. Furthermore, he was clear that the Spirit of God might be "displayed in the agitations and thunder of a revival, or the 'still small voice' of a more quiet and gentle process." Dixon understood that the Spirit's work is essential to the Christian life, and argued that therefore God would not withdraw or add to his provision of the Spirit in certain times.⁷⁸ He decried, therefore, any intimation that conversions were limited to revivals, rather than available through "the ordinary operations of the gospel" and the "common means of grace."

This notion may lead to very pernicious consequences. To expect the display of God's converting power as something extraordinary, is to reduce the regular sabbath and the services of the sanctuary, to the position of dry, unmeaning ceremonies. Why should present conversions be limited to a revival? Or, rather, why should they not be sought for in every service, from the beginning to the end of the year? Then, conversions are usually attributed to some remarkable effusions of the Spirit. As His offices belong to the Christian economy, and are inherent in the system, He will always be accessible to faith, just as Jesus Christ is so in his merit and power.⁷⁹

In a quote that seems to directly refute Caughey's characterization of revival, Dixon stated that Christians had "no right" to think of the Spirit's work as "something extraordinary...as, in fact, a kind of a whirlwind, sent down immediately from heaven, to purify the atmosphere of the church." Rather, we must affirm "the Holy Spirit pervades every thing [sic] in Christianity, which is truly of its own essence; and is, in fact, omnipresent in the church."⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Kent, "The Wesleyan Methodists to 1849," 258. Dixon declined, and remained a Wesleyan Methodist.

⁷⁶ Gregory, *Side Lights*, 369.

⁷⁷ James Dixon, *Memoir of the Late Rev. William Edward Miller, Wesleyan Minister* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Company, 1842), 152–153.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 158–159.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 161–162.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–163.

Dixon realized that Caughey's confidence in the power of the Spirit to work through "extraordinary means" must be matched by trust in the Spirit's presence through the ordinary means as well. Without such balance, the revivalist will always look askance on the broader church. And yet, on the other hand, he realized that revivals can be genuine, and left the door open to the dramatic and surprising work of the Spirit, avoiding a fixation on centralized control that was gripping high Wesleyan Methodism. Dixon's combination of confidence in the ordinary and openness to the extraordinary is a closer approximation of John Wesley's perspective than we find in the more polarized positions of the 1840s.

Caughey was a lightning rod for controversy because he exposed divisions already at play within the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion. In the end, Carwardine notes that the battle lines in 1849 closely aligned with the battle lines over Caughey: Bunting, Atherton and Newton against Beaumont, Everett, and Dunn. Sheffield, the scene of Caughey's greatest triumphs, became the stronghold of Reform Methodism. It is therefore difficult to avoid Carwardine's conclusion: "The conflict caused by Caughey and his revivalism, then, was both prophetic of and contributory to the great upheaval in Wesleyanism."⁸¹ Though it has not been generally recognized, part of his "contribution" was theological: he cast a vision of the Spirit's work that was dramatic, immediate and empowering to the individual, thereby amplifying the clash of theological presuppositions between "low" and "high" Methodism concerning the nature of the Spirit's work in the church.

⁸¹ Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, 133.