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D. A. Keighley - Report of Research in Progress - Synopsis

SOME HIGH ANGLICAN AND NONJURING INFLUENCES ON THE YOUNG JOHN WESLEY

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B. WESLEY, HOOLE AND THE MANCHESTER NONJURORS

Clayton, Deacon, Byrom, Hoole. Who was Hoole? Wesley had known him since boyhood!

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OXFORD INSTITUTE OF METHODIST THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

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D.A. Keighley - Summary of Research in Progress

JOHN WESLEY

The general objective of this research, mainly pursued at the Queen's College, Birmingham, last academic year, was to discover more about high Anglican and Nonjuring influences on John Wesley in the formative years up to his evangelical conversion, and particularly before his departure from Oxford for Georgia.

This summary and progress report deals with two main topics. The first is the influences upon the composition of Wesley's earliest publication, 'A Collection of Forms of Prayer' (1733/34) - of which there are three main sections. The second is new light on Wesley's friends in Manchester.

(A) The Literary Sources of 'A Collection of Forms of Prayer for every Day in the Week'

It is important first to make clear the structure of Wesley's first publication. It occupies 35 pages of volume xi of the Collected Works of 1829 (pp.203-237). A lengthy prayer is provided for each morning and evening, beginning with Sunday. The evening prayers are prefaced by a series of questions. On Sunday evening there are two groups of questions: first 'General Questions which a serious Christian may propose to himself before he begins his Evening Devotions'. This is followed by a group which relates, as on every other day, to a devotional theme selected for emphasis on that particular day.

(I) The prayers and the 'Companion in the Closet'

The first field of enquiry ignores the Question<sup>S</sup>, and concentrates on the Prayers. Dr. Heitzenrater's unpublished PhD thesis makes some comments on this. I cannot here discuss the relationship between my findings and his. I have read his work, and I recognize that he has had the advantage of having translated and read Wesley's diaries, which I have not. However, my enquiry is more detailed in the area I have chosen, and I do not reach quite the same conclusions.

The full title of the source I am discussing is 'The True Church of England-Man's Companion in the Closet, or, a Complete Manual of Private Devotions, fitted for most Persons and Cases, Collected from the Writings of Archbishop Laud, Bishop Andrews, Bishop Kenn, Dr. Hickes, Mr. Kettlewell, Mr. Spinckes, And other Eminent Divines of the Church of England, With a Preface by the Reverend Mr. Spinckes'. It first appeared in 1721, and went through many editions.

Ninety pages or a quarter of the 'Companion' are devoted to 'Devotions for each Day in the Week' beginning with Sunday. These offer a prayer for each morning and evening, prefaced by the 'Decad' - ten brief sentences for meditation - verses of Scripture or words of spiritual advice. The sources of the prayers are indicated.

Comparison between these prayers and those of Wesley shows he borrows significantly from them. He does this in a characteristic way. He tends to begin by following the prayer in the 'Companion'. Then he breaks away in a direction of his own, influenced by the theme he has chosen for the day. Later, when he comes to more general intercessions, Wesley often returns to the phrases and topics in the 'Companion'.

In sum we find that Wesley takes the prayer in the 'Companion' as his framework or point of departure, in eight out of his fourteen prayers. While the degree of similarity varies, it is hard to see how any other source can have approached this degree of influence. It strongly suggests that Wesley used the 'Companion' as his first point of reference, fitting his other material in, where the 'Companion' did not suit him.

This shows a considerable dependence by Wesley on Nonjuring authors. While the book was intended for 'Church of England men', it came from strongly Nonjuring circles. Four of the authors mentioned on the title page were Nonjurors, and the other two were their spiritual ancestors. Spinckes, the only one of the six alive at the time, who wrote the Preface, was a prominent Nonjuror. There was no lack of other Anglican devotional material available at the time, but Wesley chose to use a book of this parentage.

## (II) The 'Collection of Forms of Prayer' and Nelson's 'Practice of True Devotion'

We turn from the prayers in Wesley's 'Collection' to the Questions for Self-Examination before each evening prayer. The source we examine this time is 'The Practice of True Devotion in Relation to the End, as well as the Means of Religion, with an Office for the Holy Communion', by Robert Nelson, published in 1708/9. We look specifically at Chapters 4 to 10, and make comparisons at two levels.

(1) The formal scheme

Nelson chooses a theme for each day of the week, and devotes a chapter to it. Similarly Wesley chooses a theme for each day. The comparison between the two is revealing. On four days they are identical: Sunday (the love of God), Monday (the love of our neighbour), Tuesday (humility) and Friday (Mortification). On Wednesday Wesley chooses mortification again, but his Thursday theme (resignation and meekness) is close to that taken by Nelson for Wednesday (patience and resignation). Wesley has no equivalent to the 'improvement of Talents and Co-operation with God's grace', chosen by Nelson for Thursday, and their respective Saturday themes are quite different. Yet the extent of the similarity is striking. Both begin with the two Dominical commandments, followed by humility, and continuing with a stress on mortification. The differences are understandable, bearing in mind the difference in intended readership. Other devotional works, such as the 'Reformed Devotions' which Hickes edited, and Bishop Wilson's 'Sacra Privata' (published only posthumously 1781) have quite different schemes.

(2) Similarity of content

Nelson devotes a chapter to each of his themes, organized under a numbered series of side-headings. Wesley included a variable number of questions for self-examination under each of his daily headings. Comparison of Nelson's side-headings with Wesley's questions is also revealing. On Sunday and Monday the treatment of the Dominical commandments diverges considerably - they are, after all, rather broad themes. Several of the daily themes, however, show considerable similarity of treatment - viz Tuesday ('Humility'), Nelson's Wednesday theme of 'Patience and Resignation' and Wesley's Thursday theme of 'Resignation and Meekness', and the common Friday theme of Mortification. If we tabulate side by side Nelson's paragraph headings and Wesley's questions for these days, and make some modest variations in the order in which they occur, we uncover a very substantial similarity. The resemblance is far too great to be accidental. Two minds are thinking along the same lines, the later strongly influenced by the earlier.

This is not altogether surprising, if we bear in mind the letter to John Wesley from his sister Kezia of 3 July 1731, in which she takes for granted that he is familiar with Nelson's book.



(3) Corroboration - 'Frequent Communion'

Corroboration of Nelson's influence on Wesley at this time is provided by their common interest in stressing 'frequent communion'. Nelson published a booklet in 1706 called 'The Great Duty of Frequenting the Christian Sacrifice', which was an expansion of what he had written on the subject in his 'Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England' two years earlier. Dr. Heitzenrater demonstrates that Wesley abridged this in February 1732, and further summarised it for his sermon on 'The Duty of Constant Communion' of 1733, the year in which the 'Collection of Forms of Prayer' appeared.

We might add that there is a pointed passage in the sermon, suggesting that Wesley is consciously seeking to improve on Nelson. The latter stresses 'frequent' communion. Wesley says in the sermon:

I say constantly receiving; for as to the phrase of frequent communion, it is absurd to the last degree. If it means anything less than constant, it means more than can be proved to be the duty of any man...

(4) Nelson's influence

Once again then Wesley chose as his principal source and inspiration the work of a distinguished churchman (this time a layman) written during his Nonjuring period. Again it is true that the work was read far outside Nonjuring circles, but it remains significant that Wesley might have turned elsewhere yet did not do so.

This detailed argument about the influence of Nelson on John Wesley will find support if we survey the known and likely relationships between Nelson and the Wesley family, for this will show that Nelson was an influence in the Wesley family while John was growing up.

(a) The Wesley Family and Nelson

- (i) Known facts - Nelson subscribed five pounds towards a free school which the Rector of Epworth founded in his parish.
  - After the disastrous rectory fire on 9 February 1709, Samuel Wesley wrote to Nelson. Nelson wrote to Dr. Charlett, Master of University College Oxford, on 3 March, enclosing the letter and asking him to seek help for the Wesleys.

- After Nelson's death in 1714, Samuel Wesley wrote a poetical eulogy of him. This was inscribed on the fly-leaf of his copy of Nelson's 'Festivals and Fasts', and was later printed, e.g. at the beginning of 'The Practice of True Devotion' (my copy). The poem asserts personal knowledge.

- Before taking his degree at Oxford, Samuel Wesley junior corresponded with Nelson about aspects of two dissertations he was preparing on the problem of the Ignatian Epistles. In the extant letter of June 1713, (evidently one of a series) he asks Nelson to prepare the way for him to approach George Hickes the following week, to discuss some technical details with him. (Nelson and Hickes were close friends and near neighbours in Ormond St - cf Nelson's letter to Charlett!) Sam. jr must have known of his mother's contact with Hickes in 1702. Yet he obviously felt he knew Nelson better.

- (ii) Propitious Circumstances The above facts suggest that the Rector of Epworth and his eldest son were at least personal acquaintances of Robert Nelson. Other factors, although not proof of contact, make it easy to imagine this acquaintance arising.
- In February 1698 Wesley preached a lively sermon before the Society for the Reformation of Manners, in St. James's, Westminster. Nelson strongly supported the Society, and may well have been present. Wesley published his sermon, together with another small work, 'The Pious Communicant', which would no doubt be congenial to Nelson.
- The SPCK was founded in 1698/9, and within a few months Nelson was a regular and active participant. Samuel Wesley very soon became a 'corresponding member'. From July 1700 to June 1701 he wrote to the Society several times about developing its work in Lincolnshire.
- Nelson became a regular Anglican again in 1710, received by Sharp, the Archbishop of York (to whom Samuel Wesley was by no means unknown). If the family tradition is true, that Samuel wrote Sacheverell's speech for his defence, delivered in early 1710, he was in London about that time. However that may be, Wesley was a Proctor in Convocation in 1711 and 1712, and spent some considerable time in London, when he would have ample opportunity to meet Nelson.

Samuel Wesley the younger left Westminster School for Oxford in 1711, and returned to the school as usher in August 1714. It can be presumed that he was in London from time to time in the interval. Nelson was connected with the High-church circles centred on the school, being close to Hilkiah Bedford. The latter lost his fellowship at St. John's College Cambridge, as a Nonjuror, and kept a boarding house for Westminster scholars. Nelson's death in 1714/15 did not allow much time for the ripening of the acquaintance when Wesley returned to the school. But may we not see the inspiration and example of the older man when, just about the time of his death, Samuel the younger and a few friends began visiting the sick poor of Westminster - the origin of the present Westminster Hospital? At any rate, the younger Wesley's interest in Nelson was sufficient to lead him to rewrite substantially his father's poetic appreciation of him.

(b) John Wesley and Nelson's Works

- (i) Wesley was familiar with 'The Practice of True Devotion' (Kezia's letter).
- (ii) He read Nelson's 'Life of Bishop Bull' in 1730.
- (iii) He read in 1731 Kettlewell's 'Office for Prisoners', to which Nelson had contributed a Preface.
- (iv) In 1732 he received as a gift his own copy of 'Festivals and Fasts' (no doubt already being familiar with his father's copy), and worked on Nelson's pamphlet on frequent communion (see above).
- (v) In 1733 he read Fénelon's 'Pastoral letter concerning the Love of God', in Nelson's edition of 1715.
- (vi) In 1730 Wesley became tutor to a group of students. He prepared a booklist for each one, and Nelson's 'Practice of True Devotion' most often had first place on those lists.

We have thus established that Robert Nelson, High churchman and one-time Nonjuror, had a powerful influence on Wesley as a young Oxford don.



(III) Wesley's 'Maxims' - From Hilton to Wesley

In the 'Collection of Forms of Prayer', Wesley lays great stress on what he calls the 'maxims': 'I am nothing, I have nothing, I can do nothing'. If we could discover where he found them we would have an important clue to Wesley's spirituality.

(1) Earlier occurrences of the 'Maxims'

The difficulty is not to locate them, but to clarify the route by which they reached John Wesley. They derive ultimately from chapters 21-23 of 'The Scale of Perfection' by Walter Hilton (died c.1395), where the Christian life is described as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Other occurrences:

- (a) Thomas à Kempis (c.1380-1471), 'Imitation of Christ', Bk 3, ch.3, para 5. Wesley (and his mother) knew the book. No special emphasis on the maxims.
- (b) Lorenzo Scupoli, (1529-1610), 'The Spiritual Combat'. Again Wesley (and his mother) knew the book, but there is no special emphasis on the Maxims.
- (c) Augustine Baker (1575-1641), 'Sancta Sophia' (1657) - chapter 6 of Pt I borrows the Parable of the Pilgrim from <sup>H</sup>Milton. No indication that Wesley knew the work.
- (d) Simon Patrick (1616-1707) wrote a very lengthy 'Parable of the Pilgrim' (1664) based on Hilton's parable - not likely to have impressed Wesley if he knew it.
- (e) Robert Leighton (1611-1684). His posthumous 'Spiritual Exercises or, Rules for a Holy Life' (pub.1708). Again Hilton and Baker are the sources. No evidence that Wesley knew this work, though he later published other works of Leighton in his 'Christian Library'.
- (f) Jacob Boehme (1525-1624). One English version of his 'Dialogue on the Supersensual Life' introduces the 'maxims'. But this turns out to be an interpolation, almost certainly by Francis Lee, the Nonjuror.

None of these seem likely sources for Wesley's great stress on the 'maxims'. We have discovered a much more likely one.

(2) From Hilton to Wesley, via Francis Lee and Robert Nelson

The last thing Nelson wrote (1714) was 'An Address to True Lovers of Devotion' - a recommendatory Introduction to 'The Christian's Exercise, or Rules to live above the World while we are in it. In Four Parts. By Thomas-a Kempis', published in 1715. Francis Lee was the unnamed editor.

Lee (1661-1719) lost his Fellowship at St. John's College Oxford as a Nonjuror. For some years he was a leader of the Philadelphian Society of mystics, which collapsed when he left it in 1703. He was popularly called 'Rabbi Lee' because of his great piety and learning, especially in oriental literature. He and Nelson were close friends.

In 'The Christian's Exercise' there is emphatic reference to the Maxims in

- (a) The Preface
- (b) Illustrations in the text.
- (c) Section 6 of the Appendix, which again reproduces Hilton's 'Ladder of Perfection', chapters 21-23.

We know of Wesley's interest in Nelson's writings. What would be more natural than to seek out his last publication. We know of Wesley's interest in Thomas-a Kempis - he published his own distinguished translation of 'The Imitation of Christ' ('The Christian's Pattern') in 1735, in preparation for which he 'read up' Thomas. Again, he would naturally seek out 'The Christian's Exercise'.

Thus we have established a quite natural and credible route by which Wesley came to be impressed by the 'maxims'. Again it is a route which leads through Nelson and Nonjuring circles.

B Wesley, Hoole and the Manchester friends

This is our second main topic.

In 1735 Wesley made a point of visiting his friends in Manchester, in the busy weeks before embarking for Georgia. They were John Clayton, curate of Holy Trinity Salford, a rigid High Churchman who had been in the Holy Club at Oxford; Thomas Deacon, a Jacobite and Nonjuring bishop, tutored as a young man by George Hickes; John Byrom (\*Christians Awake\*), Jacobite, ex-Fellow Trinity College Cambridge, F.R.S., exponent of shorthand; and Joseph Hoole. Soon after his return from Georgia, Wesley revisited his Manchester friends.

Who was Joseph Hoole? Curnock, in the standard \*Journal\*, mis-identified Hoole. The John Hoole he speaks of was only born in 1727. V.H.H. Green (\*The Young Mr. Wesley\*) correctly identifies Hoole, Rector of St. Ann's Manchester, as the former Vicar of Haxey, but does not dwell on the point. Yet Hoole had been well known to Wesley since he was a boy, and must have had considerable influence on him.

(1) <sup>Joseph</sup>  
John Hoole (c.1682-1745)

- (a) After the Epworth Rectory fire, he came to Epworth with help which he had collected for the family. (Susannah's long letter to him of 24 August 1709).
- (b) He became Vicar of Haxey (the next parish to Epworth) in 1712, having been ordained priest in 1708. By the time he came to Haxey he was married.
- (c) In the trouble caused by the ghost, \*Old Jeffry\*, at the Epworth Rectory, the Rector enlisted the help of his neighbouring vicar.
- (d) Like Wesley, he had much trouble with his parishioners. He wrote to the Archbishop of York in 1718 asking for a change of benefice - unsuccessfully.
- (e) He had a younger brother Nathaniel, who was at one stage expected to become curate of Epworth (Samuel Wesley's massive \*Letter to a Curate\* of about 1721 or 1722, written for Nathaniel, makes clear that he admired Joseph).
- (f) He graduated MA Cantab at Sidney Sussex in 1727 by litteras regias. He may have had a Dissenting background, like Wesley.
- (g) He published an \*Address to Parents\* (1724) and \*An Admonition to Church Wardens\* (three or four years later) which corroborate the impression of his earnestness, and devotion to pastoral duty based on reliable methods and sound orthodox churchmanship.
- (h) He was at least interested in some mystical writers, including Antoinette Bourignon (MHB 546). Byrom's <sup>in</sup>\*Journal\* includes a letter from James Garden to his friend Hoole. Garden was son and nephew of two Aberdonian Non-jurors~~brothers~~, who were exponents of M<sup>me</sup> Bourignon and related mystics.

(2) Hoole's Move to St. Ann's Manchester

Confusion about this has thrown people off the scent of the connection. He was Vicar of Haxey until 1736, but he was in Manchester earlier than that. My research shows that he became curate of St. Ann's in 1732, and rector in 1736. He held a plurality from 1732 to 1736! Byrom's Journal shows that he knew him very well, even before that, visiting him at Haxey.

St. Ann's was founded in 1712 in opposition to the 'Old Church'.

Hoole was no Nonjuror, though he was a firm churchman. He died just before Bonny Prince Charlie took Manchester for a short period in 1745. The other friends welcomed the Prince, but there is no evidence that Hoole was a Jacobite.

(3) Hoole and Waterland

In 1739 Hoole published 'A Guide to Communicants; or the common Christian instructed in the Doctrine of the Eucharist, being an Extract out of Dr. Waterland's Review of the Doctrine...' with Waterland's knowledge and support. The connection is interesting.

Waterland (1683-1740) was one of the foremost theologians of the Church. His book on the eucharist was his last major work (1737). He came from Flixborough, not far from Epworth and Haxey. His previous book had caused controversy. He received support in an anonymous work published in 1735. This turned out to be by Matthew Horbery, a young Fellow of Magdalen, Oxford, who was born in Haxey and about this time became curate there (and was also known to John Byrom in Manchester). In the subsequent correspondence Waterland remembers having known Hoole long ago, and is glad to hear about him, and his proposal for a popular version of the book on the eucharist.

Thus Hoole followed Waterland, who opposed the Latitudinarianism of such as Hoadly, aligned himself with the traditional churchmanship of the Caroline divines, but did not go as far as Johnson, Hickes and Brett in maintaining the need for some material sacrifice (the bread) in the eucharist.

(4) John Wesley and Hoole

- (a) Hoole was twenty years younger than Samuel and twenty years older than John Wesley. When he first (as far as we know) visited Epworth in 1709, John was seven.
- (b) When John was compiling his record of the Old Jeffry episode, he consulted Hoole.
- (c) Wesley's diary for May 1726 (sample page transcribed in Curnock, i, p.69f) shows that he visited Haxey twice in a week.
- (d) In 1731 Wesley suggested Matthew Horbery to his sister Martha as a possible suitor. (Horbery was then a student at Lincoln College).
- (e) In May 1731, when opposition was mounting to Wesley's Holy Club, he wrote for advice to Hoole.

(5) Wesley and his friends in Manchester

The connection between Wesley and the Manchester group of friends has hitherto seemed to hinge on his friendship with Clayton when they were together in Oxford.

It is now clear that his life-long friendship with Joseph Hoole was probably a more important link.

Hoole was a traditional High churchman, and also interested in mysticism. As such he was in happy friendship with the Manchester High-churchmen and Nonjurors.

So was Wesley. But Hoole's presence and example suggests a limit to the influence on him of the other members of the group.

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