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History of Wesleyan Traditions

"Sir Henry Lunn: Wesleyan Methodist, Anglican, Pioneer Ecumenist, 1859-1939"

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Although Henry Lunn died in 1939, the Lunn family name is still well-known in Britain, though rarely associated now with Methodism. It is familiar to the British public through the Lunn Poly Travel agency, a pioneer venture in international travel, which developed as a spin-off from Sir Henry's ecumenical conferences in Switzerland. Again, in the early and middle years of the twentieth century, the name of Henry's son, Arnold, was well-known as a Christian writer and controversialist. Like his father, he was a strong and combative personality, and chose to title his autobiography, Unkilled for so long, - a reference to his wife's opinion that, in view of all he had said and done, it was a wonder he hadn't been killed long before. Arnold engaged in a celebrated controversy in print with Monsignor Ronald Knox, and as a result was converted to Roman Catholicism. Arnold's son, David, became a Benedictine monk of Downside Abbey, and an historian of his Order. He eventually left the priesthood and married a Methodist, so that in a certain sense the denominational wheel had come full circle.

It is a fascinating and colourful family history, featuring strong personalities, and an impressive commitment to the Christian Faith, in diverse forms. Sir Henry Lunn, the subject of my paper, was certainly one of the most forceful and many-sided characters produced by nineteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism; and his life and work shed much light on its tradition.

I shall first give a brief sketch of his life, and then look in turn at: (1) Wesleyan Methodism in the Lincolnshire countryside where Henry grew up; (2) Theological training at Wesley College Headingley, Leeds; (3) His work as a medical missionary in India, and the ensuing missionary controversy; (4) His pioneering ecumenical work.

A SKETCH OF HENRY LUNN'S LIFE

Henry Lunn is a sufficiently significant figure in English life and religion to be included both in the Dictionary of National Biography, and in the obituary notices of the London Times. He was born on 30 July 1859 in the little Lincolnshire town of Horncastle, and educated at the local Grammar School there. He trained for the Wesleyan ministry at Headingley College, Leeds, where he entered in 1881. In 1883, he went to Trinity

College, Dublin, and graduated in medicine and surgery in 1887. That same year, having been ordained in 1886, he sailed for India as a medical missionary. Ill-health compelled him to return to England in 1888, and he was soon involved in a fierce controversy with the officials of the Wesleyan Missionary Society over their policy in India.

In 1891, he founded a periodical, The Review of the Churches, which was devoted to the cause of Christian reunion, and the following year (1892) began organizing annual conferences of church leaders in Switzerland, to further reunion. In 1909, drawing on his experience of organizing overseas ecumenical conferences, he founded the Lunn Travel Company, which still flourishes. Politically, Lunn was a strong Liberal and in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, was an ardent supporter of the Boers, in their struggle against the might of the British Empire. In going against the stream of the majority imperialist sentiment in Britain, he made himself very unpopular. That did not worry him unduly, as he would have agreed with John Wesley's dictum, "Vice never loses its nature by becoming popular". In 1910, he was confirmed as a member of the Church of England, while continuing to practise as a Wesleyan Methodist. He maintained that his position was that of John Wesley, namely, a Methodist member of the Church of England.

He twice stood - unsuccessfully - as a Liberal candidate for Parliament, in the elections of 1910 and 1923. Following the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in 1920, he continued to organize his Swiss conferences for church leaders with a view to reunion. He was knighted in 1910, and died in London on 18 March 1939.

(1) WESLEYAN METHODISM IN LINCOLNSHIRE 1859-1880

Lunn's roots were in John Wesley's own county of Lincoln, and in his autobiographical study, Chapters from my Life (1918), he gives a vivid picture of the Wesleyan Methodism in which he was raised. He is at pains to insist that he owes all his later ecumenical concern and activity to the Faith of the universal Church as mediated through the life and teaching of John Wesley:

"The object I have set before myself is to show that all I have been able to realise of the faith and practice of the Universal Church has been mainly due to the catholic teaching of John Wesley, and his insistence on the revival of the spirit and practice of the early Christian centuries".

He testifies that the 'Catholic Spirit' of Wesley's sermon of that title, was the spirit which characterized the Methodism in which he grew up. Whatever may have been true of Wesleyanism in the towns and cities at that date, in Lincolnshire, he testifies, "The bitterness towards the Established Church which

marked the Dissenters was simply non-existent in the Methodism of my youth". It is not that the local Methodists were not proud of their own heritage - "To be the son or grandson of one of Wesley's [sc. original] preachers was a greater honour than to be the son of a Bishop". The Wesleyans cherished their own patterns of piety, which they had received from Mr. Wesley, and Lunn recalls, as the highlight of Horncastle's Methodist year, "the New Year's ...special services", which "brought Methodists from neighbouring towns and villages to enjoy the great annual Love Feasts long since discontinued, and the sermons of some well-known preacher". John Wesley's advocacy of the spiritual discipline of fasting, from his Holy Club days onwards, was transmitted to the Methodist people; and in Lunn's early years, "The quarterly fast, which was then a real institution in Methodism but has now been forgotten, was regularly observed in our little town". The picture he paints is one of a conservative brand of Methodism, faithful to John Wesley, and reflecting his loyalty and affection towards the Church of England. Lunn underlines the fact that his father, a devout and lifelong Methodist, would not go along with "Dr. Jabez Bunting and other influential early Victorian Wesleyan ministers" in their rivalry with the Church of England.

Yet though conservative ecclesiastically, Lunn's Methodist home was more liberal theologically. He writes that his father, "...was equally tolerant of theological opinion, as became a disciple of John Wesley, and whilst others around him were still insisting on verbal inspiration, the literal seven days of creation, and a material hell fire, he quietly taught us a broader and better creed".

Loyal to his Methodist roots, and imbued with Wesley's Catholic Spirit, Lunn could still be critical of his own tradition. He regretted that the Methodist emphasis on early conversion led to a repudiation of confirmation. His own mother at the age of 13 "entered into the enjoyment of religion", as the customary Methodist phrase expressed it, but lacked "that systematic training in ethics and doctrine which is carried out so admirably and thoroughly by many pastors of the English, Swiss, Swedish and other Reformed Churches, as a preparation for confirmation". Here Lunn includes the Church of England, but widens the aperture to take in other Reformed Churches, as if to anticipate the criticism that for Wesleyans to adopt confirmation would be simply to ape the Church of England. His approach is, typically, more 'Catholic' than that.

(2) MINISTERIAL TRAINING

Lunn's call to the ministry at the age of 20 was brought about by different but related influences. The first was his friendship with an Anglican, John Stansfeld, who was to become a medical missionary among the poor of Bermondsey in London's East End. The second was John Wesley's teaching on money and

the danger of riches. The young Lunn felt that he himself might be in danger from that quarter, since before the age of 20, he had built up a very prosperous business. (His later successful travel business is evidence that he had a flair for a profitable enterprise.) Although there was little emphasis, he found, in the Wesleyan pulpits of the 70s, on Wesley's teaching on money, he was deeply influenced by it: "My decision to abandon the business which I had created, and in which I seemed likely in a very short time to become wealthy, for a life in the Wesleyan ministry, and as a missionary to India, was brought about by Stansfeld's influence and my reading of Wesley".

Like Wesley, he rose at 4 a.m. and worked at his business until 8 o'clock in the evening. He then studied theology with a view to offering for the ministry. This punishing schedule brought him to the verge of physical breakdown, and the family sent him off on a 10-week voyage to the Mediterranean. While in Cairo, he met a Presbyterian missionary from India, who begged him to give his life to the Christian mission in India - an encounter which proved decisive for the young Wesleyan: "this conversation was afterwards to change the whole direction of my life".

Returned to England, he embarked on his ministerial training at Headingley, which in 1881 he found to be "one of the happiest places in England". The Governor (i.e. Principal) of the College, Benjamin Hellier, trusted his men, rather than treating them as boys, which Lunn asserts was the case in some of the other colleges. At the same time (1881) as he began his theological course, he registered as a medical student at Trinity College, Dublin, where residence was not compulsory. He was therefore able to begin work on his Dublin Arts course at the same time as he studied theology - no mean feat, and an index both of his enormous energy and his failure to learn from his earlier near breakdown.

During his time in College, he was not impressed by Leeds Methodism. He found there, "Three great Methodist chapels - St. Peter's, Brunswick and Oxford Place - once crowded with zealous worshippers, were now sparingly occupied." He uses strong language about Headingley Chapel in particular, seeing it as, "an appalling example of the Arctic spiritual chill which had frozen the members of some of our rich suburban congregations into eminently respectable monuments to a dead faith". Lunn was always to be a stern critic of Establishment Methodism, and it may be we can hear in his words the disappointment of a country boy who had been bred in the warm and lively Wesleyanism of rural Lincolnshire. Even though he wrote these words nearly forty years later (in 1918), there is no mellowing of the scorn he evidently felt.

By October 1883, he had become convinced that his life's work lay in India, and he went to Dublin to complete his medical

training with that clearly in mind. He combined the third year of his Arts course with the first year of medicine, and then, in his own words, he "decided to join the Divinity School and to take the two courses of medicine and divinity concurrently". In July 1886, he was ordained as a Wesleyan Methodist minister. In June 1887 he graduated in medicine and surgery; and in the following month he married Ethel Moore, an Anglican and a member of the High Church English Church Union. He was now ready for what was to be - in intention - a lifetime of service in India.

(3) THE MISSIONARY CONTROVERSY

In fact, he was invalided home after only one year. Nonetheless, that year marked him in significant ways. It reinforced his strong ecumenical impulse, since it convinced him of, "the infinite distance which separates Christianity from the other religions of the East, compared with which the barriers which divide Christendom are indeed trivial". The newly-ordained, 28-year-old minister also developed an uncompromisingly critical attitude to the missionary policies of Wesleyan Methodism. At his station in Tiruvalur, he found Government medical provision to be of a very high standard, a standard typical of much of South India, and so began to question the need for medical missions as a leading Christian priority. As he met with educated Christian Indians, he also began to doubt the value of current educational missions. Pinto, an Indian Roman Catholic, argued, "You in your Christian colleges and your High Schools teach them the facts of your religious history without imbuing them with the spirit of Christian teaching". Lunn came to believe that Christian work in higher education diverted missionaries from directly evangelistic work, and concentrated on the elite Brahmins rather than bringing the Gospel to the ordinary people.

Most fundamentally of all, he became convinced that many missionaries were separated from their own converts and the mass of the Indian people by their far too lavish Western style of living. He noted that the average missionary's income was £300 or 4,500 rupees per annum, whereas an Indian agricultural labourer earned no more than 4 rupees a month. With his Lincolnshire background, his Wesleyan concern for the poor, and his distaste for the bourgeois Methodism of Leeds, he argues strongly:

"It will be seen at once that our incomes bear the same relation to those of the working classes here that the Bishop of Lincoln's income does to that of the Lincolnshire peasants. Great as have been the services rendered to Christian theology and apologetics by the occupants of the English Episcopal Bench, no one looks to the Bishops to carry out the evangelisation of the masses. And what is true of England is true of India. The great bulk of the people will not soon be

affected by men as far removed from them socially as my brethren and I are".

Hence it was needful that European missionaries should come down from their pedestal of privilege, and diminish the gap between themselves and the people of India. He was not advocating that missionaries adopt the same lifestyle as the Indian people; they could hardly do that without a threat to their health. What he proposed was what he called a Via Media, a much more modest standard of living, and the development of a much larger and more responsible Indian ministry. He was particularly struck by the missionary methods of the Salvation Army in India: "They are sending English lads and lasses out here by fifties; immediately on landing they adopt native dress and native habits. This is no mere joke or whim. It means walking barefoot on burning roads, dressed in a single cloth wrapped round the whole body, and wearing a warm turban as a protection against the sun, instead of our light pith helmets. It means living almost entirely on rice at an expense of 2s.6d. a week each". That was the other extreme of missionary strategy - as complete an identification with the local people as was possible for Europeans. Lunn was urging the Wesleyans, not to adopt that precise pattern, but to move much nearer to it than they were currently doing.

In 1890, Lunn embodied his trenchant criticisms of Wesleyan missions in four, unsigned articles in the Methodist Times, at the request of Hugh Price Hughes, the radical Methodist Highchurchman and recent founder of the West London Mission. (Lunn had come to know Hughes during 1886, when he was minister in Brixton and Lunn was attending medical lectures at St. Thomas's Hospital, London). Lunn admits that he made a "tactical error" in publishing these anonymous articles before going personally to the Missionary Society's Committee, and making his case to them face to face. He did not shelter behind the original anonymity, however, but, a day or two after the fourth article appeared, he re-affirmed his position publicly in a sermon at St. James's Hall. Then the storm broke, and a Conference Committee was appointed to consider Lunn's articles and recommend appropriate action.

Lunn found himself in a very difficult position. His youth and inexperience told against him. Many Indian missionaries took his remarks as a personal insult, especially since he had spent only a year in India, whereas many of them had given long and costly service. Hugh Price Hughes proved a loyal supporter and defender, but he himself was not overly popular with the Wesleyan hierarchy, and had had to fight hard to get Conference to agree to the founding of the West London Mission in 1887. On the other hand, lest Lunn's criticisms should be seen as simply the rash reaction of an impetuous young man, it is worth noting that he was not alone in his strictures. His own Chairman of District in India - the Revd. Henry Little -

who had spent 26 years on the subcontinent, wrote in 1890 to the Methodist Recorder, stating that, "Every year [sc. of my time in India] has deepened the impression that we are on the wrong tack".

The Committee reported to the Sheffield Conference of 1890, and Lunn made his defence. After the issues had been debated, Lunn was confirmed in his ministerial appointment - to serve in the West London Mission with Hugh Price Hughes. The Indian missionaries, however, were not satisfied, and secured a further Special Commission of Enquiry, set up by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and chaired by C.H. Kelly, President of the Conference. The Commission's report did not sustain Lunn's criticisms of missionary policy. It discounted the word 'luxury' as used by Lunn of the missionaries' lifestyle; and it held that the view that the missionaries' social status alienated from the Indian people "is not sustained". It did, however, recommend a different method of paying missionary stipends, which in effect meant a slightly reduced standard of living. In the light of the report, pressure mounted for Lunn to resign the ministry. He himself believed that, but for Hughes' staunch support, he would have been expelled from Methodism altogether.

Lunn left the West London Mission and undertook chaplaincy work at the Regent Street Polytechnic. For this he received no stipend, and so earned a living by organising foreign travel tours. For this he was criticised by leading Wesleyan ministers, including the powerful Dr. J.H. Rigg, who pointed out that Wesleyan ministers were not allowed to engage in trade or business. Lunn therefore resigned the ministry and sought ordination in the Church of England. Archdeacon F.W. Farrar offered him a curacy at St. Margaret's, Westminster, and he was strongly drawn to accept. Hughes, however, begged him not to be "re-ordained" as an Anglican, and so jeopardize his work for the corporate reunion of the churches. Lunn made a conscientious decision to do as Hughes had urged. Instead of seeking Anglican orders, he applied for, and received, transfer to the American Methodist Episcopal Church, and was given permission to reside in England. This status, however, left him in limbo, as he found he had no right to attend any church meeting of Wesleyan Methodism in England; and so after three years he resigned from the ministry of the American Methodist Episcopal Church. He remained, to his credit, a loyal member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and ultimately regained an honoured position within it.

No longer a minister, he turned his abundant energies to other work: to writing and journalism; to the editorship of The Review of the Churches; to ecumenism; and to his travel business.

(4) ECUMENICAL PIONEER

From his youth, Lunn had been deeply influenced by Wesley's "Catholic Spirit", by his love of the Church of England, and by his desire to promote unity among Christians. During his time in Dublin, he had made many friendships across the churches - with Anglicans, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. In India, it had been borne in upon him that, over against other major world religions, Christian sectarian differences were relatively trivial. Hugh Price Hughes longed for unity with the Church of England, and strengthened Lunn's commitment to ecumenical endeavour.

Nevertheless, the late nineteenth century was not a propitious time, humanly speaking, for nurturing closer ecumenical relationships, and Lunn was, in many ways, a prophet in advance of his time. His considered decision, having lost his ministerial status in Methodism, not to seek orders in the Church of England, was an ecumenically mature and costly one. It undoubtedly enhanced his status, in his own church and in others, in his later work for the reunion of the churches.

He was tireless in his ecumenical engagement. His church leaders' conferences at Grindelwald in Switzerland began in 1892 and continued annually until 1896. His conviction was that if church leaders were to be induced to work for unity, they must first meet each other, in an informal setting, and develop personal relationships of friendship and trust. In that context, the most difficult doctrinal differences could better be discussed.

In 1920, the official Wesleyan Epworth Press published Lunn's Reunion & Lambeth: John Wesley's Message to the Bishops in Conference, July 1920. The assembled bishops of the Anglican Communion were in 1920 conferring about "the great question of Reunion", and Lunn, writing under the persona of John Wesley, seeks to get them to understand Methodists and Methodism. He points out that his own position is "unusual", in that he is, "A Methodist who remains a Methodist, though confirmed in the Church of England". He assures the bishops that, "For over forty years the question of Christian Reunion have [sic] been my constant study, and the advance of this sacred cause my steady endeavour". He wants the bishops to try to understand, "The attitude of present-day Methodism to the Church, and especially the attitude of those who are nearer in sympathy to John Wesley than were the Methodists of the middle of the last century". He longs passionately for reunion, but at the same time, he cannot deny the work of God's grace in the ministry of his own church and that of the historic Free Churches: "I can never take up a position which would necessarily involve any expression of doubt as to the validity of my own ministry in the past, or the present validity of those excellent representatives of the Free Churches who have worked with me in this movement".

His is a principled ecumenism, not one-sidedly angled towards the Church of England, but meant to embrace ultimately the unity of all Christian people. It is also an ecumenism which is not confined to doctrinal discussion and attempts at co-operation and joint working. It has a profound undertow in spirituality. Lunn performed a great service to the churches in several publications, which my own Wesleyan grandfather treasured, which bring together from across the Christian centuries, something of the wealth of devotion to which Christians are heirs. In The Love of Jesus (1914); Retreats for the Soul (1918); and The Secret of the Saints (1933); he brings together a great wealth of prayer, devotion and material for meditation - from Puritan, Anglican, Methodist, and Roman Catholic sources. He realised, as few Christians of his time did, the importance of what is sometimes called "Spiritual Ecumenism", the sharing of different Christian traditions of prayer, worship and spirituality, if we are to grow nearer to one another in Christ.

Many lessons may be drawn from Henry Lunn's life and work. His career suggests something of the rigidity of official Wesleyan Methodism in its treatment of a gifted and unusual minister. His radicalism with regard to mission and evangelization; his concern to bring the Gospel to the poor; his call for a more disciplined and costly discipleship: these brought him into inevitable collision with the growingly bourgeois ethos of nineteenth-century Wesleyanism. On the other hand, he is himself a product of that same Wesleyan tradition, drawing strongly on the life and teaching of John Wesley, and embodying - as few Methodists of his day did - something of that Catholic Love which Wesley urged his followers to manifest in their dealings with all people, but especially towards those of the household of faith.