

## **Renewing the Methodist 'habitus': enabling transformative communities through a revival of distinctively Methodist practice.**

### **Introduction**

In this paper, I argue for a reformation of the 'habitus' which enabled early Methodism to be a catalyst for personal and social holiness. In engaging with the work of French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu on the concept of 'habitus' and bringing those insights to bear on the structure, theology and practice of early Methodism, I suggest that a renewing of 'methodist habitus' may resource contemporary Methodism to wrestle with the complexities of discerning the way of holiness and living faithfully today.

In 'The Peaceable Kingdom' Stanley Hauerwas famously asserted : 'the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic'<sup>1</sup>. This statement has generated a model of Christian ethics in which the task of the Church is to live in faithful obedience to the story of God, incarnated in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and as revealed in the Scriptures. The outworking of what is required in such faithfulness and what practices are therefore an embodiment of such obedience has proved far from simple in the face of complex questions of human identity and global diversity.<sup>2</sup> Despite these difficulties, such an approach does have the benefit of consistency with the view that John Wesley himself

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<sup>1</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 99.

<sup>2</sup> Particular examples of this difficulty from my own context in the UK include: the approaches taken to the definition of marriage, the response to Brexit, issues surrounding UK military intervention in the Middle East.

did not have a 'social ethic'<sup>3</sup> but was more concerned with the church 'being the church', a vehicle of divine grace, living in perfect love.

There is a deep attraction to an approach which calls the Church to be first and foremost a distinctive community which prioritises holiness or faithfulness in primary allegiance to Christ, rather than seeking to 'make history turn out right' and the potential coercion and ethical compromises which such a path may demand. The challenge has often been in the practical embodiment of such a task in the daily lived experience of the church.

In this paper I argue that if the meta-narrative of the church is as a social ethic, embodying the beloved community, there are ways in which particular expressions of such embodying can be not only a witness to the world by making visible the kingdom of God but are themselves transformative of the world around them through their lived existence.

Within this context there are particular configurations of Christian practices which resonate so deeply with their culture that they not only shape faithful disciples who live in a way which imaginatively narrates the story of God in Christ, but that such a collective witness has the capacity to shape not only those who are part of it, but those who encounter it in its wider cultural context. My assertion is that early Methodist practice was such a case in point, where the combination of preached theology,<sup>4</sup> organisational structures, and particular practices created an environment to nurture ethically discerning and accountable disciples, who in turn, shaped the culture around them. In making this claim I will focus primarily on the emergence of the early Methodist societies, classes and band

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<sup>3</sup> Sondra Wheeler, 'John Wesley and Social Ethics' <http://livedtheology>

<sup>4</sup> I include within this, not only the sermons of John Wesley as preached and published, but also his writings, and most specifically in this paper, his General Rules for the Societies.

meetings, with particular reference to formative impact of *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies*.<sup>5</sup>

When considering the transformation which occurred in the lives of the early Methodists it raises the question regarding the extent to which this was due to internal and individual change or to the external structures of the rules and meetings and the communal environment which shaped their lives. Whilst there are methodological challenges with attempting to apply contemporary constructs to the world Wesley inhabited, I contend that it is possible to draw conclusions from what is known of the preaching, structures and practices of early Methodism and the way they created a social environment of lived experience. In order to analyse the significance of the relationship between the structure and the content of the societies, classes and bands, combined with the wider context of Wesley's preaching and the nature of the transformation of the early Methodists, the work of French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu will be used to suggest that it was the combination of interior and external factors which created a 'habitus' which enabled faithful discerning and living the ways of God.

I propose that the creation of a 'Methodist habitus' was an environment which gave due regard to the power of rules to shape practices which inculcated holiness, without becoming merely rigid adherence to rule keeping. At the same time, such a 'habitus' anticipated the operation of sanctifying grace, allowed for the enlivening guidance of the Holy Spirit, and encouraged the shaping of practices in conversation with (and whilst being accountable to) others. Having identified the nature of 'Methodist habitus' I will consider ways in which British Methodism has engaged with what may be termed the creating of a 'Methodist habitus' for today.

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<sup>5</sup> John Wesley, *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies*

## **Bourdieu and 'habitus' - a tool to explore Methodist ethical formation and practice**

From the time of Aristotle, the notion of 'habit' has been espoused as a useful means of training the person in the ways of virtue.<sup>6</sup> But the notion of habitus goes beyond mere habit forming and considers the way that the structures in which one lives shape choice, character and behaviour.

The French social philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, (1930-2002), created what he described as 'thinking tools' with which to analyse elements of contemporary society. These concepts have been used to examine language and its impact, structures and the powers at work within them and the relationship between particular concepts.

Much of the impetus for Bourdieu's work was seeking to navigate the philosophical distinctions between objectivism and subjectivism regarding social and ethical choices. He recognised that the objectivist structuralism, which had been influential in the works of those such as anthropologist Levi-Strauss, proposed that it was social rules which determined individual behaviour. Yet, for Bourdieu this did not account for the ways in which many people deviated from such rules or treated them with flexibility in their ethical choices. Conversely, the subjectivist existentialism based on the work of Kierkegaard and Heidegger exalted individual choice in decision-making as the ultimate outworking of personal freedom. The suggestion that men and women choose to make particular choices or undertake particular actions, accepting the consequences and aware of their repercussions without reference to the wider context and its social limitations was something Bourdieu could not accept. He sought to break down what he perceived to be

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Aristotle's distinction between training in intellectual and moral virtue: 'Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owns both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit'. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.1, 1103a. (trans Richard McKeon).

the 'ruinous'<sup>7</sup> opposition of subjectivism and objectivism and reconcile them in a way which enabled them to be held together in a dynamic relationship.

His development of the terms 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital'<sup>8</sup> provided tools for thinking about the relationships between the rules or structures which influence human behaviour and the impact of human choices upon the wider structures of the immediate community or society. I propose that the 'tool' of 'habitus' enables a way of understanding the ethical-formative nature of early Methodism as a place where individual transformation and societal renewal took place and gives scope to imagine what a renewed 'methodist habitus' may be.

### **Defining 'habitus'**

Much of Bourdieu's own definition of habitus is difficult to comprehend out of context, as it builds on his prior discussion of 'dispositions' and 'structures'. He defines 'habitus' as: "a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations"<sup>9</sup>. This is interpreted by Hillier and Rooksby as being an understanding of location, identity and purpose, communicated through the experience of inhabiting a particular place, era and set of circumstances; 'Habitus is thus a sense of one's (and others') place and role in the world of one's lived environment.'<sup>10</sup>

It is important to recognise that an important element of habitus is the ways of being which are unconsciously assumed through life experience, so gender, class, and family background all contribute to habitus, as well as choices that are made in the

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, R. Nice (trans.) (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 25.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 53.

<sup>10</sup> Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 5.

circumstances in which the person finds themselves. This is noted by Maton in his observations on the 'givenness' and opportunities for change inherent within habitus:

'Simply put, *habitus* focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others. This is an ongoing and active process - we are engaged in a continuous process of making history, but not under conditions entirely of our own making.'<sup>11</sup>

He continues:

'Which choices we choose to make, therefore, depends on the range of options available at that moment (thanks to our current context), the range of options visible to us, and on our dispositions (*habitus*), the embodied experiences of our journey. Our choices will then in turn shape our future possibilities, for any choice involves foregoing alternatives and sets us on a particular path that further shapes our understanding of ourselves and of the world. The structures of the habits are thus not 'set' but evolve - they are durable and transposable but not immutable'<sup>12</sup>

There is within this understanding of habitus a recognition of the flexibility with which an individual shapes and is shaped by their surroundings, including the groups to which they belong, and also the influence of such groups upon the individual. Bourdieu himself recognised the capacity for habitus to be a formative environment in a systemic sense, '... the habitus of a determinate person - or of a group of persons occupying a similar or

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<sup>11</sup> Karl Maton in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, Michael Grenfell (ed.) (Stocksfield, England: Acumen Publishing, 2008), 52.

<sup>12</sup> Maton, in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 52-53.

neighbouring position in social space - is in a sense very systemic: all the elements of his or her behaviour have something in common, a kind of affinity of *style*... like the handwriting of a person who keeps her style, immediately recognisable, when she writes with instruments as diverse as a pencil, a pen or a piece of chalk on media as different as a sheet of paper or a blackboard.<sup>13</sup>

The mixture of backgrounds, life experience and social standing of those who became Methodists in the latter half of the 18th century was diverse<sup>14</sup> and yet the preaching and writing of Wesley and the practice of the societies, classes and bands transcended geographical location and social class and created an environment for personal and social transformation. There was a sense in which, despite significant class, wealth, educational and geographical variations, Methodists had a recognisable 'habitus', a series of 'dispositions' which identified them 'as methodist' and which formed them.

It may even be claimed that it was an articulation of 'Methodist habitus' that John Wesley was attempting when he wrote 'Since the name first came abroad into the world, many have been at a loss to know what a Methodist is; what are the principles and practice of those who are commonly called by that name; and what the distinguishing marks of this sect, "which is everywhere spoken against".<sup>15</sup> There is strong evidence to suggest that this creation of methodist habitus was not an intended aim of Wesley. In 'The Character of a Methodist' he is at great pains to establish that he is not intending to create a group of people distinguishable by 'opinions', 'embracing any particular set of notions', or 'the espousing the judgment of one man or of another'. Nor is Methodist distinctiveness in a

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'Habitus' in Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> C. D. Field, '*The Social composition of English Methodism to 1830: A membership analysis*' Bulletin John Rylands Library p.153 [escholar.manchester.ac.uk](http://escholar.manchester.ac.uk)

<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, '*The Character of a Methodist*' in *The Works of John Wesley*.

particular use of language ('words or phrases of any sort') or theological emphasis ('laying the whole stress of religion on any single part of it').<sup>16</sup>

He does however concede that it may be perceived that there are 'marks of a Methodist', but to his mind they are in no way different from anyone living 'plain, old Christianity'<sup>17</sup>:

He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word. He thinks, speaks, and lives, according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ. His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.<sup>18</sup>

This is one of the reasons that the notion of 'habitus' is a helpful way of understanding the formative and formational nature of early methodism - the distinctiveness is not in particularly obvious practices or theological stances or visible markers, it is in a combination of lived theology, commitments and practices which generate a 'way of being', both individually and in community. It is not as individualistic as 'character' nor as inflexible as 'institution'.

It may be fair to say that the organisation of Wesley's early Methodism was foundational in creating a Methodist habitus which was not about a Cartesian dualism of 'think about theology then put it into practice' but a blending of structure, theology (studied, applied and prayed), and embodied practice in the means of grace. It is to an analysis of those features of early Methodism that I now turn.

**What were the significant elements of early Methodism's practice which generated 'Methodist habitus' and enabled ethical formation ?**

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid,

<sup>17</sup> ibid. 17.

<sup>18</sup> ibid.

It is impossible to imagine the formation of the Methodist societies without the backdrop of Wesley's preaching and writing. The themes of repentance and renewal, the power of divine grace and love, the pursuit of holiness and Christian perfection serve as the canvas on which the picture of Methodism's emerging story is painted. The geographical reach and consistency of message of Wesley's preaching was remarkable, but that is not to say that Wesley was unique as a preacher. What is argued for here is that Wesley's preaching was one strand of influence which, when combined with the practical structure of the societies, classes and bands, shaped the lives of the early Methodists.

It is not unreasonable to assert that the genius of John Wesley was not his preaching, his theology nor his pragmatic approach to evangelism, but his organisational abilities.<sup>19</sup> As the early Methodist societies were formed, the establishment of class meetings and bands, as well as select societies generated a structure which had the capacity to sustain and develop the initial transformation of those who responded to the Spirit at work in Wesley's preaching.

In this sense, Wesley's preaching, writing and the establishment of societies, classes and bands, along with the General Rules, constitute 'structuring structures' according to Bourdieu. They were the features which created the principles and practices by which the early Methodists lived and were thus significant for the development of a Methodist 'habitus' in which the love of God and love of neighbour were central principles, worked out through the structures of small group accountability.

When Wesley accounts for the formation and purpose of the societies he notes; 'They therefore united themselves "in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation,

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<sup>19</sup> R.L. Miles, Happiness, holiness, and the moral life in John Wesley, in Maddox R.L. & Vickers J.E. 'The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 209.

and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.”<sup>20</sup>

The condition of membership of a Methodist society (a desire to ‘flee from the wrath to come’ ) was itself instructive in shaping ‘habitus’ as a community of grace-filled disciples seeking holiness. The significance for ethical formation lies in their dedication to learning and living the story of God in Christ, that to pursue holiness - the love of God and neighbour, *is* the social ethic of the church. Just as Bourdieu’s concept of habitus seeks to avoid the binary opposition of structuralism and existentialism, of determinism and unfettered freedom, there is scope for it to express the dynamic in early Methodism which held a creative tension between salvation through the grace of God and the living out of that salvation in works of piety and mercy.<sup>21</sup>

### **What did a ‘habit-us of holiness’ look like?**

In many ways the habitus of early Methodism looks like the church being the church - telling the story of Christ.<sup>22</sup> It gives credence to the integrated nature of theology as ‘lived’ in the practices of early Methodists, as Ward notes; ‘In the practice of faith, doctrine is performed as it is prayed, sung, preached and enacted in mission. To be a person of faith means that the theological is embedded as lifestyle, belonging and identity’.<sup>23</sup> Membership of a Methodist society was central to this ‘embedding’ the theological in the lives of early Methodists. In such an environment of Methodist formation, the practices of scriptural study, prayer, hymn singing, giving, repenting and forgiving, fasting, conferring and communion were the ‘habitus’ inhabited by the early Methodists.

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<sup>20</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist*.

<sup>21</sup> With acts of mercy and piety themselves not being binary opposites nor options to choose between, but inseparable alternate sides of the same coin.

<sup>22</sup> As such, Wesley finds Methodism indistinguishable from ‘true’ Christianity.

<sup>23</sup> P. Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, (London: SCM), 35.

There is more to 'habitus' than merely a selection of practices, which could quite easily collapse into a legalistic performance of religious actions without the inner devotion which was so central to the early Methodist way of being. There is something to be said for the societies, classes and bands being more than a functional vehicle for gathering people together for the purpose of growth in grace and holiness. They contributed to the 'habitus' of early Methodism through the unstated effect of their nature and conditions in a way which resonates with Bourdieu's observation that there are elements which shape our views and behaviour which are absorbed without being conscious of it.

There were three key elements of membership of a Methodist society which were significant in forming the 'habitus' of early Methodism. Firstly, the very nature of the society being open to anyone wishing to 'flee from the wrath to come' instilled an accessibility which mitigated against a formation of closed cliques. Part of the 'habitus' of early Methodism was the preached theology of Arminianism that 'all can be saved' which was then embodied in the practice of allowing anyone to join a Methodist society who met the one condition of membership.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, the commitment to continue to meet together weekly formed a strong bond which contributed to the nature of the group as being mutually accountable. The demands of membership applied to all, but the benefits were shared by all:

'Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to "bear one another's burdens," and naturally to "care for each other." As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And "speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the

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<sup>24</sup> Though the 'low bar' for joining a society was counterbalanced by the high level of commitment required of those who continued in membership.

whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying itself in love.”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the shared understanding that all members would observe the General Rules meant that those who were members of the societies were joined in a common purpose. Again, this reflected the exhortation in Wesley’s preaching to wholeheartedly love God, love neighbour and do good, which then became part of the ‘habitus’ of early Methodists who were shaped by the love of God and sought to live that out in the practice of the General Rules.

### **Methodist rules and creation of habit-us**

If the preaching and writings of John Wesley were an over-arching influence which then interacted with the physical structures of societies, classes and bands, the adherence to the rules of the societies formed another strand, which was interwoven with the preaching and practice to create dispositions which were part of the methodist habitus.

The general rules for those in the society were ‘do no harm’, ‘do good’ and ‘attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are, the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence.’<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Wesley, A Plain Account.

<sup>26</sup> Wesley The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies.

The Rules were both simple and wide-reaching, as Miles notes, 'For Wesley, true holiness is bound up as much in what one *does* as in what one *avoids*. It should also pervade the whole of one's life and all of one's relationships.'<sup>27</sup>

It could be argued that this all-encompassing emphasis on doing good and avoiding harm, combined with the accountability to others for one's fidelity to these principles creates a 'disposition' of constant attentiveness to ethical behaviour. The requirement for those who were members of a Band to confess one's failures and testify to the work of God in deliverance from sin was a formational practice, providing the tools for communally discerning what constitutes holy living.

Even drawing on the few specific examples Wesley provides of practices which embody 'do good' and 'do no harm', it is possible to see how a 'methodist habitus' may form a community of people who live according to a narrative of God's redeeming and sanctifying grace in their embodied practice. A group who do not 'break the Sabbath, either by doing ordinary work, or by buying or selling'<sup>28</sup> or who love their neighbour by 'giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison'<sup>29</sup> become recognisably distinctive among their wider community when their words and actions are consistent and their mode of speaking, working and living can be described as a 'habitus of holiness'. Whilst these works of mercy may not have been undertaken exclusively by Methodists, the understanding that all Methodist members in a society *would* be doing these things generates a collective impact on the village or town in which the society is based and therefore has a transformative impact on wider society.

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<sup>27</sup> R.L. Miles, Happiness, holiness, and the moral life in John Wesley, in Maddox R.L. & Vickers J.E. 'The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 213

<sup>28</sup> Wesley, General Rules

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

Thus far, I have argued that the collective impact of Wesley's preaching and writing, along with the structure of the societies, classes and bands, combined with the requirements of membership of the societies was sufficient to create a 'Methodist habitus', which was shaped by those factors and in turn shaped the Methodists who participated by forming their discipleship. As they 'worked out their salvation' they shaped the emerging Methodist 'habitus' in the way relationships were modelled, faith was understood and expressed and life was lived. It came to be 'understood' what 'being a methodist' entailed *through participation* in in the Methodist society and class meeting. Discerning what the path of holiness entailed was navigated in community, guided by recourse to Wesley's rules but expressed individually.<sup>30</sup>

The Methodist habitus of the eighteenth century held together socially diverse individuals in urban and rural locations and resourced them to 'be church' in a way which could nurture holiness, respond to feeding and clothing the poor, oppose slavery, and pursue a moral vision which benefitted wider society.<sup>31</sup> It is neither possible nor desirable to simply transfer the structures or practices of early Methodism to our own era in the hope that it may renew our ability to discern the way of Christ and live faithfully, but what if the 'habitus' could be reformed? What if there was a way to re-imagine a way of Methodist formation which shares with the original habitus the capacity to enable holiness to flourish in the lives of those who inhabit it and transform the culture around it?

### **Renewing a Methodist habitus?**

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<sup>30</sup> In 'A Plain Account of the people Called Methodist', Wesley is keen to advocate for the existence of 'principles' in the bible which are to be applied using 'common sense' in any of the varied contexts which may arise.

<sup>31</sup> For example, the education of children through the founding of schools.

In seeking to discern what it means to live faithfully in the present age, the question of how we are formed for this task and what conditions enable us to live holy lives comes to the fore. How do we understand the structures we inhabit and our relationship with the environment which forms us and which we in turn perpetuate or reform?

The early Methodist habitus was formed through a combination of; the narrative which is lived by, the intentional community which grounds the narrative in practices, the habits which are formed and the 'disposition' or spirit in which this is lived. In recent years a number of attempts have been made in UK Methodism to rediscover some of the practices of early Methodists which enabled them to pursue holy lives and discern what it meant to 'do good' and 'avoid evil'. My assertion is that despite this renewed interest in several of the features which may combine to create a renewed 'Methodist habitus', as yet, there has not been the integration of such strands to form the sort of Methodist habitus which enables the faithful ethical discernment required in today's world.

### Narrative

Wesley's preaching and writing formed the overarching narrative for the early Methodists and in a global age with access to thousands of preachers via the Internet and multiple theological influences, it is difficult to see how a consistent narrative may shape a Methodist habitus today. It is however recognisable that the influence of historical Methodist theological emphases still shape many Methodists in the UK today. The impact of Arminianism, prevenient grace, singing theology, activism, holding together personal piety and social action continue to run deep in many Methodists, even if they do not recognise where these 'dispostions' come from. Rather than creating a new narrative, today's Methodist habitus is a renewing or remembering of the story into which Methodism was born. It would be to recapture the call to be a people 'raised up to spread scriptural holiness'.

## Small Group

From a British context, some of the greatest challenges facing Methodists in a local context in seeking to discern the path of holiness in daily living and global action appear to be formational and relational ones. In a global context of 'fake news', Brexit, political polarisation, mistrust of institutions, environmental crisis, religious fundamentalism and an increasing wealth gap, nationally and globally, the task can seem overwhelming. What resources are most readily relied upon to discern how to 'do good' and 'avoid evil'?

It may be the case that a renewal of small groups where the expressed desire is 'to grow in grace and holiness' is exactly the place to work through questions of 'doing good' and 'avoiding evil'. In honesty and vulnerability, this may be the vehicle for seeking together to discern the way of God about significant ethical issues. In fragmented communities, the witness of Methodists gathering to love and encourage one another and seek God's will together, even in the face of contrary convictions, is a witness to the watching world.

The appetite among Methodists for belonging to a group in which commitment is greater than a Bible study group or Housegroup is a litmus test of whether the habitus which distinctively formed the early Methodists can be renewed today. The willingness to participate in a group which is orientated to growth in grace and holiness, with its required discipline, rather than a support group or self-help group is counter-cultural. It would generate the depth of relationship, upheld by prayer, to enable members to honestly discern together what it means to live a holy life today. It would be the place to engage in the same Christian practices as the early Methodists, but to review and reimagine the most meaningful exercise of those practices in contemporary culture.

## A Rule to live by

The General Rules for the early Methodist societies were significant in shaping the 'habitus' of those who joined the societies. Inspired by the early Methodist rules for holy living, the contemporary Rule of life within the Methodist Diaconal Order and emerging Fresh Expressions developing their own 'rule of life' or 'community rules' a Methodist 'Way of life' was brought to the Conference of 2018. The extent to which the structuring of accountable discipleship in line with the direction of this "Methodist Way of Life' is adopted at a local level is another test of whether we will see a renewed Methodist habitus emerge.

These three emerging factors suggest a desire to recapture different strands of early Methodism: accountability, communal commitment to particular central Christian practices, the use of rules as a guide to formation in holy living.

## **Conclusion**

This paper set out to pursue whether there is a possibility of intentionally recapturing a way of 'being Methodist' which is faithful, not only to the story of God in Christ, but also faithful to the formation of a people raised up to spread Scriptural holiness. I proposed that the notion of 'habitus' was a concept which represented the 'way of being' of early Methodists which enabled them to discern the shape of holiness in their generation and live lives which transformed society through their practice of living the kingdom of God. Having analysed the nature of habitus, I suggest that the time is right to explore a renewed Methodist habitus in order to equip us for the task of pursuing holiness in the present age.