

‘Extraordinary Messengers’:

On the Wesleyan origins of the superintendency and the contemporary understanding and praxis of superintendency in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the British Methodist Church

‘A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of
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List of Contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	6
Chapter One: Origins	9
1.0 Influences: Society	9
1.1 Influences: Family and University	13
1.3 Authority	16
Chapter 2: The Forerunners to the Superintendent	27
2.1 Conference	30
2.2 Wesley’s Assistants	32
2.3 America.....	37
2.4 The Sunday Service	42
2.5 Ordinations.....	44
2.6 Apostolic-Man	45
Chapter 3: Methodology and Findings	48
3.1 Personal Reflexivity.....	48
3.2 Epistemological reflexivity	49
3.3 Interviews.....	53
3.4 Findings: Questionnaire Responses	55
3.5 The Interviews	64
Chapter Four: Contemporary Superintendency	82
4.1 Sign of Unity.....	83
4.2 Leader	85
4.3 <i>Missio Dei</i>	87
4.4 Management, Leadership and Oversight.....	95
4.5 What sort of bishops?.....	102
4.6 Conclusion	110
Bibliography	117
Appendix1 :.....	121
Specimen Interview (extract): Minister B	125

(45170 words)

List of Tables

Table 1 - Years of Service.....	55
Table 2 - Number of Appointments	56
Table 3 - Personnel.....	57
Table 4 - Levels of Pastoral Charge.....	58
Table 5 - Role of Superintendent	59
Table 6 - Adequacy of Training	60
Table 7 - Early Identification of Superintendents	61
Table 8 - Selection of Potential Superintendents	61
Table 9 - Model of Superintendency.....	62
Table 10 - Forms of Superintendency.....	62
Table 11 - Age Distribution	63

Abstract

**The University of Manchester
Simon Huw Leigh
Master of Philosophy**

‘Extraordinary Messengers’: On the Wesleyan origins of the superintendency and the contemporary understanding and praxis of superintendency in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the British Methodist Church.

2015

This thesis concerns the origins of Methodist superintendency and what it meant for John Wesley. In the first two chapters the thesis explores the development of the role of the Assistant and Wesley’s growing understanding of authority and order in the Methodist movement, together with his pragmatic ideas concerning episcopacy. The thesis engages with primary sources and contemporary scholarship, offering a critique of Wesley’s project.

The thesis uses a questionnaire and a set of interviews as a piece of qualitative research into the work of contemporary superintendency. The findings are used to offer a critical analysis of the Superintendents’ responses, which have significant implications for the praxis of superintendency in the Plymouth and Exeter District. This forms an original contribution to research.

The final section explores what is a Superintendent for British Methodism and identifies the superintendency with being a focus for mission, unity, oversight and leadership. This is then critically examined through the lens of contemporary scholarship, particularly the work of Croft and Grundy with regards to *episkope*. The office of Superintendent is examined in terms of its functional utility as opposed to any ontological grounding. The implication for the missional work of the Superintendent is seen in the contention that the office is a focus for mission, for unity and exhibits episcopal characteristics of oversight, leadership and governance.

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Introduction

This thesis asks the question ‘what is a Superintendent minister for John Wesley and for today. The thesis then explores what implications this has for the mission of the Plymouth and Exeter District of the British Methodist Church?’

This thesis will reflect upon how and why the Superintendent minister came into existence in the life of the Methodist movement. In order to accomplish this it will be necessary to trace John Wesley’s journey which led him to create an office which is sustained to the present day. This will be achieved by examining primary sources and through interaction with secondary works and scholarly interpretation. This thesis will engage with the British Methodist Church’s current understanding of superintendency and through information which was gathered through qualitative field-work, its implications for mission in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the British Methodist Church.

A former President of the British Methodist Conference, the Reverend A. Raymond George once asserted that ‘Of all the familiar institutions of British Methodism none is more familiar than the Superintendency.’¹ George may be correct in this statement, there is however, little scholarly reflection on the reason for this office and for its development in terms of missiology, until more recently. It is in the understanding of the historical background to the superintendency, that its ecclesial significance in the contemporary British Methodist Church, may be fully appreciated.²

The research question leads this thesis to interpret the Wesleyan reasoning for the establishment of the superintendency. In turn, this asks the question as to whether or not there still remains any link between the early Methodist movement’s Superintendent and that of the contemporary office. It was in this context that a qualitative survey was entered into with Superintendent ministers in the Plymouth and Exeter District. A subsequent follow-up interview was undertaken with selected Superintendents.³ The research question

¹ A. Raymond George, ‘Superintendency’ *Epworth Review*, 1 (1974), p. 79.

² Although A Raymond George considers the superintendency and latterly the Faith and Order Committee asks ‘What is a Superintendent?’ (2005) scholarly comment has been limited, for instance, Rupert Davies *Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1985) and A.B. Lawson *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1963) Adrian Burdon in *Authority and Order* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) and H.D. Rack *Reasonable Enthusiast* (London: Epworth Press, 2002) offer some more detailed consideration.

³ The determination of the methodology and methodological approaches are set out in chapter 3 of this thesis. A full reasoned explanation for the selection of certain Superintendents for interview is explained in the same chapter.

forms a link between ecclesiological developments of the Wesleyan era and its missional imperative for the early Superintendents, together with the need to reflect on the validity of such a claim for the contemporary office-holder.

This thesis is also influenced by the experience and reflection of the writer by his being a Superintendent in the Plymouth and Exeter District. Without prejudice, this thesis is asking if an eighteenth century model of ministry has anything to say to the position of the Superintendent minister in the twenty-first century British Methodist Church, as experienced particularly in the Plymouth and Exeter District.

Chapter one grounds the research question in John Wesley's milieu. The chapter takes notice of those spheres of influence which impinged on Wesley's life, particularly his family, the University of Oxford and his ordination, in 1725, into the Church of England. The chapter also reveals how his serious minded piety, the effect of his conversion, firstly in 1725 and latterly in 1738, had considerable effect on his ministry. These influences had particular impetus on his ministry and had a material effect on his ordering of the Methodist movement. This had a direct effect on the development of the role of Wesley's Assistants, the forerunners of the superintendency.

The chapter continues by addressing Wesley's own sense of position within the Methodist movement and his adoption of the term *scriptural episkopos* in relation to his own position of authority. It is through this process that the influence of Lord King and Edward Stillingfleet become apparent. Both King and Stillingfleet had a profound and lasting effect on Wesley and particularly upon his understanding of episcopacy. As will be seen in chapter two and four this will have significant and transformative effects on the Methodist movement and its relationship with the Church of England.

Chapter one also engages with contemporary scholarship as Wesley's understanding of authority and Church order are explored. The works of Richard Heitzenrater, H.D. Rack and Adrian Burdon are influential in this consideration.

Chapter two explores the place of the Assistant and this is achieved by the use of both primary and secondary sources. The thesis engages with the contemporary scholarship of Burdon with regard to Wesley's Assistants and H.D Rack, with regard to the ordination of ministers for work in America and in Britain. The chapter also presents the resultant controversy which came as a consequence of the ordinations.

Chapter three moves to the contemporary experience of Superintendent ministers in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The chapter presents qualitative research through the utilization of a survey and follow-up interviews with selected Superintendents. The chapter evidences the personal reflection of the Superintendents into their ministry as Superintendents. The chapter also reveals the appreciation or otherwise of the Wesleyan heritage of superintendency from the days of Mr Wesley's Assistants. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the information obtained from the survey, as it appertains to the research question.

Chapter four engages with the British Methodist Church report of 2005 '*What is a Superintendent?*' This document is highly significant as it lays down how British Methodism is to relate to superintendency. For the purposes of this thesis it is similarly an important document, as it forms a link between contemporary British Methodism and the milieu of John Wesley and his development of the superintendency.

Chapter four engages with the scholarship of David Carter, Steven Croft, Malcolm Grundy and others as leadership, oversight and *episkope* are considered and assessed. This final chapter brings together themes of authority, unity and focus, missional pragmatism and *episkope* as the research question is answered. This final chapter allows conclusions to be drawn about the place of Superintendency in the mission of the Methodist Church, particularly as it impinges on the mission of the Plymouth and Exeter District.

Chapter One: Origins

The office of Superintendent minister has a hinterland which derives its origins in the evangelical zeal of the Reverend John Wesley and the birth of the Methodist movement. In order to come to a fuller understanding of why and how this office came into existence, it is necessary to engage with Wesley and the influences which had a profound effect on his Christian journey. The powerful influence of his family, his attendance at the University of Oxford and the context of the Age in which he lived, all form significant landmarks in the life of the founder of the Methodist movement. John Wesley's entry into the priesthood of the Church of England in 1725 is a seminal moment in the development of Wesley's piety, as significant as his later evangelical awakening in May 1738.

1.0 Influences: Society

Richard Heitzenrater paints a picture of eighteenth century England as being 'decadent, corrupt and mad for pleasure'.⁴ He cites the artistic works of Hogarth as being, in part, a satirical mocking of the age, but that in the satire there is to be found an underlying and uncomfortable truth, that society was morally challenged. This was the era of Gin Lane and Tyburn, examples of depressing excess and barbarity, but so too, it was the context where Capability Brown put his mark on architecture and the British landscape. It was an age of growing prosperity and in contrast to Heitzenrater, it was, as Henry Rack contends 'a time of elegance, rationality and humanitarian idealism – this was an improving society.'⁵

Nevertheless, Bishop Gibson, bishop of Lincoln from 1716 to 1723, makes a robust criticism of his times, when in 1740 he claims that 'the decay of piety and religion and the increase of sin and vice are so visible...in this corrupt and degenerate age.'⁶ However, the Church of England itself was not above criticism and, it may be argued, that Methodism was a consequence and correcting response to the failings of the Church of England's clergy. This is part of the critique of the Church of England in the eighteenth century, by Rupert Davies. He depicts the contented lot of the minister who lived in an affluent

⁴ Richard P Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1989), p. 33.

⁵ H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002), p. 9.

⁶ Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 34.

benefice, with the plight of ‘starveling and uneducated curates’; for one the delights of ‘hunting, shooting and fishing’ for the other penury.⁷ Hogarth’s satirical print ‘A midnight modern conversation’ portrays the good parson as being only a little less drunken than his affluent friends. Gerald Cragg’s criticism is well put when he states that ‘The Church may have been in intimate touch with the life of the age, but did not generally stand conspicuously above it.’⁸ Rack acknowledges that there were deeply seated problems within the Church of England and that the plight of some curates was a scandal. However, Rack argues that this was not purely symptomatic of the eighteenth century milieu, but had been a legacy of the mediaeval period, not much changed by the Reformation. Thus absentee clergy and pluralism, the practice of having more than one ‘living,’ was commonplace.⁹ Rack in common with Heitzenrater, Davies and Cragg is critical of the abuses of the clergy, particularly when he notes the comment of an unattributed cathedral canon:

The life of a prebendary is a pretty easy way of dawdling away one’s time: praying, walking, visiting and a little study as your heart could wish.¹⁰

As will be observed in chapters two and four of this thesis, it was the failure of the clergy which influenced Wesley in his evangelical desire to preach the pure word of God and enliven the Church of England.

That the Church of England did need enlivening is a moot point. Davies is critical of the Church of England, but his criticism is only partial. The Church of England comprised twenty-six dioceses with ten thousand parishes and about fifteen thousand clergy¹¹. The bishops were political appointees and the Convocations of Canterbury and York had failed to meet since 1717, which was seen as a very real flaw.¹² The impact of the Civil War and the political intrigues of the Whig and Tory bishops added to the parlous state of the national church. And yet, contrary to the impression given by Davies, Rack claims that not all clergy were ineffective, or drunken or absent.

⁷ Rupert E. Davies, *Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1985), p. 28

⁸ Gerald Cragg, *The Church in the Age of Reason* (Baltimore, MY: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 128

⁹ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 11.

¹¹ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 16.

¹² Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 12-13.

Indeed, Davies' account may be too partisan. David Hempton offers a more nuanced assessment of a Methodist movement:

Methodist leaders knew they were making advances against 'carnal Anglicanism... The real problem for the Methodists was that the British state in the eighteenth century was expertly designed to protect landed property and Anglican privileges through a political and legal system that itself was subject to aristocratic control'¹³

Hempton argues that Methodist leadership, following Wesley's example, knew that they were part of a progressive movement which could challenge the establishment, both spiritually and socially. However, there was uncertainty as to how to pursue such a route, coupled with a realisation that matters may go too far, which was far removed from there inherent conservatism.¹⁴

It was in the formation of religious societies in the seventeenth century, following the Restoration of the monarchy and its reaction to 'politicized Puritanism' that a remedy to the ills and ails of the Church of England was found.¹⁵ The religious societies were in part a moral counterpoint to the extremes of eighteenth century Britain. The religious societies offered a religious and moral expression of both social concern and religious piety as a measure to remedy moral decay and to offer an opportunity to reform. Anthony Horneck founded the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge in 1678. This Society found a sympathetic reception in the Church of England. The Rector of Epworth, Samuel Wesley, founded a religious society and John Wesley became a member of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge.¹⁶ The religious societies offered a personal programme of reform which saw the transformation of society as that of personal resolve and personal transformation. The intent of the societies was not that of the evangelical awakening of the Methodist movement, but the societies had an impact on the development of the early Methodist movement.¹⁷ Andrew Goodhead asserts that the religious societies had a great impact on John Wesley, as he became a member of the

¹³ David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson Education, 1987), p. 225

¹⁴ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p. 225.

¹⁵ Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 37.

¹⁶ Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 36.

¹⁷ Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 36.

Fetter Lane Society, which promoted the Methodist cause.¹⁸ It was at a society meeting, James Hutton's Aldersgate Street Society that Wesley found his 'heart strangely warmed'. Although much sentimentalised by later Methodists, this experience did have a profound effect on Wesley's evangelical mission, which led eventually to the formation of the Methodist Church.¹⁹ The personal piety and order which the Societies brought to the life of the adherent, fostered a commitment to Christ and a mutual accountability for their Christian conduct and progress. This was not restricted to the example of John Wesley and the Methodist movement, but also to such as Benjamin Ingham and those who gathered around him.²⁰ However, there is a parallel with the later Bands and Classes of the Methodist movement.²¹ As will be seen in Chapter 2, the work of the Assistants and later the Superintendents of the early Methodist movement, had oversight of these Bands and Classes and a responsibility for the progress of the Bands and Classes in Christian progress.

Whether one takes the view of Heitzenrater, as being an entirely accurate portrayal of the age or the more nuanced approach of Rack; Heitzenrater is astute when he observes that what is required in that age was stability. The spectre of revolution in France and in America became a reality. Poverty and wealth are two polarities breeding vice and immorality, Republicanism and Jacobitism stand in competition with one another, rationalism and enthusiasm produce their own philosophical and religious perspectives.²²

Bebbington acknowledges the discernability of the Enlightenment in Wesley's allegiance to reason, self-improvement and optimism.²³ Hempton goes much further in his analysis of Wesley as both an 'enthusiast' and as an 'enlightenment man'.²⁴ Hempton cites Wesley's interest in scientific method, his indebtedness to Lockean empiricism, his defence of religious toleration and his implacable opposition to slavery as indicative of an

¹⁸ Andrew Goodhead: unpublished Ph.D thesis, *A Cross and a Crown: The Origins, Development and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth Century England*, Sheffield, 2007.

¹⁹ J. Wesley, *Works [BE]* Vol 19. p. 375.

²⁰ J.C.D. Clark, 'The Eighteenth Century Context' in William J. Abraham & James E. Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 11.

²¹ Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 38. where Heitzenrater refers to the Order of the Cripplegate Society. Goodhead's thesis reflects similarly on the linkage between the Societies and the Bands and Classes of early Methodism.

²² Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 34.

²³ David Bebbington, *Methodist Spirituality 1800-1950*, p. 22. <http://www.stirlinguniversity/history>. Accessed 1.1.15.

²⁴ David Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 32-54.

Enlightenment mind set. However, he also admits that Wesley was for all this an enthusiast, even if a ‘reasonable enthusiast’.

Rack also comments on the changes being wrought in society by the movement of people from a pastoral landscape to one dominated by the cities and industrial towns. The population of Britain in the eighteenth century increased from approximately five million at its beginning to almost nine million by its close. The population was changing both numerically and in location and the effects of the agrarian and industrial revolutions were being felt.²⁵

1.1 Influences: Family and University

The influence of family was a powerful influence on the life of John Wesley. Wesley’s father, the Reverend Samuel Wesley, who founded the Epworth Society in 1700, was also Rector of Epworth. Samuel was the son of a dissenting minister, who had been ejected by the Church of England in 1662.²⁶ Samuel was also a reckless debtor whose lack of financial probity caused his imprisonment in Lincoln prison.

It was Wesley’s mother who had a very profound influence over Wesley’s religious and educational development. John Wesley attended Charterhouse School, then located in London. From Charterhouse he gained an exhibition to Christ Church College, Oxford, in 1720. Wesley was a serious and committed student which was a rarity at that time, when so many of the students were given to a frivolous lifestyle.²⁷ Hempton refers to Wesley as ‘An Oxford trained logician of cold and mechanical disposition.’²⁸ It was during his time at Oxford that Wesley searched for a deeper religious meaning to his life:

Wesley’s search during this period for a meaningful understanding of the demands of Christian living, eventually led him to tie together the perfectionism of the Pietists, the moralism of the Puritans and the emotionalism of the mystics, which he felt could operate within the structures and doctrines of the Church of England.²⁹

²⁵ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 1.

²⁶ Davies, *Methodism*, pp. 38-42.

²⁷ V.H.H. Green, *The Young Mr Wesley* (London: Arnold, 1961), p. 23.

²⁸ Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, p. 34.

²⁹ Richard P.Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1995), p. 239.

Although Heitzenrater may be correct in this, it did not prevent Wesley from believing that his relationship with God was disturbing and inadequate:

Being removed to the University for five years, I still said my prayers, both in public and in private and read, the Scriptures, several other books of religion, especially comments on the New Testament. Yet I had all this while so much as a notion of inward holiness.³⁰

Wesley's struggle to find his own Christian identity and Christian praxis is an important development in his Christian journey. It is also indicative of his serious desire to be a Christian. This intense devotion was later to be manifested in the Methodist movement. The works of Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living*³¹ and *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying*³², the writings of Thomas a Kempis and in 1727 the immensely influential *Christian Perfection and a Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, by William Law, had lasting meaning for Wesley. Law advocated a life of simplicity, beatitudinal devotion, piety and counselling perfection as an ultimate goal. Law's thesis resonated with Wesley and permitted him to discover a life of personal piety and serious devotion. Wesley's fresh understanding of Christian living had a transformative effect. In later life, the importance of Taylor's work was mentioned to John Newton in correspondence, when in 1765 he reflects on his condition in 1725:

I was struck particularly with the chapter upon Intention and felt a mixed intention to give myself up to God.³³

The intention to lead a devout and pious life was transformative and evident not only to Wesley but also to his contemporaries at Oxford. In the 1730's the pious and devout group associated with Wesley became known as Methodists. The life of prayer, taking the sacrament and regular attendance at worship, performing acts of charity, together with devotional reading and study made for serious Christian living. The devotional life of the early Oxford Methodists, inspired by Wesley, had a lasting impact on the future Classes and Bands of Methodism. However, Heitzenrater is not convinced that there was a distinctive method or theological perspective or even a Rule which would show a common purpose or identity in the Oxford Methodists. And yet, as will be evident in the next

³⁰ Wesley, *Works [BE]* Vol. 18. I have not been able to source page number.

³¹ J. Taylor, *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living* (London: Rivingtons, 1882)

³² J. Taylor, *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying* (London: Rivingtons, 1882)

³³ Davies, *Methodism*, p. 42.

chapter of this thesis, there is a common bond evident by 1753 in the Rule of the Helper, promulgated by Wesley at the Conference that year. These Rules were to have a directing effect on the lives of Mr Wesley's preachers and Assistants. David Carter, however, insists that Wesley was the most powerful influence on Methodism and that his theological perspective shone through all Methodist endeavours.³⁴

Whether or not the Oxford Methodists had developed an identifiable lifestyle under Wesley, he wrote that:

And by my continued endeavour to keep his whole law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of him and that I was even then in a state of salvation.³⁵

Heitzenrater's doubt about distinctive Methodist identity and Carter's focus on the power and force of Wesley as a founder of the movement, offer a conflicting view. The earnest conviction of Wesley and the evidence of his conduct in achieving his ends, make Carter's assertion appear reasonable. Wesley sets a certain tone and example about his own conduct which is, arguably, to be seen is indicative of the expectation of others called Methodists and far removed from the conduct of the cathedral prebendary, mentioned by Rack:

I began to alter the whole form of my conversation and to set in earnest on a new life. I set apart an hour or two each day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed, I began to aim at, and pray for, inward holiness.I doubted not that I was a good Christian.³⁶

The underlying seriousness of Wesley's new life and the demands of living a pious existence were later inculcated into the conduct expected of Wesley's Assistants as they were required to 'feed and guide, teach and govern the flock'.³⁷ Wesley would not have entrusted 'the flock' to any person whom he believed not to be called of God and subject to Wesley's discipline.

³⁴ David Carter, *Love Bade Me Welcome: A British Methodist Perspective on the Church* (London: Epworth Press, 2002), p. 5.

³⁵ Wesley, *Works [BE]* I have not been able to find original source.

³⁶ Wesley, *Works [BE]* I have not been able to find original source.

³⁷ Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (London: Epworth Press, 1988), pp. 68-69.

The influence of those such as Law, Taylor and Thomas a Kempis had great effect on Wesley. So too did Wesley's ordination into the priesthood of the Church of England. Wesley assimilated ideas and used those ideas later, as the Methodist movement developed. However, as Rack observes:

His selection was conditioned by his interpretations coloured by his own needs and the experience of his followers. They became part of his own synthesis of piety and very much eighteenth century documents.³⁸

Rack has identified the pragmatist in Wesley, who adapts, interprets and evolves his vocation, ministry and leadership of the early Methodist movement, according to his perceived needs. Carter goes further than Rack and perceives Wesley's theology 'changing under the pressure of events' and his ecclesiology as 'idiosyncratic.'³⁹ However, as the missiologists Frost and Hirsch have contended, there will always be a refocusing, reimagining of mission in changing contexts; Wesley's thought, ideas, theology and praxis were awakened through his ordination and later experience in Aldersgate, in 1738.⁴⁰ He adapted and interpreted according to his context and asserted his authority accordingly. This expression of Wesley's authority is seen when he called the Methodist preachers to Conference. He invited who should attend and attendance was to confer with Wesley, on his terms.⁴¹

1.3 Authority

Following Wesley's ordination into the College of Divines, in 1725, by John Potter, Bishop of Oxford, he came under the influence of two High Church Anglicans John Clayton and Thomas Deacon.⁴² Their influence on Wesley came through their introducing him to patristic theology and the writings of the early Church.⁴³ The growing interest in the early Church led Wesley towards the writings of Lord Peter King and the future Bishop of Worcester, Edward Stillingfleet. This would have considerable impact on

³⁸ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 97-98.

³⁹ Carter, *Love*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Michael Frost & Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), p. 231.

⁴¹ A.B. Lawson, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry: The Sources and development of His Opinions and Practice* (London: SPCK, 1963), p. 105.

⁴² Dennis M. Campbell 'Ministry and Itinerancy' in William Abraham & James E. Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 264.

⁴³ Gunter, *Limits*, p. 142. and Rack *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 111.

Wesley, as he came to consider the leadership and oversight of the Methodist movement and his own position as its *scriptural episkopos*; *episkopos* being merely the Latinised form of the Greek noun bishop. The authenticity of the early Church made a marked impression on Wesley and his mission to Georgia, in America. Similarly it had a significant impression in his encounter with the Moravians and the teaching of Peter Bohler in London.⁴⁴

The authority and authenticity of the early Church are behind the sentiments of Wesley's words at the foundation of the City Road Chapel in London, in 1777, when Wesley states:

Methodism, so called, is the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive church, the religion of the Church of England.⁴⁵

Wesley appeals to the primitive church as an example of the precedent under which Methodism operates in the Church of England. Not only that, but Wesley ties it to biblical authority. In effect he operates two of the pillars of the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral, the authority of Scripture and Tradition, Reason and Experience, in defence of the Methodist cause within the Church of England.⁴⁶ Appealing to the tradition of the primitive church and Wesley's reading of Scripture was to have great consequence for the Methodists and Wesley, particularly in regard to his understanding of episcopacy. Indeed, it had a schismatic effect when Wesley, acting under his own authority ordained ministers for work in America, Scotland and in England. He became an *episkopos*, not through ambition, but through what he saw as a consequence of pragmatic and functional requirement.

Carter's assertion that Wesley adapted and changed his views as expediency demanded, seem to find a genuine ring of truth when one considers his changing view of episcopacy and its authority. At the time of his ordination and beyond his evangelical awakening in 1738, Wesley maintained a traditional approach to his understanding of episcopacy. Both Burdon and Albert Outler view him as a typical establishment churchman. Outler suggests that he is profoundly influenced by Thomas Cranmer and Richard Hooker.⁴⁷ His reading of episcopal authority is, in part, determined by his approval of Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

⁴⁴ Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol.3. p. 585.

⁴⁵ Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3. p. 585.

⁴⁶ Carter, *Love*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Albert C Outler, *John Wesley* (Oxford: OUP, 1964), p. 306.

Cyprian reads the apostolic succession as being instituted by the work of the Holy Spirit and then communicated with due authority from Apostles, to bishops and in due succession.⁴⁸ This chimed with the belief of eighteenth century Anglicanism, as it still does. Wesley's position was the Church's position.

However, by 1745 there is a change of attitude apparent in Wesley's questions to the Conference:

Q: Is episcopal, Presbyterian or independent church-government most agreeable to reason?

A:Christ sends forth a preacher of the Gospel. Some who hear him repent and believe the Gospel. Then they desire him to watch over them, to build them up in the faith...here then is an independent congregation, subject to no pastor but their own views, neither liable to be controlled in things spiritual by any other man or body of men whatsoever. But soon some others form parts....beseech him to come and help them also....Knowing it to be the will of God he consents, yet not until he has conferred with the wisest and holiest of his congregation, and with their advice appointed one who had the gifts and grace to watch over the flock until his return.

In like manner, in every place where it pleases God to gather a little flock by his word, he appoints one in his absence to take oversight of the rest...These are Deacons, or servants of the Church and look on the first pastor as father of the Church and look on their first pastor as their common father...and esteem him still as shepherd of their souls...As these congregations increase, and as the Deacons grow in years and grace, they need other subordinate deacons or helpers; in respect of whom they may be called Presbyters or Elders, as their father in the Lord may be called the bishop or overseer of all of them.⁴⁹

As Burdon argues, Wesley is justifying his own position and authority in the Methodist movement. Burdon finds support for this view from Rack, for Wesley's decision is influenced by the Conference of 1744 where Wesley asks:

Q: How far is our duty to obey the Bishops?

A: In all things indifferent. And on this ground of obeying them, we should observe the Canons, so far as we can with safe conscience.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p.37. Burdon is citing Davies, George and Rupp, *A History*, Vol.4. p. 77.

⁵⁰ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 30. Lawson cites the Benet Minutes, p. 13.

Rack and Burdon are critical of Wesley for his abuse of the Articles of Religion which state:

The congregation of English believers in which the pure word of God is preached and the sacraments is duly administered.⁵¹

Wesley argues that the Methodists are those whom the Article applies and that separation from the Mother Church was not conceivable. However, with considerable adeptness the response to the question in the 1744 Conference qualifies the situation, through the insertion of the phrase 'In all things indifferent'. Wesley provides what might appear to be an escape clause, for Wesley and others believed that the 'pure word' was not being preached in the parishes and many of the clergy were inadequate or failing.⁵² It also reflects Wesley's sentiments that:

I have both an ordinary call and an extraordinary. My ordinary call is my ordination by the bishop...My extraordinary call is witnessed by the works of God doth by my ministry.⁵³

Wesley expresses his loyalty to both Church and God; it is the latter which has superior authority. It is as a result of Wesley's clear understanding of his call, that the responses in the 1745 Conference, reflect a growing clarification of Wesley's position and to his rigorous exercise of personal authority in the Methodist movement.

For the purposes of this thesis, Wesley's developing understanding of his own position in the Methodist movement, begins to reflect how he is seen as a focus for leadership, oversight, mission and unity. This will offer an insight into the position of the Assistants and then the future superintendency, both in Wesley's era and in the context of this thesis.

Wesley's Journal for Monday 20th January 1746 offers an insight into the development of Wesley's thought on the nature of authority and episcopacy in particular. It will also be seen as a natural engagement with the ideas planted in Wesley's mind by his friends Deacon and Clayton.

⁵¹ Article 19 of the Articles of Religion of the Church of England cited in, Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 293. Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 36.

⁵² Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 37.

⁵³ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 12 citing Telford *Letters 1 and Baker Letters*, 25: 660.

I set out for Bristol. On the road I read Lord King's *Account of the Primitive Church*. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education I was ready to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught; but, if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are one order and that originally every Christian congregation was a church independent of all others.⁵⁴

Although Wesley admits in his *Journal* that he has decided upon Bishops, Priests and Deacons as being the best ordering of ministry, it is a changing perception.⁵⁵ Lord King contends that the Church is divided between the laity and the clergy. His argument is that in the primitive church the bishop was the minister in every congregation. For King the presbyter was a person in holy orders who could perform the function of the bishop, although King accepted that this was so, but the presbyter would need the assent of the bishop to perform his functions.⁵⁶ It is worthy of note too that King saw the bishops and presbyters as ministers of the Universal Church, considered by him as being as one.⁵⁷

By 1747 Wesley was prepared to consider further questions in relation to the ordering of church authority. The Methodist Conference was asked:

Q8: Are the three orders of Bishops, Priests and Deacons plainly described in the New Testament?

A: We think they are and believe they are generally obtained in the churches of the Apostolic age.

Q9: But are you assured, God designed the same plan should obtain in all the churches throughout all ages?

A: We are not assured of this, because we do not know that it is asserted in Holy writ.⁵⁸

Wesley's opinion and therefore, that of the Methodist Conference, was that 'in gradu' the bishop differed from the presbyter, that is in degree, but was equal 'in ordine' or order.

⁵⁴ Wesley, *Journal*, 3. p. 232.

⁵⁵ Wesley *Works [BE]* Vol1, p. 287.

⁵⁶ P.King, *An Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity and Worship of the Primitive Church*, (London, 1691), p. 53.

⁵⁷ King, *An Enquiry*, p. 83.

⁵⁸ Bennet Minutes, 17th June 1747, pp. 47-48.

Thus, the Conference broadly asserts that the threefold order of ministry is authoritative, but not necessarily obligatory.⁵⁹

Rack, it may be argued, portrays Wesley as being opportunistic in his accretion of ideas and concepts from both King and Stillingfleet's *Irenicum*, even where both men had retreated from their positions. Thus, Stillingfleet's 'that dissent from the Church of England was unnecessary and undesirable. Wesley took the unreconstructed Stillingfleet position for his own purposes.'⁶⁰ If Wesley was opportunistic, it was again, a means of cementing his own authority at Conference and within the broader Methodist movement. Lawson interprets Wesley's use of King's understanding of equality of rights to ordain, by both bishop and presbyter, as a valid part of the public office of both orders of ministry.⁶¹ This is a significant observation, for it sheds light on Wesley's future intention to ordain Superintendents for the work in America and some of his own Assistants for work in Britain.

Adrian Burdon appears to be in sympathy with this view, in that he sees Wesley as being very capable of being selective in his thinking and unimpressed by views that did not accord with his position, even when it is Bishop Jeremy Taylor, who had such a profound influence on Wesley in other respects:

The power of the imposition of hands for ordination is fixed upon the apostle and apostolic men. . . . Therefore this office and ministry of the apostolate is distinct and superior to that of the presbyter and this distinction must be continued. . .⁶²

Taylor's opinion did not resonate with Wesley and he began to see in his position the authority and position of his own episcopal role. The transformation in Wesley, through his Aldersgate experience of conversion, in May 1738, arguably, put Wesley in a superior position in relation to that of Whitefield and even his brother Charles Wesley; for John Wesley could argue that his position was unique. Hence, once again the letter to his brother Charles, of the 23rd June 1739, is significant, as it enforces his authority:

⁵⁹ A. Stevens, *The History of Religious Movements of the Eighteenth Century called Methodism, to the Death of Wesley* (London, 1862), p. 539.

⁶⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 295.

⁶¹ Lawson, *John Wesley*, pp. 51-52.

⁶² Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 41.

I have both an ordinary call and an extraordinary. My ordinary call is my ordination by the bishop... my extraordinary call is witnessed by the works God doth by my ministry.⁶³

It is in this nature of vocation that Wesley derives a very real sense of personal authority for his mission which goes beyond his loyalty to the Church of England, even if he always maintained such fidelity, by stating 'I am a Church of England man, and in the Church of England I will live and die, unless I am thrust out'.⁶⁴ However, Wesley could also appeal to Scripture as vindicating his position:

Neglect not the gift that is within thee which was given to thee by prophecy, with the laying on of hands by the presbytery (1 Timothy 4:14)⁶⁵

'Neglect not' means not exercising the gift to its fullest extent and that 'the gift' is that of 'feeding the flock, of power, and love and sobriety'. The prophecy was deemed as being the immediate direction of God.⁶⁶ Wesley's appeal is indicative of his claim to authority from Scripture to pursue his actions with the Methodist people. He is acting so as not to neglect his particular gifting from God. Dunn however, interprets the verse, by seeing that the *Charisma* which previously allowed ordination by any member of the church, as being more formalised and restricted to the holder of an 'office'. This neither validates nor denies Wesley's interpretation, but reflects the developing location of power and authority in the early Church, particularly with regard to ordination.⁶⁷

The rise of the threefold nature of ministry is commented upon by Richard Cooke, who notes how rapidly the loose house-church structure, which was broadly charismatic in nature, became more formalised in the first century and attributes this to the work of Paul in Ephesus.⁶⁸ By implication, it was the presbytery or the council of elders who 'ordained' those deemed worthy into their ministry. Paul may have had an apostolic authority, but this appears to be transferred to those in local authority in the nascent churches.

⁶³ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 12 where he cites Telford, *Letters, 1* and Baker, *Letters*, 25:660.

⁶⁴ John Telford (ed), *The Letters of the Revd John Wesley A.M.* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), Vol. 8. p. 58.

⁶⁵ The Authorised Version of the Bible, King James is used in this instance. The New Revised Standard Version and the New International Version translate presbytery as 'the council of the elders.'

⁶⁶ John Wesley's Explanatory Notes, www.christnotes.org/commentary accessed on 31 May 2014.

⁶⁷ James D.G.Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 385.

⁶⁸ Richard Cooke, *New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 2009), pp. 219-220.

Likewise, in Acts 20:17-28 Paul speaks to the Elders at Ephesus and the word *episkopoi* is used to talk in terms of ‘overseers’ or bishops and interchangeably presbyter at verse 17 and 28.⁶⁹ Dunn is quite clear that Luke rejects that in the episcopacy or superintendency within that early church setting, any future Roman Catholic sense of apostolic succession had been established.⁷⁰ This is a feature of the superintendency both of the Wesleyan era and in contemporary Methodism, that the title is designated to the office and not the person. It is a functional and not ontological office within Methodism, as opposed to the notion in the wider catholic Churches.

In Titus 1:5-9 the credentials for church leaders are advanced and the leaders are referred to as ‘overseers’ or bishops and Elders, who are presbyters, which stands in line with Ziesler’s understanding of *episkopoi* and Stott’s notion of presbyter-bishops.⁷¹ The term bishop and Superintendent is that these are the leaders of the Church who have authority to ordain, together with the Elders or presbyters. The question relates to function and not order, even if it is accepted that the bishop is superior to the presbyter as stated by Ignatius:

Let nothing be done in ecclesial concerns, without the bishop for whosoever doth anything without the knowledge of the bishop, is a worshipper of the devil.⁷²

For Wesley it is the simple practicality of the early Church which is so enticing, as both presbyter and bishop were permitted to ordain and work for the development of the Church. Thus Wesley may have seen the early Church as being unfettered and thus would reflect King in his contention, that in the absence of the bishop, it was the function of the presbyter to ordain, to baptise and to confirm those who were entering the Christian faith and the Church.⁷³

If Wesley could appeal to Scripture and make some defence of his position, even if those whom he relied, Stillingfleet, who later became Bishop of Worcester and Peter King who became the Lord Chief Justice, retracted their original position; he had by 1785 become

⁶⁹ John Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (Oxford: OUP, 1990), p. 136.

⁷⁰ Dunn, *Unity*, pp. 395-396.

⁷¹ Ziesler, *Christianity*, p. 136 and John R.W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: IVP, 1990), p. 323.

⁷² Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 52.

⁷³ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 52.

tired of the argument and stated ‘that he assuredly felt we have better work to do.’⁷⁴ His deeply held view, that his was an evangelical mission to the world, held higher priority and was subject to divine authority, which outweighed ecclesial niceties. Albert Outler argues, very persuasively, that it was Wesley’s firm belief that he was in some respect offering a remedy for the ‘ordinary’ ministry of the Church of England and that the Methodists, through his offices, were offering an extraordinary ministry.⁷⁵ He was in a sense an extraordinary overseer of extraordinary messengers. This appears to be in line with Kirby’s argument, that Wesley’s societies were not to be seen as a separate church, but as part of the mission of the Church of England.⁷⁶ Adrian Burdon cites Outler when he views Wesley as ‘rather like a superior-general of an evangelical order...within the Church catholic.’⁷⁷ Outler’s insight is a helpful motif for what, through Wesley’s Assistants, was to become the superintendency. Outler envisages an organization or movement which had at its heart an evangelical imperative, whose motivation stemmed from a need to see conversion to the way of Christ and through Christ’s mercy salvation being attained. Wesley’s being a scriptural *episkopos* is likely sheer pragmatism, allowing the Gospel to take priority over Church order. However, Wesley’s claim to episcopal-presbyteral equality to ordain is likely overblown.

Burdon argues persuasively that:

John Wesley’s claim that he could ordain...was based on very selective early precedents, chosen by himself....He would only exercise his supposed powers when the Gospel and the maintenance of Methodist integrity, demanded it. John Wesley believed that even if he did exercise his ‘right’ he would still not be separating from the church, according to his own convenient definition... Wesley was obviously influenced by the conventions of the Established Church...he could manipulate these and the church Fathers to suit his purpose....⁷⁸

However, even if Wesley was manipulative and if Rack is correct, when he observes John Wesley:

used precedent to clothe the nakedness of his own will, seen by signs following the providential will of God for his own mission.

⁷⁴ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 123.

⁷⁵ Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 306.

⁷⁶ James E. Kirby, ‘Methodist Episcopacy’ in William Abrahams & James E Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 232.

⁷⁷ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Burdon, *Authority and Order* p. 21.

Wesley clearly saw that the need of the age was such that the Methodist movement had to adopt such measures for the mission of God.⁷⁹ Thus, Wesley could move from being supportive of Cyprian's view of ordination and the traditional tenets of the Church of England, with regard to apostolic succession, to one where, through his reading of and admiration for the Alexandrian Church, presbyteral ordination of bishops was acceptable.⁸⁰ This pragmatism allowed Wesley to create Coke and Asbury as Superintendents for the American work in 1784. Wesley, in his terms, was standing in the footsteps of the presbyter-bishops of the primitive church.

In this chapter there has been an engagement with Wesley's formative years at Oxford University and his early experiences which led him to a more serious encounter with religion. The influence of bishop Taylor and his University colleagues Deacon and Clayton; the spiritual reading of Thomas a Kempis all influenced Wesley's character and inclination to be more seriously engaged with a pious life. His ordination as a priest of the Church of England, likewise, had a profound impact on his life.

The Chapter also notes the two revelations of personal piety in Wesley's life in, 1725 and later, his Aldersgate experience, in 1738, which has had such an impact on the Methodist mind-set from that day to this. Following from this experience and Wesley's animated evangelical activity in his post-Aldersgate ministry, the writer has engaged in the argument concerning Wesley's understanding of authority and order, as it is so vitally important in understanding how the Methodist movement is later to be organized and equipped in terms of leadership. Wesley's sources of authority are established in Stillingfleet and King and contemporary scholarship is referred to in making comment to Wesley's appropriate or otherwise use of such sources and Wesley's appeal to Scripture in aid of his understanding of being a *scriptural episkopos*.

The work of Rack, Lawson, Heitzenrater, Carter and Burdon have been used particularly in scrutinising Wesley's intentions and motivations and in offering a critique of Wesley. In particular this thesis has shown how Wesley's pragmatism influenced how he engaged with authority and exercised authority himself. The chapter has also shown how Wesley began to position himself not only as the one with authority, but also as a focus for

⁷⁹ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 296.

⁸⁰ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 511.

mission, leadership, such qualities are seen as the functional legacy of Wesley for the superintendency.

The next Chapter will engage with those who were known as the Assistants, that is the Assistants to the Reverend John Wesley. It is important to work with this material, for it presents, what may be termed an historic genetic link between the Assistant, the Superintendent of eighteenth century England and America and its later ancestor the Superintendent of contemporary British Methodism.

This chapter will come to an understanding for the role of Assistant and the eventual decision of John Wesley in ordaining such persons for work in America and in Britain. The chapter will also show how Wesley made a significant liturgical impact on the Methodist movement, by creating the Sunday Service and its part in securing an 'episcopal' role for the Superintendent.

Chapter 2: The Forerunners to the Superintendent

The research question asks ‘What is a Superintendent for John Wesley?’ The Superintendent has, as has already been noted, found its origins in the Latinised translation of *episkopos*, or overseer or superintendent or bishop. But this question is really asking how does the Methodist movement derive its office of Superintendent and from where did it come in those early years of Methodist identity and development. The British Methodist Church Faith and Order Committee commented in 2005 that:

[It was led] by an extraordinary overseer of a team of extraordinary messengers and of a movement or society of extraordinary disciples.⁸¹

The term ‘extraordinary’ in the context of this thesis needs clarification. For Wesley, as has already been noted, there is the reality of his ordinary call which is seen in his conventional ordination by a bishop. Wesley’s ordination stands in the historic Anglican tradition of the ordination of Deacons, Priests and Bishops and has at its heart an ontological and permanent quality absent from what later became Methodist ordination.⁸² The extraordinariness in Wesley’s position was one allotted to himself by his evangelical calling which went beyond Church of England convention.

Wesley’s preachers and Assistants were extraordinary messengers in that they were Wesley’s Methodist preachers. Their extraordinariness, in a sense, derives from both their appointment by Wesley and their evangelical call to be preachers. However, their extraordinary ministry is limited by Wesley’s pragmatic and functional requirements, whereby permanence of a role or office held was at the discretion of Wesley himself.⁸³ The experience of Pawson and Hanby, who were subject to extraordinary Methodist ordination as ministers for work in Scotland, had the title revoked by Wesley when they returned to England. In this instance there is a clear indication that territorial appointment inferred no right or permanence to a position. It was governed by Wesley’s perceived need and established by his authority alone.

⁸¹ Faith and Order Committee, *What is a Superintendent?* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2005), p. 3.

⁸² This is further developed in this thesis at page 38 and in chapter 4.

⁸³ See further at page 38.

However, the question of permanence and Wesley's sole authority to appoint, remove and direct his ministers and preachers is more complicated when one considers the extraordinary situation in America. American Methodism was not an indigenous movement but came from Britain; Wesley sending the first extraordinary messengers in 1769. According to Ruth, Wesley had a very controlling hand over the American Methodists. Thus Wesley would decide who were to be the preachers and leaders of the Circuits and particularly who were to be 'the chief itinerants to serve as his proxy'.⁸⁴ Ruth also observes that Wesley shaped the American Church, in its first generation, by providing the literature, liturgy, administrative, doctrinal and homiletical materials for the Methodists.⁸⁵ Following the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, John Wesley's direct influence and control diminished. American independence, the difficulty in communication and the fact that Anglicanism was not Established in America, meant that Methodism in America would develop its own identity, polity and practise. Indeed, under the leadership of Francis Asbury American Methodism 'grew at an unprecedented rate.'⁸⁶ The criticism that under Wesley 'Methodism was not only Church of Englandism felt, it was these feelings organized' arguably, appears to be a significant factor in American Methodism moving away from its Wesleyan origins.⁸⁷ Territorial distance, nationhood and differing political constitutions produced an almost evolutionary tendency to create alternative orders of ministry and a rationale for them. Arguably, the gift of the Wesleyan project in America, is, that through the extraordinary demands of the American milieu, the Gospel imperative in the American Methodist context, transcends Wesley's authority, which Wesley had apprehended.⁸⁸ The corollary to this seems to be, that Wesley's extraordinary authority and that of his extraordinary messengers is in the British context. So too, that the extraordinary nature of Methodist ministers and preachers and that of the Methodist movement, was within the orbit of John Wesley's authority and control.

If Wesley was that extraordinary overseer or bishop, the Faith and Order Committee has made a very insightful comment when applied to John Wesley. Wesley saw ordination as what Adrian Burdon terms 'a ministerial conveyance' and not as any form of ontological

⁸⁴ Lester Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2005), p. 24.

⁸⁵ Ruth, *Early Methodist Life*, pp. 23-24.

⁸⁶ John H Wigger, 'Francis Asbury and American Methodism' in William Abraham & James E. Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 53.

⁸⁷ Ruth, *Early Methodist Life*, p. 24.

⁸⁸ See page 38 below in this thesis.

action performed by the priest.⁸⁹ This then has an important corollary for Wesley and the Methodist movement. If Wesley understood ordination as a commissioning, that is being granted authority by one office-holder to another, it removes from Wesley any concept of ordination, being in some sense, a sacramental rite or having ontological significance.

Wesley was pragmatic, responding to situations. As such he directed the form and function of the Methodists and when a task was complete, so that office might end. Functional necessity took pride of place over the permanence of any office or office-holders position. Thus an Assistant might be dispensed with as Wesley saw fit.⁹⁰ Adrian Burdon advances the notion that in Cyprian, Wesley finds an echo from the early church; ‘...hence you know that the bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop and if anyone be not with the bishop, he is not in the Church.’⁹¹ The bishop then is seen as a focus of unity. In Wesley, it may be argued, Wesley was the focus for Methodist unity; their scriptural *episkopos*.

Stephen Gunter has made a telling observation about Wesley when he says:

[they] either did not understand his functional ecclesiological dialectic or simply refused to accept it.⁹²

Gunter is right to say this, so far as Wesley articulates a view that is within the bounds of Methodist practice. However, the line becomes distinctly blurred, when Wesley lays hands on his Assistants to make them Superintendents and presbyters for the work in America and later in Britain. As a priest of the Church of England he exceeds his authority. As a Methodist presbyter-bishop, with Wesley’s particular view of the primitive church, informed by Stillingfleet and King, even if erroneously, Wesley acted with functional pragmatism. He is not seeking schism with his beloved Church of England, but his actions make this more likely, even if he states:

Ye yourselves were first called in the Church of England; and though ye have and will have a thousand temptations to leave it, and set up for yourselves, regard them not, be Church of England men still....⁹³

⁸⁹ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 7

⁷⁶ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 105.

⁹¹ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 47.

⁹² Gunter, *Limits*, pp. 160-161.

2.1 Conference

However, prior to any such controversy the Methodist Conference had determined what the office of the Assistant meant. The Minutes of the Methodist Conference sitting on the 29th June 1744 asks this:

Q2: What is the Office of our Assistants?

A: In the absence of the minister to feed and guide, to teach and govern the flock:

- (1) To expound every morning and evening.
- (2) To meet the United Societies, the Bands and the Select Societies and the penitents every week.
- (3) To visit the classes once per month (London excepted)
- (4) To visit and decide all differences.
- (5) To put the disorderly back on trial and to receive on trial for the Bands and Societies.
- (6) To see the Stewards, the Leaders, the Schoolmasters, and Housekeepers faithfully discharge their several offices.
- (7) To meet the Stewards and the Leaders of the Bands and Classes weekly, to have oversight of their accounts.⁹⁴

The work of the Assistant was not a small or insignificant task. To be poorly educated, or illiterate or to lack a sufficient sense of call to this office, is surely not credible. It may well have been the case that some of Mr Wesley's preachers were roughly hewn men, not of the university. Even so, the task and demands of the Assistant were altogether more demanding and required great qualities. When Dr Thomas Rutherford, Archdeacon of Essex and Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, is critical of Wesley's Assistants, on account of their lack of formal education, Wesley defends them thus:

⁹³ Albert C Outler (*ed*), *Works*, 4:82.

⁹⁴ Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp, *A History of Methodism*, p. 70.

In the one thing they profess to know they are not ignorant... I trust that there is not one of them who is not able to go through an examination in substantial, practical, experimental divinity as few of our candidates for Holy Orders... They do not allow the most ignorant men to preach..

Now I pray what is the common examination for a deacon or priests' orders to do this?⁹⁵

Although Rutherford may have in part been correct about some of Wesley's field-preachers, his Assistants were, by and large, men who were skilled artisans such as John Nelson of Yorkshire. So too Thomas Walsh and Thomas Maxfield, who was subsequently ordained, at Wesley's request, by the Bishop of Derry. Wesley's intention in the use of his Assistants, to stir the Church of England into action, gives his functional ecclesiology a context. Rupert Davies is critical of the Church of England in the eighteenth century for its lack of missional zeal and its alignment too closely with the landed gentry and the aristocracy. He portrays too many Anglican clergy as acting out of self-interest in seeking a good living and abusing hapless curates into the bargain.⁹⁶ The functional ecclesiology advocated by John Wesley, envisaged the Methodist movement as a catalyst to bring the Gospel of salvation to the people. That was the priority, before Church or bishop. Wesley was responding to his divine calling.

Charles Godwin has argued that:

Consciously or unconsciously Wesley was expressing through the organisation of Methodism a bare acknowledged dissatisfaction with the corruption of the established church...⁹⁷

The work of Wesley's Assistants may then have been seen as a provocation to some in the Church of England. Rutherford's critique of the Methodist preachers and Assistants may have been crudely influenced by this. It is equally likely that the Archdeacon's ire is also influenced by loyal Church of England men preaching without a bishop's licence and Wesley's illegitimate sanction of this. Wesley's functional ecclesiology in action, was likely to make him precious few friends in the Anglican hierarchy and may even have been detrimental to his cause. Wesley's view is simply stated:

⁹⁵ Lawson, *John Wesley*, pp. 100-101.

⁹⁶ Rupert Davies, *Methodism*, p. 28

⁹⁷ C.H. Goodwin, 'An Evangelical Pastorate: The unresolved dilemma in Wesleyan concepts of ministry and church growth (London: Wesley Fellowship Publication, 1994.), p. 8.

My principle (frequently declared) is this: I submit to every ordinance of man wherever I do conceive there is an absolute necessity for acting contrary to it. Consistently with this I do tolerate Lay Preaching because I conceive there is an absolute necessity for it...for if it were not thousands of souls would perish everlastingly.⁹⁸

Wesley's justification for his Lay Preachers and his Assistants, therefore, is that Wesley considers them necessary. This again evidences that Wesley has the authority, he has the oversight and control of his Assistants and preachers. He is the pivot and focus for mission and unity in the Methodist movement.

2.2 Wesley's Assistants

Wesley's Assistants had considerable responsibility thrust upon them. It is implausible that Wesley would grant his Assistants such responsibility, if he had believed that they would not be sufficiently able to do the work. The 1744 Conference listed the requirements of the office. Their role in oversight, governance and leadership is mirroring the actions of Wesley. It may be that the Assistants are becoming local foci for mission and service and a local expression of unity in the Methodist Societies. Wesley's requirements of the Assistants are to be found later in the Superintendent's office. It provides a distinct link between the eighteenth century obligations and duties of the Assistants with their contemporary Superintendents⁹⁹.

Thomas Olivers, one of the Assistants and preacher from Montgomeryshire states:

As a member of the Society, I was careful not only to receive strength from them, but also to stir up them to greater diligence. I used to call them up to morning preaching. If I found any of them guilty of evil-speaking, or mentioning news or worldly business on the Sabbath, or of useless conversation, I always gave them a serious and loving reproof.¹⁰⁰

Olivers describes his preaching and pastoral oversight of the Methodist people. In his description one can see the out-working of Wesley's early desire to lead a serious religious life. A life concentrated on greater religious diligence, being observant to the Gospel of

⁹⁸ Telford, *Letters*, Vol.3: 186.

⁹⁹ See Chapter 4

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Jackson (ed), *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers: The Life of Thomas Olivers* (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publication, 1988), Vol.1. p. 281.

Christ and leading a pious devout life were at its heart. This was only but part of the work of oversight. Alexander Mather goes on to describe his work as a church leader, whose substantial gifts were being used to build the fabric of the Colne Circuit.

In the year 1777 I was appointed to the Colne Circuit. It was not long before the gallery at the preaching-house, being full of people, had fallen to the ground... This obliged me to travel through many of the Societies in order to defray those larger expenses...rebuilding the gallery...and furnishing the house of the preacher..¹⁰¹

Mather was engaged in a pioneering ministry. This excerpt of his *Life* reveals that during his ministry the preaching-house had become too small for the needs of those attending. The enlargement of the preaching-house was part of an evangelistic scheme to bring Christ to the people of the Colne Circuit. In both the case of Olivers and Mather there is a demonstration of practical oversight, which is also indicative of how Wesley thought of and expected his Assistants to conduct themselves. They were overseers of the Methodist movement, if overseers, then Superintendents and therefore, in terms of the early church, bishops. These Assistants, in their particular roles were also a sign of unity for the Methodist movement, in that they expressed Wesley's intent, for they were united with Wesley and their unity with him reflected a wider sense of the Methodist movement's unity, expressed in the Wesleyan Conferences and in Wesley's ordering of the movement.

It is also worth observing that the eighteenth century Methodist movement was engaged in pioneering evangelism. The Assistant, the forerunner of the modern Superintendent minister, was engaged in the practice of growing churches, planting new religious communities. The Wesleyan missional imperative is clear and functional. Although there was an administrative element to the oversight of the Societies, it was in the growing of the Societies that the Assistants and preachers were focussed. The Assistants and the preachers were engaged in a Wesleyan soteriological mission, in that Wesley's desire was to see souls saved and lives transformed, so that people may understand that in Christ 'God is with us'. In short there is a combination of soteriology and incarnationalism in the work of Wesley's Assistants and preachers. This view is supported by Shier-Jones, who sees the Methodists from their inception as 'a pilgrim people' whose 'understanding of

¹⁰¹ Jackson (ed), *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, Vol.1. p. 372.

salvation is a process rather than an event.¹⁰² The Assistants and preachers are assisting the individual to make a corporate pilgrimage of faith in the life of the Society or Church:

They undertake the pilgrimage corporately by virtue of the fact that as part of the people of God they are divinely appointed to call others to share in the journey and, where appropriate, to journey with them..... Wesley may not have chosen the pilgrim path for his people, but his actions essentially ensured that they were left with little alternative.¹⁰³

John Wesley saw in John Nelson, one of his foremost Assistants from Yorkshire, a clear example of what he saw as the Methodist way:

When I took account of the Societies in Yorkshire, chiefly under the care of John Nelson... I found them alive and vigorous of soul, believing, loving and praising God their saviour; an increased number from between eighteen hundred to three thousand or more... From the beginning they were being taught both the Law and the Gospel; God loves you, therefore, love and obey him. Christ died for you, therefore, die to sin. Christ is risen, therefore rise to the image of God.. So we preached and so you believed. This is the Scriptural way, the Methodist way, the true way...¹⁰⁴

John Nelson had a powerful ministry, not only in his native Yorkshire, but also in Cornwall where he stirred-up the people so much that the local Anglican clergy had him set upon by the mob. This too happened in Lincolnshire, where he was grievously attacked at the behest of the local vicar. It is in this vigorous ministry, inspired by Scriptural preaching that many came to Methodism and therefore, to Christ. This again was the Wesleyan imperative, which linked Methodism with the authority of Scripture, the authority of Scripture empowering the Methodist movement and aligning the truth of Methodism with the truth of the Gospel.

The rules for the Assistant adopted at the 1744 Conference are modified by Wesley and the Conference of 1753. The rules are explicit and inform the Assistant of their duty to engage in a soul-saving mission, which is a soteriological imperative.

¹⁰² Angela Shier-Jones, *A Work in Progress: Methodists Doing Theology* (London: Epworth Press, 2005), p. 195.

¹⁰³ Shier-Jones, *A Work*, p. 196.

¹⁰⁴ Wesley, *[Works] [SE]* Vol. 4, p. 345.

Q.11: You have nothing to do but save souls. Therefore, spend and be spent in this work. And go, not only to those who want you, but to those who want you most.

Q.12: Act in all things, not according to your own will, but a son of the Gospel and in union with the brethren.¹⁰⁵

Wesley was not only assisted by the work of such men as Maxfield, Mather, Nelson and others but also by the public support of Anglican clergymen such as the Bishop of Derry, by the Reverend William Grimshaw of Haworth, the Reverend Venn of Huddersfield, the Reverend Walker of Truro and the Reverend Vivien, once of Redruth and later of Cornwood, near Ivybridge, in Devon. Whether an evangelical Anglican clergyman, or Methodist preacher, they find a unity and focus in the charismatic leadership of John Wesley.

Wesley however, pushed the loyalty of such supporters to its limits and that of his brother Charles too, when Wesley moved towards ordaining those who would be Superintendents for the Methodist work. As has already been observed, Wesley appeared to believe that his authority to act was derived from his extraordinary call and, by virtue of that call, he could act as he deemed fit. The Reverend Walker of Truro had genuine sympathy for the Methodist movement, but this did not breach his loyalty to his bishop and to the Church of England more generally. Walker organised Methodist Societies in Truro ‘To glorify God..to make ourselves more useful’, but this did not mean that Walker approved of unauthorised preaching or Wesleyan ordination.¹⁰⁶

William Grimshaw removed himself from Methodist circles concerning the matter of some preachers in Norwich becoming licenced Dissenters, of which he wholeheartedly disapproved. The reason for the disapproval is that fundamentally Grimshaw saw the Methodist movement, its preachers and Wesley’s Assistants, as those who were energising the Church of England.¹⁰⁷ They were not in Holy Orders and if that was what was desired then it would be at the hands of an authorised bishop, not at the hands of Wesley. The

¹⁰⁵ Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, *A History of Methodism*, pp. 118-119.

¹⁰⁶ Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross: the Origins and Development and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth Century England* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2007), p. 123.

¹⁰⁷ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 50. Burdon cites Grimshaw’s letter to Charles Wesley of the 31st March 1760.

London Society was in support of Haworth and Charles Wesley in stating they ‘would live and die in the church’¹⁰⁸

It would appear that Wesley distanced himself from the rows concerning ordination of his Assistants, as he arranged for the Bishop of Derry to ordain Thomas Maxfield for the Methodist work. Wesley, perhaps, realised the vulnerability of his position. If he did decide to ordain under his own authority, that for the Church of England the ordinations would be void and for Wesley, that he might be subject to sanction and be ‘put-out’ of the ministry. When Thomas Maxfield was ordained, a matter Wesley had cause to regret, one of his most valued Assistants had a greater sense of authority placed upon him at the hands of the bishop. Dr Barnard, the Bishop of Londonderry, made it quite clear as to why he was ordaining Maxfield, and it was not entirely because of Maxfield’s qualities, many though they were:

Remember I ordain you as a helper of Mr Wesley, that that good man may not work himself to death.¹⁰⁹

Adrian Burdon argues and rightly, that the purpose of Wesley was to have his Assistants ordained, for they were provisional, interim extraordinary ministers, whose role, in part, was to energise and revitalise the ordinary ministers of the Church of England. What better way therefore, to cause this effect, other than by official recognition and the grant of authority through Anglican ordination. Once ordained, conventionally, these ‘Methodist’ Anglican ministers could continue to be a catalyst for evangelisation in the Church of England¹¹⁰. Wesley, was no doubt also wary of the level of criticism which had been heaped on Methodism by those such as the Bishop of Bristol, Joseph Butler and the Bishop of London, Dr. Edmund Gibson concerning unauthorised activities, such as field-preaching. Methodism more generally was criticised by those such as the Bishop of Exeter, George Lavington, who accused Wesley and the Methodists of ‘mere enthusiasm.’ Lavington wrote a highly critical publication on Methodism, *Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared*, which as Rack has noted was inaccurate and a smear.¹¹¹ The invective against Methodism derives from the Anglican hierarchy objecting to Wesley’s evangelical theology, but more so, to his usurpation of good order through field-preaching

¹⁰⁸Burdon, *Authority and Order*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁹ J.W. Etheridge, *The life of the Revd Thomas Coke, DCL* (London: John Mason, 1860), pp. 31-32.

¹¹⁰ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 52.

¹¹¹ Lawson, *John Wesley*, pp. 21-25.

and use of unauthorised lay preachers.¹¹² Others were calling for the repeal of the Test Act, which reflected upon social tensions in Britain, in part caused by the spectre of revolution in France and America, but also by the challenge of Dissenters and others, including Methodists, to the Church of England.¹¹³

2.3 America

The American War of Independence had placed the Methodists and the Church of England in an invidious position, as both, to a lesser or greater degree, were identified with an inherent loyalty to the British cause. Campbell and Kirby do not see it in the same light. Campbell saw growth under Asbury and Kirby, that the lack of Anglican clergy offered space into which the Methodists could prosper, not amounting to Methodist supremacy, but show that the effects of the War of Independence were not terminal to the Methodist cause.¹¹⁴ Even so, Wesley had denied the American claim that ‘there could be no taxation without representation’ and that American claims for liberty were ‘clap trap.’¹¹⁵ Add into this already inflammatory mix a pamphlet war between the Arminians, championed by Wesley and Fletcher, against the Calvinists, Toplady, Caleb Evans and Price.¹¹⁶ The Methodist cause had been weakened, not least because so many of Wesley’s Assistants had returned to Britain and also, as Heitzenrater has observed, that Wesley never really understood the ‘New World.’¹¹⁷ Francis Asbury had to manage as best he could as Wesley’s Assistant.¹¹⁸ By 1779, the situation had reached such a parlous state that the Fluvanna Conference in Virginia commenced its own presbyteral ordinations, something which both Asbury and Wesley opposed. The reality was that the Methodist people were suffering deprivation in terms of sacramental provision. In 1784, there were approximately 15000 Methodists being served by 83 preachers, none of whom were ordained. This was clearly inadequate and has Richey has noted of the American Methodists:

¹¹² Campbell, ‘Ministry’, p. 265.

¹¹³ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 499.

¹¹⁴ Campbell, ‘Ministry’, p. 265 and Kirby ‘Episcopacy’, p. 229.

¹¹⁵ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 377.

¹¹⁶ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 377.

¹¹⁷ Richard P. Heitzenrater, ‘The Founding Brothers’ in William Abraham & James E. Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 45.

¹¹⁸ E.T.Clark & J. Manning-Potts & J.S.Payton (ed), *The Journal and Letters of the Revd Francis Asbury* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1958), Vol.1. p. 46.

For early Methodists, community was itself intensely spiritual, contagiously so, a spreading of fire of love and holy zeal.¹¹⁹

There was no bishop who could instigate ordinations and few Anglican priests to mitigate against the lack of provision for those who saw themselves as Methodists within Anglicanism.¹²⁰

In Maryland and Delaware the situation was similarly dire and by the late 1770's the missionary Thomas Rankin was imploring Wesley to make provision for the Methodist people. Asbury wrote to Wesley in the following terms:

We are greatly in need of help. A minister and such preachers as you can fully recommend will be very acceptable. Without your recommendation we shall receive none.¹²¹

Wesley reacted to the letters from America by imploring the Bishop of London, Dr Lowth, to make provision for the Methodist people, by ordaining Wesley's Assistants for the American work. Lowth responded by obfuscating. He claimed that there were three priests in America, but appeared not to understand the vastness of the land in which they were placed. Wesley was also highly sceptical about the men who had been sent. Echoing the defence of his own Assistants to the Archdeacon of Essex, he presents a criticism of those ministers as being far too learned, versed in Latin and Greek, but lacking practical application:

Your Lordship did see fit to ordain and send to America other persons who knew something of Latin and Greek, but who knew no more of saving souls than catching whales.¹²²

Wesley's demands may have validity but Lowth's position was fraught with difficulty as he had no power, ecclesially or in law to make appointments to what had become an independent state. How could an American swear loyalty to a British institution and to a British King? This predicament is acknowledged by Rupert Davies.¹²³ Wesley, in Rack's

¹¹⁹ Richey, Russell E, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 42.

¹²⁰ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 56.

¹²¹ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 132.

¹²² Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 133.

¹²³ Davies, *Methodism*, p. 110.

view, acts out of pragmatic concern because the Church of England could not act decisively.¹²⁴

The research question asked ‘What is a Superintendent for John Wesley?’ It is now in the dilemma of the American situation that need becomes an imperative. The imperative for Wesley is that the Methodist people should not be deprived, particularly of the sacraments, which formed a higher functional demand on him than even his loyalty to the Articles of the Church of England. Although the acts which he was about to perform might prove schismatic; it was something that he was compelled to perform. In a very real sense therefore, the first Superintendents for John Wesley, were an act of necessity. It may be that without the demands of these peculiar circumstances that Wesley would never have performed an ordination.

Thomas Coke had suggested that Wesley should ordain a suitable person as a bishop for the Methodist work in America. That bishop would then have authority to ordain in America and relieve the urgency. This was a hugely significant proposal matched only by Wesley’s response. Thus Coke wrote to Wesley on the 9th August 1784:

The more maturely that I consider the subject, the more expedient it seems to me that the power of ordaining others should be received by me from you, by the imposition of your hands; and that you should lay hands on brother Whatcoat and brother Vasey...¹²⁵

Wesley’s decision to so ordain was formed not through schismatic intention or personal ambition, but through the perceived need of the Methodist people:

Wesley never set himself to multiply Bishops of the Anglican type. The Methodist bishops most appropriately derived their ‘orders’ which were ‘marching orders’ from John Wesley... The American Methodist Episcopacy is not prelatical, but presbyteral, not hierarchical but evangelistic; not diocesan but itinerant...It exercises a general itinerant superintendence¹²⁶

Wesley records in his Journal:

¹²⁴ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 514-516.

¹²⁵ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 59.

¹²⁶ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 151.

Being now clear in my own mind, I took a step that long weighed in my mind and appointed Mr Whatcoat and Mr Vasey to go and serve the desolate sheep in America.¹²⁷

On the 1st September 1784, even though those clergymen such as Charles Wesley, John Fletcher and James Creighton, even though Creighton assisted Wesley in the ordination, were set against the action; Wesley ordained Coke as a ‘Superintendant.’¹²⁸ However, Lawson has noted, the ordination certificate signed by Wesley, made it clear that he was ordaining Coke as a ‘Superintendant’, a presbyter-bishop in the sense of the early church and the New Testament. Wesley would not confer on himself powers he did not have and he certainly did not have authority to ordain to a higher office than that which he held.¹²⁹ Indeed, there is still a real argument that Wesley had exceeded his authority in this action, even if born out of necessity.

In a letter John Wesley sent to America with Coke, Wesley made clear his reasons for ordaining Coke and the others and spelled out his authority; derived from his understanding of Lord King’s *Account of the Primitive Church*, and thus Wesley advances his own authority:

The case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have legal jurisdiction; in America there are none, neither any parish ministers...there is none to baptise or to administer the Lord’s Supper. Hence, my scruples are at an end; and I consider myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man’s right by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest.

I have accordingly appointed Dr Coke and Mr Francis Asbury to be joint Superintendants over our bretheren in North America,,I also advise all the elders to administer the Lord’s Supper on every Lord’s Day.¹³⁰

It is of course evident from this letter that Wesley uses the term Superintendent and not bishop, but it is also clear that Wesley’s ordination of Coke granted episcopal power and authority. The consequence of Wesley’s actions soon transmitted itself across the Atlantic. On the 24th December 1784 Coke ordained Asbury at Baltimore and then both

¹²⁷ Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church*, Vol. 4, pp. 199-200.

¹²⁸ Wesley uses the spelling Superintendant rather than Superintendent and this is replicated in his liturgy for the American Church in the *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*.

¹²⁹ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 151.

¹³⁰ Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church*, Vol.4, pp. 199-200.

Superintendents ordained elders and deacons for service in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In making Coke a Superintendent, he was not signifying that his ordination in the Church of England was null and void, but he was conferring on him powers to ordain as a presbyter-bishop and Wesley was acting as a scriptural *episkopos*. Again it may be contended that in Wesley, Methodism found its focus for mission and unity; its episcopal inspiration. Lawson is unclear as to whether or not Wesley intended to create an Episcopal Methodist Church in America, whereas Burdon is clear, that Wesley would not have created Coke a Superintendent if episcopal authority was not the intention, for Coke was an ordained presbyter. Therefore, an episcopal system was the preferred route for the American Methodists.¹³¹ This provided a new focus for the American Methodists and arguably a new focus for unity and missional impetus in the office of the Superintendent.

Charles Wesley was vehemently opposed to John Wesley's actions and saw that Wesley had exceeded his authority. His main argument was that if his brother had only waited, the Scottish bishops would have ordained and then the ordinations would have been impeccable.¹³² His position with regards to Coke's activity in America was summed-up in a piece of verse:

A Roman emperor, tis said,
His favourite horse a consul made:
But Coke brings greater things to pass-
He makes a bishop of an ass.¹³³

It is the context which matters in Wesley's decision either to effect an ordination or to approve others elsewhere. The context is set within the demands of mission. Therefore, in the American setting, in a country which following the Declaration of Independence was beyond British jurisdiction, one can fully appreciate the desire of Wesley to ordain for the sake of the Gospel mission. Once again he is acting within the broad movement of the Methodist cause. The effect was that the mission of the American Methodists developed its own life, mission and polity. Even so, Wesley still saw the American project through Anglican eyes, seeing Methodist worship as complimentary to Anglican worship and not replacing it. However, *The Sunday Service*, as Ruth has observed:

¹³¹ Lawson, *John Wesley*, pp. 150-154 and Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 63.

¹³² Luke Tyernan, *The Life and Times of the Revd John Wesley* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1870) Vol.3. pp. 439-440.

¹³³ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 63.

was out of sync with an itinerant system constantly moving and where preachers led services nearly every day of the week.¹³⁴

The Methodist Episcopal Church became separate from Anglicanism and increasingly remote from Wesley's direct control. Charles Wesley disapproved of the ordinations, as a good 'Church of England man.' However, the vacillation of Anglican bishops, evidenced in Wesley's dialogue with bishop Lowth and Lowth's apparent vapid response to sacramental deprivation in America, may have compelled John Wesley to act, notwithstanding Charles Wesley's opposition.¹³⁵

Wesley's actions in Scotland were not so much influenced by territorial considerations, but once again by the pragmatic and functional concerns of mission. For Pawson, Hanby and others, the ephemeral nature of being one of Mr Wesley's ministers, stood in stark contrast to the permanent ordination to the priesthood within Anglican Church.¹³⁶ The designation of being one of Wesley's preachers or ministers was entirely within his gift, just as the Conference was a conferring with John Wesley at his calling and for his purposes. Wesleyan ordinations were null and void within Anglicanism, but effective for the mission of the Methodist movement.

2.4 The Sunday Service

It is worth considering at this point how Wesley sees the Superintendent when he creates an ordinal for the creation of Superintendents, elders and deacons in North America.¹³⁷ Wesley interprets the *Book of Common Prayer (1662)* for the Methodist people in *The Sunday Service for Methodists in North America*. The service is entitled: *The Form and Manner of Making and Ordaining of Superintendants, Elders and Deacons*. The service is simplified by Wesley, for Bishop read Superintendent, for Priest read Elder and Deacon is rendered the same. It is quite clear that it is Wesley's intention that the 'Superintendent' should have authority to ordain and in the *Service* it is the 'Superintendent' who ordains

¹³⁴ Lester Ruth, 'Liturgical Revolutions' in William Abraham & James E. Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook to Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 326.

¹³⁵ Above p. 36.

¹³⁶ See page 41 below.

¹³⁷ See page 40 above for comment on *The Sunday Service*.

and when it is the making of a ‘Superintendent’ the service follows the form of the ordaining or Consecrating of an Archbishop or Bishop.¹³⁸

As John Wesley makes the office of Superintendent for the American milieu, it would seem that his position has changed considerably from when he wrote to Nicholas Norton in 1756:

Some of our preachers who are not ordained think it quite right to administer the Lord’s Supper and believe it would do much good. I think it is quite wrong and believe it would do much hurt...I verily believe it is a sin which consequently I dare not tolerate¹³⁹

The formation of the office of Superintendent one could argue is drawn from necessity, rather than simple expedience. If it was simply expedient then Wesley could have more easily permitted ordination through what Robert Monk has termed ‘ a corporate act joined in by more than one presbyter’, rather than the episcopal ordination, which Wesley performed through his belief that episcopal, threefold ordering of ministry was the way ministry should best be ordered.¹⁴⁰ It also is consistent with Wesley’s view that he was a scriptural *episcopus* and had, in Methodist polity, the right to ordain. That ‘right’ was then re-enforced by the perception of an overwhelming need which needed to be resolved.

In the American context, whether one sees Coke and later Asbury as being ‘ordained’ or perhaps ‘commissioned’ for their work, the independence of the Methodist Episcopal Church is seen in Asbury, Coke and John Dickens’ encouraging the adoption of the term bishop, rather than superintendent, in polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Church adopted the term as it was more commonly found in Scripture.¹⁴¹ It may be argued that in Wesley’s decision to ordain, that the creation of a new Church in America was almost inevitable. And, that this Church would seek its own direction, independent of Wesley, though loyal to much of Wesley’s Methodist movement and his teaching; creating its own leadership (bishops) and ordaining its own clergy.

¹³⁸ Both A.B. Lawson and Adrian Burdon produce the full text of the occasional service which is an abridgement of the text in the *Book of Common Prayer* by John Wesley. Burdon, *Authority and Order*, Chapter 8.

¹³⁹ Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 85.

¹⁴⁰ Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* (London: Epworth Press, 1996), p. 206.

¹⁴¹ Kirby, ‘Episcopacy’, pp. 232-233.

2.5 Ordinations

Once Wesley had set his course with regard to America it then became rather less vile to ordain John Pawson for the work in Scotland, on August 1st 1785, together with two other trusted preachers Thomas Hanby and Joseph Taylor. In similar vein to the American ordinations these men were given their ‘marching orders’, by Wesley, for the purpose of the Methodist mission. It is a key feature of Wesley’s ordinations that they are for a specific purpose and are directed towards a cause. Wesley’s ordinations are not a progression through Holy Orders, in that they are not a rite from the Diaconate to the Priesthood. Indeed, Wesley’s ordinations were limited to a time and place as both Pawson and Hanby were to discover, when on returning from Scotland the title ‘reverend’ was removed and plain ‘mister’ was given. Ordination by Wesley to being Superintendent was not a life-long order of ministry, but at the disposal of the Reverend Wesley and the Conference.¹⁴² If this ordination was Wesley’s ‘gift’ then is it in fact ordination, but rather a commissioning to a particular work? The answer to this may be that for Wesley authorisation to effect a particular work was by ordination and that that my critique is anachronistic, applying modern criteria to ordination and commissioning which did not appertain in eighteenth century thought. Adrian Burdon is clear that:

When Wesley did undertake the ordinations of his preachers..it was for specific and essential purposes...motivated by the demands of his evangelistic calling...that the demands of the Gospel required him to ordain his preachers....as Methodist preachers, not to Anglican orders.¹⁴³

Ordinations for the work in England soon followed, precipitated by the anticipated sacramental deprivation of the Methodist people. Thus on the 28th and 29th July 1786 Warrener, Hammett and Clark were ordained for mission in England. Henry Moore’s ordination certificate written by John Wesley in February 1789 states that Moore is a worthy man to administer the sacraments and Burdon draws attention to the words ‘*according to the usage of the Church of England*’.¹⁴⁴

John Wesley was an autocrat. The Conference was his Conference and what he advocated the Conference advocated. Richey notes that:

¹⁴² Lawson, *John Wesley*, p. 157.

¹⁴³ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁴ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 70.

Wesley gathered his preachers into a deliberative conference, they came to confer with him who remained the decision-maker a point nicely made by the historian and bishop Thomas Neely (1892:9-10) ‘But let it not be supposed that the Conferences which Mr Wesley called had any governing power. The members discussed but Mr Wesley decided. They debated, but he determined. Mr Wesley was the government.’¹⁴⁵

Those who did not share Wesley’s vision were free to leave Methodism and cease to be in Connexion with him. The Assistants and then the Superintendents were his placemen. Their position owed everything to his perceived need for the Methodist movement. The needs of the Methodist movement were inspired through what he saw as a God given vision. Therefore, the office of Superintendent and the Assistants were an expression of that vision, which derived from his sense that God had called him to stir the Church of his ordination and belonging, to revival. The Assistants and the Superintendents were catalysts for mission and evangelism; if their presence in Britain or elsewhere caused the Church of England difficulties, that difficulty had to be endured for the sake of the Gospel.

2.6 Apostolic-Man

It is worth noting here the argument advanced by the historian E.W. Thompson in regard to Wesley’s ordinations, both for America and in Britain. Thompson saw Wesley as ‘an apostolic man’. He argued that it was not possible for Wesley to use King and Stillingfleet in defence of his ordinations, but rather his defence was in the nature of Wesley himself. Thompson saw in Wesley the true credentials of the Apostolic Man, whose character and calling from God fitted him far better to the role of bishop than many of the Georgian bishops.¹⁴⁶ For Thompson therefore:

To ordain and consecrate rests securely not on ancient precedents but on his extraordinary divine commission to preach the Gospel and to shepherd the flock of Christ. God is the great consecrator and nearness to him- Christ is the great shepherd and partaking of his mind is what matters most in the consecrating minister.¹⁴⁷

The Methodist theologian John Kent is dismissive of the concept of the Apostolic-Man. He argues that Thompson’s view, that non-episcopal ordination was permissible, because

¹⁴⁵ Russell E Richey, ‘Connection and Connectionalism’ in William Abraham & James E. Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p. 236.

¹⁴⁶ E.W. Thompson, *Wesley, Apostolic Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957), p. 60.

¹⁴⁷ Thompson, *Wesley*, p. 81.

Wesley was an Apostolic-Man, was tautological. Kent contends that Thompson's argument means 'Wesley ordained because Wesley ordained'.¹⁴⁸ Kent was also clear that Thompson had not properly understood that, even if Wesley's ordinations were permissible, by a simple play on words from Apostolic-Man to being in apostolic succession was not in any way justifiable. In effect, it created the setting up of a new Church order that was not part of the Church of England.

To some extent the Superintendents were to be his successors, together with the Conference. The Office of the Assistant died with Wesley and the Office of Superintendent became what A. Raymond George stated 'Of all the familiar institutions of British Methodism none is more familiar than the Superintendency'.¹⁴⁹ It is my contention that Wesley's Superintendent was his creation as a tool for the Gospel's dispensation and for the evangelism of Britain, but also in America. The Assistant was simply there to assist Wesley in revitalising the Church of England, engaging the Methodist movement in mission. This imperative was commensurate with the work of the Superintendents, but more widely still in the task of evangelism in the 'world parish'. The Superintendent was a sign of Methodist unity, a focus for mission and a symbol of God's soteriological and incarnational presence in the service of Christ as expressed in the Methodist movement.¹⁵⁰ From Wesley's Assistants to the coming of the Superintendent, there is a functional utility dependent on Wesley's authority. The Assistants, it is argued, reflect the outworking of Wesley's will and intention for the Methodist people. Accordingly the Assistants express that sense of disciplined unity which comes from Wesley's leadership. This is what Wesley's Assistants and then Superintendent is created for, to be in continuing expression of the foundational ideas, theology and practical exposition of Methodism. Thus the Assistants and then Superintendents provide a focus for mission, governance and sense of unity in Methodism. In so doing the Superintendent became an office and function of the Methodist Church and those features are still evident in the superintendency of contemporary British Methodism in the Plymouth and Exeter District.

Whether in Britain or in America, initially, those who became Superintendents were placed as such by Wesley. There was never any intention within British Methodism that the office of Superintendent should be seen as emulating the apostolic succession of

¹⁴⁸ John Kent, *The Age of Disunity* (London: Epworth Press, 1966), pp. 172-177.

¹⁴⁹ George, 'Superintendency', p. 79.

¹⁵⁰ Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church* (London: DLT, 2010), pp. 142-156.

bishops. In America, likewise, there was a two-fold order of ministry, distinct and separate from the Anglican understanding of episcopacy. Asbury and his colleagues never intended there to be a 'three order ministry' as it was not understood that the bishop was of higher order. The 'moderate episcopacy' is therefore, a two-fold order of ministry and there is no sense of the historic episcopate.¹⁵¹ Thus the office of Superintendent or Bishop may continue in Methodism, but it generates no sense of historic succession or hierarchical status.

This chapter has explored part of the research question relating to Wesley's developing ideas on episcopacy, particularly the influential works of Lord Peter King and Edward Stillingfleet, Bishop of Worcester. This thesis engaged with primary literature and contemporary scholars in determining what the Superintendent was for John Wesley. The thesis has shown how Wesley became the Methodist movement's functional scriptural *episcopos*. In Wesley the movement found its principle source of oversight, leadership, governance, missional direction and unity. As a corollary, it has been argued that in Wesley's Assistants, there was a reflection of Wesley's authority in the local Circuit situation. Evidence from *The Lives* of a variety of Wesley's Assistants has been adduced in support of this argument.

The next chapter will present the findings of a survey of contemporary practicing Methodist Superintendent ministers in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The epistemological and methodological basis for the survey, grounds this part of the thesis, in determining what Superintendents experience in their praxis and its implications for the superintendency.

¹⁵¹ Kirby, 'Episcopacy', p. 233.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Findings

This thesis poses the research question ‘What is a Superintendent minister for John Wesley and for today and the implications in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the Methodist Church in Britain.’ This chapter engages with the praxis of being a Superintendent minister in the Plymouth and Exeter District. In order to do this it will be necessary to establish the epistemological assumptions made and the consequence of adopting those assumptions in this thesis. Likewise, the decision to adopt two methods to obtain information from which an analysis could be made, that is a questionnaire and an interview, needs to be justified. It will also be necessary to make a reflexive statement concerning the influences which impinge upon the researcher.

In establishing an epistemology, it is quite clear that the milieu of the researcher is almost inevitably going to influence the research. Therefore, how is the reflexive knowledge of the researcher influenced by his being a Superintendent minister in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the Methodist Church in Britain?¹⁵² In answering this it will be necessary to consider personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity.

3.1 Personal Reflexivity

Swinton and Mowatt state that reflexivity is the ‘most crucial dimension of the qualitative research process’.¹⁵³ It recognises that self-reflection is a necessity and that there is an impossibility for the researcher to stand in a sterile zone outside of the research area. This means that this researcher has to acknowledge he is a Superintendent minister alongside 17 other Superintendent ministers in the same District.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, it is almost inevitable that shared values, experiences, interests and beliefs will have an influence and shape the research.

¹⁵² John Swinton & Harriett Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), pp. 59-61.

¹⁵³ Swinton & Mowatt, *Practical Theology*, p. 59.

¹⁵⁴ The Plymouth and Exeter District comprises approximately 230 churches separated into 17 Circuits, each with a Superintendent minister. There are approximately 8500 members of the Church in the District which covers all of Devon, Cornwall in the Rame Peninsula and Bude and Somerset in the region of Taunton and Bridgwater south of the Huntspill river <http://www.pemd.org.uk>, accessed on 2nd January 2014.

3.2 Epistemological reflexivity

If personal reflexivity has a consequence for research questions and answers, epistemological reflexivity is subject to similar constraints. In short, can the researcher be certain the research question has not limited and defined the questions posed and has not had an undue influence upon the analysis of the information received. Likewise, whether or not the research question could not have been posed differently. Knowledge gained is therefore subject to influence, but while accepting that influence is almost inevitable, it does not mean that partiality and bias are a necessary consequence. Hence, ‘researchers both influence and are influenced by the process of engaging in research. A reflexive approach recognises the reciprocal relationship and seek to make it explicit’.¹⁵⁵

This thesis consistently focusses on what the Superintendent was for the Revd John Wesley in the eighteenth century and what it is today and its implications for the Plymouth and Exeter District. Therefore, the knowledge sought from those surveyed was done so as to establish an historical understanding of the office and contemporary praxis. This may be seen later, in the interviews, where the Superintendent ministers are asked if they are setting the agenda for Circuit mission and their understanding of the historical context of superintendency. It has to be acknowledged that two of the Superintendents had either little or no discernable knowledge of the origins of the Superintendent minister. Therefore, the historic significance of the office had not ever been known, or, had never been considered as significant or was a deficiency in the training of ministers and potential Superintendents. The lack of fundamental knowledge may of course serve as a critique of an element of this thesis, in that for some of those who are contemporary Superintendent ministers, find little need to know of the office’s origins and perceive scant importance in the historical perspective.

This example of epistemological research represents what McLeod calls ‘knowledge of the other’ which leads to a constructivist epistemological assumption concerning how communities and individuals perceive and construct knowledge.¹⁵⁶ Given the reality of personal and epistemological reflexivity, when taken in conjunction with a constructivist paradigm, the interpretation of information collected will be viewed within a dynamic relationship between researcher and respondent.

¹⁵⁵ Swinton & Mowatt, *Practical Theology*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁶ Swinton & Mowatt, *Practical Theology*, p. 60.

This study uses a Qualitative methodology, whereby a study is made of a small group of people, in this case Superintendent Methodist ministers in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The methodology permitted purposive sampling to take place, as the sample group selected gave the best opportunity for the questions set to be answered. Two methods were determined to collect information. A questionnaire was sent to 15 Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District, as there was a vacancy in the South Devon Circuit and the writer is the Superintendent of the Plymouth and Devonport Circuit. The questionnaires were despatched in July 2013. During August 2013 the questionnaires were reviewed. Of the 13 questionnaires returned, 9 Superintendents indicated a willingness to be interviewed; 5 ministers were selected for further interview, but due to ill-health one of these had to withdraw.

In forming the questions for the questionnaire and in the interview questions, every effort was made to ensure that the questions were not biased in favour of any 'correct' answer. So too, the questions posed were made in such a way as to prevent the interviewee from being 'led' into answering the questions in such a way as to be supportive of the interviewer. From a reflexive perspective, it may well be that in Qualitative Research there is no such thing as complete objectivity and that the methodology has to acknowledge that there is a causal subjectivity, determined by the interaction and peer-relationship of the sample group and the researcher.

The questionnaire began by asking two opening questions concerning the gender and age of the respondents. It had been thought necessary to establish these facts, as a matter of fact in relation to the pool of available knowledge about the respondents and later, in the criteria for selection for interview. It would not have been helpful to have had an all male selection or for there to be an age imbalance which had not been previously considered.

The questionnaire continues with 15 questions which were multiple choice and 5 questions which were open in nature but which required specific answers. (Appendix 1). Prior to designing the questionnaire and after conversation with the Superintendents, it was made clear that all responses would be held in confidence and that the identity of the respondents would be protected. Agreeing to material being held in confidence and similarly agreeing to the anonymity of the respondents, allowed the respondents a measure of confidence in the study, as it made it possible for them to respond more freely, both in the questionnaire and in the interview process.

The questionnaire did not employ open questions as it was felt this could be employed at the interview stage and, that it might prove to be a deterrent to completing the questionnaire. Open questions also gave rise to the potential for long-winded and rambling answers. However, it also has to be acknowledged that by not employing open questions, issues which have a great deal of importance to the respondents risked not being heard.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it was felt that the closed multiple choice questions offered sufficient latitude and that the ministers selected for further interview, would have an opportunity to expand on their thoughts and concerns.

Question 1 sought to establish how long the Superintendent had been a presbyter, as it was important to understand the depth and breadth of experience of the Superintendent ministers. Similarly, Question 2 enquired about the number of appointments the Superintendents had as a presbyter, prior to becoming a Superintendent. Once again this was seen as a measure to determine the level of experience of those surveyed. Question 3 followed this broadly informational section by asking how many appointments as a Superintendent had been previously held by the respondents. This information would be significant in determining the balance of experience of ministry as a Superintendent, by those currently holding the office.

Question 4 concerns itself with supervision and how many colleagues, lay, ordained, probationer and student minister the Superintendent had to oversee. Question 5 sought information on the number of churches the Superintendent was in pastoral charge. This would be a significant response, for the number of churches for which the Superintendent had pastoral charge, would have a significant effect on his ability to perform as a Superintendent. The effect of a greater number of colleagues to oversee (Q4) and the answer to Question 5 would reflect on the capacity of the Superintendent to work effectively as a Superintendent.

Question 6 and Question 9 are related. Question 6 seeks to understand if the minister had indicated a willingness to serve as a Superintendent and question 9 asks whether or not the Superintendent would be content to serve again. Both questions are important as they will tend to show whether or not the move to become a Superintendent was voluntary, or not. Likewise, it is significant to know if the Superintendent would serve again and if not, the

¹⁵⁷ Louis Cohen, Lawrence Mannion & Keith Morrison, *Research Methods in Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 321.

reason for not so doing. This might form an interesting aspect of the interview stage. However, other than those who were retiring, no one declined to serve again.

Question 7 is concerned with role and function. The question offers a choice of responses on the role of the Superintendent as administrator, overseer, pastoral ministry and the promotion of mission. It was obviously of vital importance to have some understanding of how the ministers understood their role. Question 8 sought information concerning the perception of the Superintendents as to how they regarded their position in influencing mission and ministry in the Circuit. Again this is important as one attempts to understand the mind-set of the Superintendents surveyed in relation to missional direction.

Question 10 and 11 sought information in relation to training in becoming a Superintendent and its adequacy. It is again important to reflect on the responses to these questions, as it may tend to show the gap between appearance and reality in the Connexional programme of training those who hold such a vital office in the life of the Methodist Church.

Questions 12 and 13 sought a response concerning the early identification of those to become Superintendents and whether or not, there should be a selection procedure for those intending to hold the office of Superintendent. Again the responses to these questions may have a corollary for the way in which the Connexion identifies and selects future potential Superintendent ministers.

Question 14 asks whether the present model of Circuit superintendency works well, needs changing or should be abolished. There are 5 choices per question as how to answer, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This question seeks to clarify whether or not those surveyed believed the present position was in need of change or not.

Question 15 worked in similar mode and sought to determine if the Superintendents saw the office of Superintendent as a focus for mission, ministry and service. It also sought to establish whether or not the Superintendent minister should have pastoral charge of one church or none.

The questionnaire attempts to establish the thinking of the current Superintendents within the life of the Plymouth and Exeter District, as they think about the contemporary praxis and development of superintendency. Their responses reveal a width of opinions, but also

some commonality. The diversity of views, together with commonly held views, is an indicator as to the complexity of the issues raised concerning the future development of this office in the Methodist Church.

3.3 Interviews

Four Superintendents were selected for interview. The criteria for selection was based first on length of service. It was assumed that those who had been in ministry for many years would have a greater level of experience and this would inform their insight.

There was also a need to be gender sensitive and inclusive. However, only two women are Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District and only one of them was willing to be interviewed. The female Superintendent who was interviewed would have been interviewed in any event as she met an alternative criteria.

The context and nature of the Superintendents' appointment was also a significant criteria for selection. Thus one Superintendent had been in ministry for over 20 years but was in his first appointment as a Superintendent. He was also a minister in a newly formed large Circuit. Because of his broad experience and the special circumstances of his appointment, his inclusion as an interviewee was considered essential to the thesis. Another minister was selected because of the unique location of his ministry at a Central Hall and, as with the previous Superintendent, the level of oversight of staff, lay and ordained, was considered a significant criteria for selection. These two ministers had a broad experience of Methodism over many years and their current appointments were quite contrasting in terms of mission, circuit profile and ecclesiology. Their insight and experience was thought to be very significant in exploring this thesis.

Two Superintendents who were selected for interview had less than ten years' service each as a presbyter and were in their first appointment. One, as already mentioned is a female. Both ministers either had or were about to have a probationer minister under their supervision. This also was a significant factor in inclusion, as the supervisory-oversight aspect of being the Superintendent minister, features as a significant criteria for being a Superintendent minister.

The interviews therefore, were not taken from those Superintendents who were simply available, but rather from those who would add good material content to the interviews

and whose context was considered significant to the overall thesis. The interview exhibits the characteristics of Purposive Sampling and Quota Sampling is also evident, as the criteria for selection through years of service is indicative of this form of sampling.¹⁵⁸

Prior to interviewing the respondents, they were informed verbally of the subject areas to be covered, but they were not sent advance notice of the questions to be asked, or the ordering of the interviews. Had the interviews been determined in advance, then this standardised approach may have offered greater measurable consistency in response and in terms of greater time for prior reflection on the questions posed. However, it was thought that this type of interview was inflexible and may indeed, have been constraining and too formalised, which may have also produced contrived answers.¹⁵⁹

The approach adopted was to combine elements of the Interview Guide Approach and the Conversational Interview. The interviews were recorded on tape which meant that copious note taking was avoided, which is distracting and prevents the natural flow of conversation. Its artificiality may detract from the respondent's answers and frustrate the interview process, because of the continual hiatus in conversation. The interviews were then transcribed and were compared and contrasted, so as to establish common themes and divergence. No method of coding was observed, which may, on reflection, be to the detriment of the analysis. Neither were the interviews placed on video, which may have added further to the interview interpretation, through non-verbal communication.¹⁶⁰ The researcher simply sought to identify themes and to reflect on the recordings so as to gain insight into the respondents' responses.

In formulating the questionnaire and in conducting follow-up interviews it was of paramount importance that the process was done ethically. Therefore, no respondent was coerced into participation, confidentiality and anonymity were assured and every effort was made to ensure that the respondents were not manipulated into providing answers sympathetic to the writer's thesis. There was a determined neutrality by the researcher in setting the questionnaire and during face-to-face interview. It would have been helpful to the study, if both female Superintendents had participated in the interviews. However, one declined and reflexively, the researcher considered if this caused anxiety about rejection of

¹⁵⁸ Swinton & Mowatt, *Practical Theology*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁹ Cohen, Mannion & Morrisson, *Research Methods*, p. 353.

¹⁶⁰ One interviewee had commented after interview, that if the interview was to be filmed, then that interviewee would have declined to be part of the study. Filming was seen as too intrusive.

the study.¹⁶¹ The Superintendents were told at the beginning of the study, that only some of them who responded would be selected for interview, based on the criteria to be adopted. This acknowledgement that some would not be contacted further was hoped to allay any sense of rejection.

As an ethical consideration, because of the study having a localised focus, the researcher had to reflect on the publication of the thesis, if such publication would have a deleterious effect through offering a critique of the role of the Superintendent, particularly in the Plymouth and Exeter District. This was viewed as a potential risk, but was reconciled in terms of the ethical integrity of the thesis as an academic study.

On reflection it may have been useful to produce a short code of ethics setting in writing the respect for confidentiality, anonymity, data protection and disposal. An interested party even recently raised the question of there being a ‘right to reply’. This was never offered to any party taking part in the research and would not have been part of the overall methodology.¹⁶²

3.4 Findings: Questionnaire Responses

Question 1: How long have you been a presbyter?

Table 1 – Years of Service

Years of service	Years as a presbyter	Years as Superintendent
0-5	0	6
6-10	3	5
11-15	3	0
16-20	3	1
21-25	2	1
26+	2	0

¹⁶¹ Catherine Dawson, *Introduction to Research Methods* (Oxford: Howtobooks, 2011), p. 108.

¹⁶² Dawson, *Research Methods*, pp. 153-155.

It is interesting to note from Table 1 above that the majority of Superintendents had served for 5 years or less in the role and 11 of the Superintendents had served 10 years or less. This may tend to show that there is a level of inexperience within the District, which may have an impact on how the role of Superintendent is maintained. Superintendents who have not been immersed in the traditional approaches to the role may bring fresh and less traditional methods to their work.

The reality of having a group of Superintendents who have not served for a long time in the Church, may have an impact on how the role is expressed currently in their Circuits and how the role is developed in the future. This may mean there is change in focus, but it also brings the risk that inexperience may tend to cause a more cautious approach to leadership or to a leadership style which lacks understanding and maturity.

Question 2 and Question 3: How many appointments have you held as a presbyter and as a Superintendent? (Including the present one)

Table 2 – Number of Appointments

Number of Appointments	As a Presbyter	As a Superintendent
1	7	10
2	2	2
3	3	1
4	1	0

Question 2 and Question 3 distinguish between the appointments held as a presbyter and as a Superintendent minister. Only one minister had held four appointments as a presbyter and one presbyter had held the position of Superintendent on three occasions. The vast majority of the Superintendents surveyed had held only one appointment as a presbyter (53%) and 76% of the Superintendents were in their first appointment as a Superintendent.

In terms of this thesis, Table 2 may tend to reflect the position of Table 1 and show that within this District there is a general lack of experience in the role of being the Superintendent. However, this may not be to the detriment of the role, as the less

experienced minister may bring fresh understanding of ministry and offer a more contemporary approach to Circuit leadership.

Question 4: How many colleagues do you superintend in your Circuit?

Table 3 – Personnel

	Mean per Circuit	Least per Circuit	Largest number within a Circuit
Lay employees per Circuit	4	0	30
Ordained	2	1	11
Probationer/Student minister	Only 4 in District	0	1

Question 4 relates to the number of colleagues the Superintendent has to offer oversight and supervision. Having responsibility for oversight and supervision is a technical function and requires certain ‘professional’ abilities of line management, mentoring and accountability. It also reflects a need to understand good employment practices and a sound understanding of oversight of ministers.

In terms of this thesis the challenge to the Superintendent goes beyond pastoral ministry or missional focus, but into the realms of technical supervision and employment administration. It begs the question as to whether or not the Superintendent is equipped to deal with the demands and expectations of the present office. It also means that if the Superintendent is engaged in supervisory duties, then the corollary is that less time is available for mission and evangelistic approaches to ministry.

Where a probationer or student minister is in place in a Circuit, there is a requirement for the Superintendent to provide specific supervision and no probationer will be placed in a Circuit without the Superintendent or another minister having completed a supervisory course. This is more often than not the responsibility of the Superintendent. The education, practical engagement and oversight of a minister in training, offers an exciting prospect for the development of the trainee minister and the supervisor. This dimension of the Superintendents’ role has been part of the function of the Superintendent for many

years, however, it has now been given a fresh sense of importance and vitality by the Connexion, which will make significant demands on the Superintendent in future years.¹⁶³

The Superintendents mostly had lay and ordained staff with whom they had a significant level of oversight. One Circuit had a large number of ordained staff and the supervision of a student minister. One Superintendent had a significant number of lay staff who were working within a Methodist Church nursery. Day to day supervision lay with a lay manager, however, the Superintendent was ultimately responsible for good practice and ensuring Safeguarding rules were complied with.

Question 5: For how many churches are you in pastoral charge?

Table 4 – Levels of Pastoral Charge

Number of churches under Superintendents' direct pastoral charge	Superintendents
1	3
2	0
3	2
4	3
5	0
6	2
7	3

The Plymouth and Exeter District has three major urban areas centred on Plymouth, Exeter and the Torbay region. For the most part the District is rural or semi-rural. The Superintendents with 6 or more churches are based in North and West Devon.

In one respect if the Superintendent has pastoral charge of several churches then at least the Superintendent minister has a direct contact with the congregation. However, the competing demands on the time of the Superintendent may tend to decrease the amount of time that she or he can offer the individual churches. Haley and Francis have evidenced

¹⁶³ Standing Order 725, Methodist Church Constitution Practice and Discipline.

that only 15% of Methodist ministers have pastoral charge of just one church and that 69% of presbyters surveyed agreed that having more than one church led to problems.¹⁶⁴ It may be reasonable to argue then, that if a Superintendent's time is spread too thinly, across more than one church, this may have a tendency to become deleterious and frustrating to that ministry.¹⁶⁵ Haley and Francis do however, acknowledge that overall, Methodist presbyters value the positive aspects of having more than one church. Nevertheless, Haley and Francis also argue that the majority of Methodist ministers do not view the system of the majority of ministers having multiple pastorates, incentivises church growth.¹⁶⁶ Likewise, having pastoral charge of more than one church may lead to increasing demands and complexity, for which the minister is not adequately resourced.¹⁶⁷

Question 6 asked the Superintendents if they had indicated a willingness to be a Superintendent and 100% of the Superintendents had done so. Question 9 asked if the Superintendents would be willing to serve again. All said that they would but two indicated in a pencil note that they were due to retire and so would not do so again.

Anecdotal evidence would tend to suggest that there is a general reluctance to be a Superintendent, but this sample of ministers had no such reluctance to do so and would continue to do so if required. None of the ministers said that they would not offer again.

Question 7: My main role as a Superintendent is:

Table 5 – Role of Superintendent

	Strongly Agree	Agree	NADA	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Admin	0	8	4	1	0
Oversight	4	9	0	0	0
Pastoral	0	10	2	1	0
Mission	12	1	0	0	0

¹⁶⁴ J.M. Haley & L.J. Francis, *British Methodism: What Circuit Ministers Really Think* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2006), pp. 169-171.

¹⁶⁵ Haley & Francis, *British Methodism*, pp. 171-174. This also appears to be the case in the survey conducted for this thesis. See Table 10 below.

¹⁶⁶ Haley & Francis, *British Methodism*, p. 181.

¹⁶⁷ Keith Elford, *Creating the Future of the Church: A Practical Guide to Addressing Whole-System Change* (London: SPCK, 2013), p. 8.

Eight Superintendent ministers surveyed agreed that their role was administrative with only one minister in disagreement with the statement. Almost one third of those surveyed neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Nine Superintendents agreed and four Superintendents strongly agreed that the role involved an oversight and supervisory role. The majority agreed that their role was pastoral.

Question 7 also asked if promotion of circuit mission was part of the role twelve ministers strongly agreed with the statement and one Superintendent agreed. Although this sentiment may tend to support the thesis, in its contention to see the Superintendent in terms of a missional focus, appearance may not reflect reality. This may be due to the Superintendents being so occupied with administrative functions to the detriment of the mission element.

Questions 10 and 11 concerned the training of Superintendents and all those responding had received at least 1-2 days training.

Question 11: To the statement – ‘I found the training adequate?’ Responses were:

Table 6 – Adequacy of Training

Strongly agree	Agree	NADA	Disagree	Strongly disagree
0	2	6	5	0

The response would tend to suggest that the Superintendents were not convinced that the Connexional provision for training of Superintendents was adequate, as five Superintendents disagreed with the proposition. It must be acknowledged that the Connexion now offers a Superintendents’ refresher course annually, which has increased training provision.

In terms of this thesis and the question posed, it may still seem to be an obvious critique of the Methodist Church, that its training provision for such a significant role in the life of the Methodist Church, is lamentable. The Superintendent as leader of the Circuit, surely needs to be properly equipped in terms of that leadership role. If the Superintendent is to

be an administrator, then the Superintendent needs to be an effectively trained administrator and the same applies to evangelism or missional leadership too.

Question 12: Suitable ministers should be identified early in their ministry as future Superintendents equipped for such ministry:

Table 7 – Early Identification of Superintendents

Strongly agree	Agree	NADA	Disagree	Strongly disagree
0	2	4	6	1

This provides an interesting insight into the future provision of the ministry of the Superintendent. Only 2 ministers agreed with the statement, the majority disagreed (6) or strongly disagreed (1) The reason for disagreement with the contention, may be that this might preclude those who develop into good potential Superintendents later in their ministry. It is possible too that the question ignored the possibility of vocation or calling, which may be a far more significant factor than was given credence.

However, when the Superintendents were asked: There should be a selection procedure for Superintendents? There appears to be a different response. Question 6 asked if the presbyter was willing to be a Superintendent. It would appear in light of the answer to Question 13 that ‘willingness’ was not sufficient motivation to become a Superintendent. Eight of the Superintendents believed that selection should be instigated as a procedure of the Methodist Church to select Superintendents. The move to a selection procedure would be a completely radical move in the Methodist Church which could be transformational.

Table 8 – Selection of Potential Superintendents

Strongly agree	Agree	NADA	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
0	8	4	1	0

If such a move was made to selection, then it may increase the status of the role and its potential for greater influence. However, it may be seen as an overtly hierarchical construct and deter potential candidates from considering being a Superintendent.

Question 14: The present model of superintendency works well?:

Table 9 – Model of Superintendency

	Strongly agree	Agree	NADA	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Works well	0	3	6	4	0
Needs changing	0	9	1	3	0
Abolish	0	0	3	6	4

Nine of those surveyed agreed that there needed to be change as to how the role of Superintendent is operated, but none thought that the office needed to be abolished. Overall it would seem that the place of the Superintendent is in need of change, which may signify that the role is a valuable one for the Church, but that it should not be removed.

Question 15: The Methodist Church in Great Britain is moving towards larger Circuits, in such circumstances the Superintendent minister should be a focus for mission, ministry and service and the Superintendent should not have pastoral charge of a church.

Table 10 – Forms of Superintendency

	Strongly Agree	Agree	NADA	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Mission	5	8	0	0	0
Ministry	0	0	1	9	3
Service	0	4	6	3	0
No pastoral charge	0	1	0	11	1
Single Pastorate	1	5	2	3	2

Those surveyed agreed that the Superintendent should be a focus for mission, ministry and service, none disagreeing with the concept. Twelve of the Superintendents did not want not to have pastoral charge of a church, though there was a less clear response to having a single pastorate. This may simply reflect the reality of the Church or Circuit not being able to afford one minister with one church. It may have been a surprising result that the Superintendents were not seeking a single pastorate, which was the anticipated answer. It may be that the reason for this response, was the deep Methodist cultural tradition of its ministers having more than one church and that the Superintendents were simply reflecting the culture.

Table 11 - Age Distribution

21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70
0	1	4	5	3

The majority of Superintendents are over 50 years of age. Almost 84% of the Superintendents had less than 10 years' experience as a Superintendent and most Superintendent ministers had less than 20 years' service as a presbyter. It may be a defect of the questionnaire that a question concerning previous career or occupation was not included. This may have revealed something of the gifts which the minister is bringing to the role of Superintendent.

There are no Superintendent ministers in the age range 21-30 and only one in the age range 31-40. This is a serious concern. Unintentionally, the voice and perspective of a younger generation is excluded and may go unheard, particularly as 'Young people's culture is one of continual change and rapid transition.'¹⁶⁸ If the younger generation is unrepresented in the superintendency, this may have a continuing effect on church leaving, as evidenced by the work of Philip Richter and Leslie Francis in *Gone but not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning*.¹⁶⁹ The fact that there are no Superintendent ministers in the age range 21-30 and only one in the age range 31-40, may reflect the scarcity of

¹⁶⁸ General Synod Board of Education and *Youth A Part: Young People and the Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 1996), p. 11

¹⁶⁹ Philip Richter & Leslie J Francis *Gone but not Forgotten: Church Leaving and Returning* (London: DLT, 1998) examine the reasons for Church leaving, which is multi-faceted and complex. However, ignoring the needs of those such as the Baby Boomers (1945-1960) and the Baby Busters (1961-1981) contributed to an exodus from the Church.

potential Superintendents in that age range, which may reflect such scarcity in the Methodist Church and District at large¹⁷⁰.

3.5 The Interviews

The sample of Superintendents available for interview were those who signified a willingness to enter the interview process. Eight ministers expressed a willingness to be interviewed and only one of those Superintendents was a female. Three ministers were in their first appointment as a Superintendent, but one of those had over twenty years' experience as a presbyter. One Superintendent had previously been a Superintendent. All those selected had supervisory and oversight roles in regard to lay, ordained and probationer minister/ student ministers, respectively. A fifth minister had been selected but he became seriously ill and was excluded. The criteria for selection has been outlined in the methodology.

Particular care has been taken to ensure the identity and situation of any respondent has been anonymised. The respondents were known to the researcher as being part of a peer group of Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The conversations with those selected had to be conducted sensitively and the researcher was aware that on occasions the respondents were unable to be completely open in their replies.

Question 1: How do you understand the role of Superintendent?

All of the Superintendents had made reference to the Superintendent as being a 'bridge'. This bridge was seen in terms of being a bridge between the Circuit churches and also being a bridge with the District and wider Connexion. This means the Superintendent is a conduit between the national and the local and the process is seen as working in reverse, particularly with the District.

One minister talked of being a diplomat and building bridges when relationships in the Circuit or with the District become strained. Another talked of being a facilitator but it was clear that the term 'diplomat' could be applied to that concept. Another saw the Superintendent as a 'firefighter', having to resolve difficult situations and dealing with conflict and seeking resolution.

¹⁷⁰ <http://www.methodistchurch.org.uk/statistics> for mission. Accessed 7.2.14.

All the Superintendents consulted saw the Superintendent as a focus for mission, oversight and unity. In this aspect of the work of a Superintendent the office was seen as having a greater horizon than a section minister within the Circuit.

A male Superintendent minister who had served for over twenty years as a presbyter, commented:

“It’s an oversight thing, getting to know and being known by the people in the churches and looking after the staff...it’s about trying to encourage our churches to be missional...that’s an opportunity given to me as a Superintendent”.

The Superintendents felt a huge sense of responsibility and two male ministers, both with many years of service as presbyters and one of whom had been a Superintendent before said that they were ultimately responsible for maintaining Circuit functions, having oversight of discipline and the work and mission of the churches, while also being the Chair of the Circuit Meeting. It is an onerous responsibility.

A female Superintendent in her first appointment said:

“It can be very lonely, because you have so many tensions to hold together, such as confidentiality, safeguarding issues and goodness knows what else that gets thrown at you and which you’re often not prepared for. It could be overwhelming.”

All four Superintendents were clear that the Superintendent was seen by many as ‘the leader of the Circuit’. Minister A saw this as giving clear direction and having a sound scriptural basis. Minister B spoke of a collegial enterprise which brought out the gifts of all. Leadership was seen as being a good facilitator and focus for action. Minister C admitted to having a more managerial approach which probably derived from his previous occupation. Minister D saw enabling mission as a clear priority but also touched on aspects of the other ministers thoughts too. Minister A reflected that his understanding of being a Superintendent had changed over the years. Once the Superintendent was a remote figure, full of authority who controlled the Circuit. He commented that the Superintendent would have been a presbyter for at least twenty years, prior to becoming ‘the Super’.

The concept of the Superintendent as a ‘bridge’ was not one foreseen by the interviewer. The main idea seemed to be that the Superintendent was the go-between from the national to the local and in reverse. The Superintendent as ‘bridge’ emphasised the need for the

office holder to be a good communicator and the need to have good inter-personal skills. It would also appear that the Superintendent is an interpreter of Connexional policy.

Being a focus for mission and unity has clear implications for the Superintendent, for the role surely has at its core the need to discern and promote mission possibilities and for the Superintendent to be a focal point in the Circuit for action and oversight. In a Circuit with diverse theological approaches, competing agendas and ideas, the multi-faceted requirements of the office of Superintendent will stretch any incumbent. It is therefore, essential that when Circuits consider what they expect of their Superintendent, when that person is sought, that there should be a clear definition of the role. Likewise, the Connexion has a responsibility to ensure that Superintendents are equipped to meet the challenge of the work. Within the context of this thesis the concept of the Superintendent as focus for mission, ministry and oversight is highly significant to the current praxis and development of the role.

Question 2: How would you describe the main differences between being a Superintendent minister and a presbyter.

Minister B, C and D were clear that creating appropriate strategy for the Circuit was essentially a real contrast in the roles. So too was the Superintendents' particular responsibility for dealing with complaints and discipline, safeguarding, stationing, probationers, circuit finance, and having oversight of all the staff. Minister A mentioned taking responsibility for making the Plan for preaching appointments in each church in the Circuit and for the supervision of the Local Preachers.

Superintendent B commented:

“It inevitably involves looking after one another, watching-over and being watched-over in love. My role is to be pastor at times to my colleagues and to offer a listening ear and advice when appropriate.”

The ministerial staff meeting was seen clearly as an important element in oversight. Minister B was very enthused about the content and conduct of staff meetings as a place of profound sharing and mutual ministry. It was a place of business, a place of sharing and prayer and a place where each could ‘build one another up in the faith’. The staff meeting was an informed and confidential place which could be a place of great creativity and

energy. The Superintendents' role was to facilitate and promote this within the Circuit staff and to ensure that agreed work was actioned and completed.

Minister A had mentioned that the Superintendent had over past years been seen as a powerful and often remote senior figure. Minister C and D, who were both in their first appointment as a Superintendent and had about ten years' service each as a presbyter, still felt that in Methodist circles the Superintendent's position had an aura about it, particularly in the older generation. In circumstances of difficulty with members of the ministerial team or with problematic issues in the Circuit, a well-judged word from the Superintendent, would have a beneficial effect. Minister B certainly believed that fostering good circuit wide relationships aided the work of the Superintendent.

One key difference between the Superintendent and other ministerial colleagues was in relation to supervision. This supervision may extend to that of probationers and student ministers which could often be exacting. The Superintendent would also be involved with Ministerial Development Review and in the re-invitation process. This was seen as a significant area of leadership, pastoral expertise and a possible source of conflict and tension.

Leadership was seen as a key aspect of the Superintendents' ministry. However, there was a common feeling that the Methodist Church did not invest adequately in the leadership training of Superintendents. There was a general feeling that more often than not it was left to the individual to source training. Minister A commented:

“It's almost instinctive really, when one has a good leader in a Superintendent, it goes unnoticed; when one has a poor Superintendent, it's very obvious.”

The last comment in terms of this thesis is informative. The fact that a Superintendent is perceived as a poor leader or poor Superintendent, may be that the person is not suited to the role, but is in position because she or he is willing to do so. The person may also be perceived as being 'poor' because they have little training or lack support or mentoring. Although there may be a residual deference to the office of Superintendent in the Methodist Church, it is likely that will soon disappear if the Superintendent has not invested in building good inter-personal relations.

Being designated as the Superintendent was seen as empowering for all the ministers concerned. In essence the office of Superintendent was seen as having the full weight of

the Conference and Connexion standing behind it and that even today, the Methodist people, still have a deep respect for it. It is perhaps in this fact that the office has almost a mythical power, for in reality, there is little power, but there is authority derived from Scripture and the tradition of the Church. It is my contention that as the role of the Superintendent is developed that it is not more power that is required, but it is the authority of the Superintendent which is transformative and expressive of a missional Church.

Question 3: As chair of the Circuit Meeting does the Superintendent set the agenda not simply for meetings, but for Circuit Mission?

Before dealing with the response to this question it is worth pausing reflexively to examine the question. In some respects it is inelegantly put, in that it could quite easily be rendered as a leading question and there is a real danger that that was the way in which it was received. However, the responses were made without any reference at all to being lead in any direction and the integrity of the interviewees is such, that they would have rejected such an approach. It was not the researcher's intention to lead, but there is a possibility that might have happened.

Minister A was quite clear in his view after many years of ministry that the Superintendent should very much be setting the agenda. In setting the agenda of a Circuit Meeting this is only part of a far deeper spiritual exercise, in offering leadership across the Circuit. The Superintendent should be closely involved in the envisioning of the Circuit and empowering the work of Christ's Church.

Ministers B,C and D saw the Superintendent as working collaboratively, encouraging the mission of the Circuit by using the gifts of others. It certainly was not a one person show, but a combination of the talents of many people. Nonetheless, there was also agreement that the responsibility lies with the Superintendent and part of the loneliness of being the Superintendent is the loneliness of being the leader. Being that leader meant that part of the role is to build effective leadership teams, which could be a great privilege. Good collaborative working was seen as a positive and essential way to operate. Minister A was very robust:

“It is my responsibility to make the Circuit Plan for preaching. It's more than an administrative task, it means I have control of the preaching plan and the preachers and that I can ensure the quality of preaching. In all aspects of the

mission of the Circuit it is my responsibility to give focus and direction and to do what the role entails, that is to superintend. It's a Biblical, New Testament concept."

At times it was found easier to work with colleagues of a similar theological or ecclesial disposition, but not exclusively so. Diversity of opinion could often be a rich seam to explore and did not have to be divisive or destructive. It could also be an issue creating discord. Managing these tensions was part of the challenge of being an effective Superintendent and this quality may not be able to be taught. It was universally agreed that the present stationing system did not allow for the creation of homogenous teams of broadly similar view.

Having effective relationships with staff and Circuit members was a vital tool in creating the possibility to do new things. Minister B regularly held 'get-togethers' in a local pub in various parts of the Circuit. Here ideas were shared and thoughts developed on an informal basis. It also was a place where the Superintendent could check the pulse and temperature of the Circuit. Holding this type of open meeting in a public place had created unforeseen mission possibilities.

All four ministers were of a mind that the Superintendent had a deeper opportunity to effect the mission of the Circuit than section ministers in the Circuit. Minister C stated:

"I may have particular interests in evangelism or children's work or changing structures, whatever it may be. Being the Super means I get to speak more widely to people and this really does influence things, more so than if I was a section minister."

As the role of Superintendent develops one of the key attributes of the Superintendent will be the model of ministry which she or he adopts. If one is autocratic, for some there will be acclaim, being portrayed as a true leader. However, it would be my contention that this style of ministry is anachronistic and belonging more to the era of the Revd John Wesley than to the contemporary Church. Neither is the Superintendent the Managing Director, for the Methodist Church cannot be closely compared to a business, although there will be some overlap. In an organization where the majority are volunteers, the approach must be collaborative and collegial, where the development of good relationship and clear objectives are determined. The Methodist Church needs Superintendents who have refined, mature and creative inter-personal skills which seeks to bring out the best of the talents within the Circuit.

Question 4: Why did you become a Superintendent?

Minister A saw being the Superintendent as part of a personal offering to the Methodist Church and as part of an individual vocation. This was seen as a powerful motivation for a 'willingness' to serve as it was a happy coincidence of personal offering and vocation. The individual concerned had exercised this ministry prior to coming to the present situation, and would, other than because of retirement, been content to continue or seek another appointment as Superintendent. It was also the case with Minister A that the influence of Superintendents known to this person, by personal example, for good or ill, compelled a personal offering to become a Superintendent.

Minister B had been a presbyter for over twenty years and had considered making an offer to be a Superintendent previously. Circumstances dictated that this did not happen until coming to the present appointment. Living life with a bigger horizon was a compelling reason to offer for this ministry. Being the Superintendent permitted greater involvement in every aspect of Circuit life and at a District and Connexional level. Being the person who is a natural intermediary between the local and the national was seen as an attractive reason to be a Superintendent.

Minister C had only been in one appointment prior to becoming a Superintendent and his first Circuit had been where he had been a probationer minister, and from where he had been sent for ordination. The reality was that this minister only had three years' experience beyond the probationary two years, as an ordained minister. Prior experience in industry as a manager, at a senior level, was seen by others as a good reason for those skills to be used in the role of Superintendent. This minister was quite diffident about the qualities that s/he had to offer, but external recognition had been a powerful motivation for offering to be a Superintendent.

Minister D felt s/he had been coerced by circumstances and prayerful encouragement to become the Superintendent. This minister was quite sure that other than through the force of circumstances, becoming a Superintendent minister was not part of any personal plan. Indeed, there were good reasons not to be a Superintendent, as administration and managerial skills were not part of his/her skill-set. Nevertheless, this minister now felt, despite initial reservations, that being the Superintendent was the 'right' place for his/her ministry to be worked-out. It was a challenging, demanding, frustrating, satisfying and ability-stretching ministry that is now seen as fulfilling.

One of the contradictions in this thesis is that the office of Superintendent is not simply a post which will bend to the will of strategic planning, management theory or the influence from other leadership roles in business, commerce or the civilian or armed services. The Superintendent and the office itself is subject to being bent to the will of God, to be placed at the service of Christ and subject to the powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Although this does not destroy a contention of this thesis, that the Church should act proactively to be more determining about the place of this Office in the life of the Methodist Church. It does offer a constant proviso that the needs of the Kingdom take precedence and that one has to accept this office is subject to the renewal of Christ's invitation to serve.

The response of the ministers to the question reveal powerful reasons for taking the role. Encouragement and discernment of others, personal vocation, interest and reluctance transformed to enthusiasm all feature as part of the complexity of reasons. However, it is the fact that once in the role, despite its challenges and frustrations there is a general feeling that it is better being the Superintendent than not being the Superintendent.

Question 5: Was your training to become a Superintendent adequate?

All acknowledged there had been some training but that of itself it was entirely insufficient. The Superintendents' further training was a better than it had been and the annual Superintendent's Conference was seen as a positive offering by the Connexion. This meeting was seen as a place where stories could be shared with their peers; where advice could be sought, problems shared and issues aired in a confidential setting. It was a confidence-building place and a place to relax in the company of others who knew the landscape in which each worked. This place of conversation was valued even more greatly than the in-put of technical information.

Nevertheless, there was still a feeling that the role of Superintendent was not adequately resourced. So often the minister had to fend for themselves. When it came to funding training this was often done at personal cost. One minister noted that the training of executives in industry was far superior to the Church and the Church had much to learn from industry.

Within the remit of this thesis, as the Methodist Church resources its Superintendents, there is a depth of concern in the area of training and for its funding. The eighteenth century Wesleyan example is not of much assistance, as Wesley offered limited formal

training for his Assistants. The Methodist Church of the twenty first century offers far greater training than its eighteenth century ancestor and from this perspective offers little by way of realistic comparison. However, the Faith and Order Committee report of 2005, claimed that Wesley offered imaginative and creative training programmes, but offered no evidence upon which that assertion was made.¹⁷¹

Question 6: Should the Methodist Church identify ministers early in their ministry to become a Superintendent?

There was no enthusiasm at all for this idea. The main reason for this was that people change and develop. One may be identified as having potential, but similarly, all may have the potential to change over years, making them either more or less suitable. There was also a sense in which the Superintendents thought of developing a hierarchy, could well be to the detriment of the Church, as it may tend to establish an elite.

The key, as far as these Superintendents were concerned, was to identify those with the potential gifts and graces required and not, to look at those early in their ministry with potential.

The early identification of potential may have some merit and within the scope of this thesis is worth consideration. However, the response of the Superintendents questioned reveals a deep reservation about such a move. For them identification of gifts and graces in the pool available is key to future development.

Question 7: Should there be a selection procedure for Superintendents?

Ministers A and B both reflected on years of experience and noted that many had become Superintendents who were clearly unsuitable. If years of service was a criteria for access to the role of Superintendent, then it was a poor criterion. They also reflected that the work of the Superintendent was seen as unattractive; an administrative function beset with difficulties and the potential for continual conflict. All were agreed that selection should be implemented but felt that many would be put off because of selection.

Within the culture of the Methodist Church, anecdotally at least, there is a suspicion about ambition. One retired Superintendent commented:

¹⁷¹ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 30.

“In my day, if one expressed an interest in becoming a Superintendent or a Chair of District, or really any sort of advancement, then that would be good reason not to appoint that person. It was a sort of inverse snobbery really and no doubt robbed the Church of many good potential leaders.”

There is however, a change in the way in which people are appointed to roles within the Church. Jobs are now advertised for those considering becoming a Chair of District or a Connexional appointment. It may be that the idea of advertising and application for Superintendents posts is not too remote a possibility.

The Chair of District in the British Methodist Church is a presbyteral office which dates back to the years immediately following John Wesley’s death in 1791. In Britain the office evolved from that of the Circuit Superintendent, representing an expression of oversight between the Districts and the Conference. In America the developments was between the General Superintendent who later became known as bishops and the Presiding Elder who became the District Superintendent.¹⁷²

The process of evolution of the District Chair continued after Methodist Union in 1932. The present configuration is that the Chair of District is a Connexional post, but who differs not in status or grade from any presbyter, in common with the Superintendent, but who has a particular responsibility for the advancement of mission in a designated area.¹⁷³ The District Chair will offer Oversight, governance and management, all of which are features of what it is to a Superintendent minister. The roles are similar in nature, but have aspects which differ, particularly regarding geographical authority, processes concerning stationing of ministers and roles within the complaints and discipline environment. It is a particular function of the Chair of District as Chair of presbyteral and representative synods to:

Exercise oversight of the character and fidelity of the ministers and probationers of the District.¹⁷⁴

In a sense the District Chair is the Superintendent writ large, acting as the chief officer of the District Policy Committee and ensuring District leadership with appropriate levels of

¹⁷² Faith and Order Committee, *What is a District Chair?* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2006), p. 87.

¹⁷³ Faith and Order, *District Chair?* pp. 91-92. Standing Order 400A(i) also refers to the designation of the District Chair.

¹⁷⁴ Faith and Order, *District Chair?* p. 95.

executive management. The Faith and Order Committee affirms a distinctive role for the Chair:

As representative of the Conference and Connexion within the District. Chairs are frequently looked to by the Circuits and their officers for guidance and support or as trouble-shooters, people who can offer a knowledge of the local situation, together with their wider experience, but also an independent objectivity.¹⁷⁵

This clearly makes a significant differentiation between the Chair of District and the Superintendent. It is arguably true, that if the Chair of District was named District Superintendent, this would resemble more closely the office of bishop, not in any Anglican model concerning apostolic succession, but in terms of the Wesleyan presbyter-bishop and that of a bishop in the United Methodist Church in the United States of America.¹⁷⁶

Question 8: The Connexion is considering a report ‘Larger than Circuits’; do you think larger Circuits and fewer Superintendents might be a way forward?

Minister B felt that the District was probably a redundant layer of the Church and that larger Circuits, properly resourced, could be an effective bridge between Connexion and Circuit. The Superintendent would however, have to have only one church to make the post tenable.

Minister A still felt the District had a place and thought larger Circuits would struggle with matters such as stationing and training.

Minister D was concerned that there was a real risk of there being a disconnect between the Connexion and larger Circuits. This disconnect was seen as potential remoteness and an impersonal top-down relationship. A larger Region to replace the District was viewed with similar concern.

All the ministers felt that fewer Superintendents might release others back into Circuit ministry. The issue was who was to be the Superintendent, how they would be selected and that these people were not over-stretched.

¹⁷⁵ Faith and Order, *District Chair?* p. 99.

¹⁷⁶ Below p. 85.

The Church may come to the conclusion that it has no choice but to operate on a basis of larger than Circuit and that regions will be developed. This thesis would advance that whatever mode of delivery is selected, it is essential that the place of the Superintendent is equipped thoroughly for its purpose and that the historic place of the Superintendent is not abandoned.

Question 9: How do you see the role of the Superintendent developing?

All four Superintendents felt that in coming years the work of the Superintendent would increase. They cited the demands of such things as safeguarding and the training which is required on a continual basis. They spoke of the effects of legislation on their work, ensuring the churches were obeying Health and Safety directives and that Charity Law was being complied with. They also bemoaned the continual passing down of more and more work from the Connexion to the Circuits. There are also more demands when dealing with probationer and student ministers which was perceived as likely to become increased, as theological colleges close.

One of the most significant concerns for the Superintendent ministers, was how they handled continual decline and the huge stresses and strains that put on a Circuit and on them. All the ministers spoke of the tensions between those who wanted to maintain a traditional approach and were resistant to change and those who wanted radical change. Minister D commented:

“I have a lot of people coming to my church and that’s great. A great many of those who come are not cradle Methodists or Methodists at all. Some are Anglican, others Baptists or former house church people. Many are just bored with denominational tags and will not come into membership. This is both refreshing and a challenge, as non- members cannot be on church council or vote. We have to think outside the box.”

The significance of denominational loyalty was increasingly seen as a matter of disinterest to many who attend Church and this posed opportunities and challenges for those in leadership. The diverse nature of Church attendance would pose considerable challenges to the Superintendent as the old order, often familiar and revered was passing away. All the ministers were agreed that flexibility and adaptability was needed by those who are Superintendents.

The Superintendents also talked of the demands for the ministry of the Church outside of the building and sometimes in the building. In an era of social change, economic depression and the withdrawal of the State, the social Gospel had a very real significance. The promotion of work alongside those in debt through organizations such as Christians Against Poverty, or work with prostitutes, drug users, rural decline and city centre life styles was seen as significant. The Superintendent had to have an understanding and empathy with such work if the Church was to be seen as authentic.

Minister A spoke of being a representative person for the Church in the wider community. In her/his ministry so often the Methodist Church was a 'go-to' place, because the church had immersed itself within its community.

Ministers B, C and D mentioned the need to be media-friendly and the effect the internet and the Web had on the reality of ministry. One minister noted that his/ her services were recorded and placed on the Church website, so what was said in the pulpit had the possibility of 'going viral'. It was an area to be exploited and used to put across the Gospel.

All the ministers saw their role as being a catalyst, an enabler, an apologist for Christianity; a leader among equals in forwarding the mission of the Church. The complexity of what the Superintendent has become and the impossibility of all facets of the requirements being found in one person is unlikely. The passage of time from those early Assistants to their counterparts three hundred years later is stark. Their modern day equivalents are not 'spent in saving souls' but in a myriad and far more complex interaction between traditional expectations and the demands of 21st century society. The Superintendents surveyed did not appear to be overwhelmed but had a clear understanding of their individual and collective realities. All could and did see how being a Superintendent might develop but were realistic about the scarcity of resources which limited progress.

Question 10: In your opinion what makes for a good Superintendent?

Minister A said:

"The Superintendent should be a person of sound convictions, knowing where they stand; willing to listen but able to decide. Sometimes to have a thick hide and a good sense of humour. A person not very far from Jesus."

This minister who has many years of service offered a very robust view of the Superintendent. It would seem that the Superintendent envisaged by this minister was resolute, firm in their beliefs, strong and having a very profound personal faith.

The remaining ministers, who were younger than Minister A, spoke in more collegial and empathetic terms. The need to be a good listener, a good holder of confidences and being a person who was willing not always to be popular were seen as assets to the role. There was also a strongly held belief by all the ministers that the Superintendent must have a close walk with Christ and have a basis in prayer, study and reflection.

It is apparent that the ministers had a broad sense of agreement in what they saw as making a good Superintendent, Minister A's assessment was rather more robustly put than the others and gave no doubt that the Superintendent is very much a leader. For others leadership was expressed in other ways, but no less in terms of leadership. Being a good Superintendent is about exhibiting qualities which may be latent in an individual, capable of being developed or taught, or which develop through experience.

Question 11: As part of my research I am looking at the influence of the Revd John Wesley in developing the role of the Superintendent minister. Do you know anything about this and do you think the Methodist Church has anything to learn today?

Ministers C and D felt they could not comment as they had very little knowledge.

Minister B felt that there was a real danger in trying to apply the insights and conditions of the late eighteenth century to today's situation, as it was anachronistic.

Minister A had a deep knowledge of Methodism and its history. This minister felt that there was a great deal to be learnt from the past. This minister was particularly impressed by the evangelical zeal of Wesley and his early Assistants, their discipline and commitment to the movement. He also reflected on the spread of scriptural holiness, Wesley's genius for organization and finding unlikely people to be extraordinary messengers of the Gospel.

This question touches on the first element of this thesis and its effect upon the latter. The fact that Minister C and D had little knowledge of Methodist Church history was of some surprise to the researcher and revealed an absence of Methodist knowledge in their understanding.

Minister B advanced a notion that the past may be a bad place to base anything for the present or the future, as it is too far distant from contemporary culture and society. The Church has moved on so far since that time, as to make it largely irrelevant. This opinion has a valuable contribution to make, as this minister is obviously correct in noting how different eighteenth century society is to that of today.

Minister A saw the possible areas of commonality and how the contemporary Church could use the Wesleyan approach as a critique of its present situation, particularly with regard to the place of the Superintendent's role. It also offers a potential critique of the wider Methodist project in the 21st century, as it refers back to its foundational project as a movement, rather than a Church.

In this chapter there has been an engagement with those who are Superintendents in the life of the Plymouth and Exeter District, by means of a survey and by interview. In the survey it was established that the majority of Superintendents saw their role as that of Oversight (69%), Pastoral Care (76%) and Administration (61%), but similarly in that question 92% agreed or agreed strongly that their role was to promote Circuit mission. 69% of the Superintendents (Question 14) thought that superintendency needed to change but that it should not be abolished. The Superintendents would not have favoured a change, whereby Superintendents are identified early in their ministry as suitable candidates for the Office (Question 12) However, some form of selection procedure was needed and 'willingness' was not a sufficient qualification. (Question 13)

The Interviews released some critical information for this thesis. As has already been noted, two of the ministers had very little knowledge of the historical origins of the office of Superintendent minister, to such an extent they declined to comment. This lack of knowledge provides the writer with a dilemma. Does this mean, that for those who have little or no knowledge that this lack of appreciation has materially affected their ministry, for good or ill; or that it has had no effect. The latter conclusion would be profoundly disturbing for this thesis, as, by implication, it is suggesting that the Wesleyan approach has no lasting impression on the mind of the current Superintendent. It is a defect of this thesis that the researcher did not pursue this avenue of enquiry more deeply. Closer questioning may have revealed the reasons for the lack of knowledge, which may also have ramifications for the theological training of its ministers in respect of Methodist Church history and the institution's own appraisal of such a significant office of the Church. Nevertheless, it does raise the question that there appears to be a significant lack of awareness of the historical significance of the office of Superintendent.

In a sense too, the reflection of Superintendent 'B', that to compare the contemporary situation with an eighteenth century model is profitless, because it is anachronistic and fraught with difficulty brought about by the passage of time. It has to be acknowledged that for the contemporary Superintendent the social, cultural and societal changes wrought by the advances of science, technology, economics, politics and other influences have dynamic influences on the office of Superintendent. And yet Superintendent 'A' saw the eighteenth century model as a useful critique of the contemporary Methodist Church; in that the Superintendent of eighteenth century was a leader of an advancing movement and not a declining Church.

The interviews also gave voice to the Superintendent as a missional leader and a focus for the work of the Circuit. In this there is a sense of the Superintendent being a uniting force in the Circuit and this is displayed in the Superintendents' general oversight of the Circuit, which is, arguably, in line with Wesley's notion of scriptural episcopacy. However, there is no evidence, either from the Questionnaires or from the Interviews that any of the Superintendents saw their role as 'extraordinary'. This was not explicitly asked of the respondents and so an opportunity to explore the 'extraordinariness' of the Assistant-Superintendent of the Wesleyan era and that of today, was not explored. The Interviews and the Questionnaire did however, reveal a greater level of commitment to the office and its future than the researcher had anticipated, particularly in terms of its perception as a missionally uniting office for the Circuits.

It is surprising to the writer that none of the Superintendents interviewed made any reference to the collective authority of the Superintendents within the District. R.P. Winter, in *The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission* argues that there is a normative, functional, default position of Church, which is seen in the every-day local instantiation of Church. However, he argues that this is simply the *modal* representation of Church structure and that there is another representation which is observable in the New Testament mission of the Church in the Pauline era. Winter also contends this is evident in the monastic movement and later in organizations such as the Anglican Church Mission Society, that is *Sodality*. *Sodality*, derives from the Latin *Sodalitas* which refers to social and political groupings and religious fraternities.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.frontlinemissionfellowship.org/uploads/documents/two-structures>. Accessed 2.6.14.

The contemporary Superintendents appear to conform to a sodal group, in that they are a group with a common purpose and have compatible aims, such as oversight, governance, mission and the unity of the Methodist Church in the District. And yet there is no discernable dynamic whereby, as a group with authority and influence, that there is any collective vision or joint enterprise taking place. The focus is parochial and limited. Talk of ‘bigger horizons’ fails to connect to a dynamic, whereby the local church is influenced, or inspired by any common pioneering sodality by the District Superintendents.¹⁷⁸ If the Superintendents decided to share in a pioneering enterprise, then the local churches and Circuits might be informed, directed and pioneered by an effective sodal group with transformative effect, much in the tradition of Wesley’s Assistants. Arguably, this would form a bridge with the extraordinary ministry envisaged in the mission of Wesley’s sodal group of Assistants and Superintendents of the early Methodist movement.

Winter’s thesis might be problematic. If it is for the short term, then Atkins would reject it and be critical of it. Atkins articulates a concept of catechesis which forms part of a longer term process. If Winter’s project is ‘a quick fix’ then it would be subject to a severe critique.¹⁷⁹ However, Atkins also portrays Jesus’ teaching of the disciples in terms which are redolent of Winter’s notion of *sodality*. For Atkins it is about recovering ‘God’s anointed tools for discipleship once again’¹⁸⁰. Winter’s project concerns recovering an authentic dynamic between a hub or church and the external missioner(s). The *sodal* group is a catalyst for the fixed *modal* church, but the *modal-church* sustains and responds to the former group. This however, does not negate in any sense that this is an authentic tool for discipleship in Atkins’ terms.

This chapter has engaged with a survey of Superintendent ministers in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the British Methodist Church. The reasons, in terms of the research question, for the survey and interviews have been explained and analysed. The methodology and epistemology have similarly been explained and given focus through the scholarship of Swinton and Moffat, Cohen, Mannion, Morrison and others.

There has been an engagement with the research question which has identified the superintendency as a role of mission, oversight and unity. There has also been an

¹⁷⁸ D. Male, (ed), *Pioneers for Life* (Abingdon: BRF, 2011), p. 32.

¹⁷⁹ Martyn Atkins, *Resourcing Renewal: Shaping Churches for the Emerging Future* (London: Epworth Press, 2010), pp. 177-184.

¹⁸⁰ Atkins, *Resourcing Mission*, p. 185

identification of the links with and the incoherence between the Assistants and superintendency of early Methodism with the contemporary understanding of superintendency in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The chapter has also offered a critique of how superintendency is resourced, trained and maintained in the District. The interviews with the Superintendents reveal concerns and ideas on the future direction of superintendency. This thesis has offered an original piece of research with the Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District. It is not comprehensive and does not embrace wider British Methodism in the same way as Haley and Francis' research has done.¹⁸¹ Although an original piece of research it is therefore, limited in scope and its findings may not be extrapolated beyond its focus.

Finally the chapter uses Winter and Atkins to consider the responses of the Superintendents in terms of *Sodality*, noting a possible critique by Atkins. The purpose of utilising Winter's thesis is to express a bridge between early Methodism and contemporary praxis.

¹⁸¹ J.Haley & L.J.Francis, *British Methodism: What Methodist Ministers Really Think* (London: Epworth Press, 2006)

Chapter Four: Contemporary Superintendency

This chapter will answer the research question by asking ‘What is a Superintendent for the contemporary Methodist Church compared to the Wesleyan era and for the Plymouth and Exeter District Circuit Superintendents?’

For this to be achieved it will be necessary to define what the British Methodist Church considers the Superintendent minister to be, by reference to its Standing Orders in *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* and through the work of Conference reports prepared by the Faith and Order Committee. Particular regard will be given to the British Methodist Church Conference reports *What is a Circuit Superintendent* (2005) *Called to Love and Praise* (1999) *What Sort of Bishops?* (2002) *The Nature of Oversight* (2002) and *What is a District Chair?* (2003) Through its Standing Orders and Conference reports, the British Methodist Church articulates its contemporary understanding of the office of Superintendent. How the British Methodist Conference, the supreme governing body of the British Methodist Church, views the superintendency has consequent implications for the praxis of that ministry in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the Church. The Conference reports supply an insight not only into matters of internal governance, but also into the ecclesiological understanding of the office. This will be significant as the implications of Conference decisions and the local experience of Superintendents is key to answering part of the research question.

This chapter will also explore a significant aspect of the office of Superintendent, that of oversight. In this the continuation of a Wesleyan heritage will be evident, together with the more contemporary understanding of the Superintendent’s role as that of exercising ‘theologically informed management and theologically informed leadership.’¹⁸² By engaging with the early Methodist movement’s Assistants and the nature of authority understood in the time of Wesley, there is a bridge with the contemporary situation whereby, present day Superintendents understand and exercise authority. As the implications for current praxis are determined, so there will be a need to engage with contemporary scholarship as it impinges on this thesis. Steven Croft’s *Ministry in Three Dimensions* and Malcolm Grundy’s *Leadership and Oversight: New Models for Episcopal Oversight* offer an alternative view of oversight and leadership from an Anglican perspective. For the Methodist scholar David Carter there is a recovery of the term

¹⁸² Faith and Order Committee, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 14.

‘serving ruler’, originally advanced by the 19th century Methodist Benjamin Gregory, of Methodist presbyters in general.¹⁸³ However, this insight offers a transitional understanding of the nature of the development of Wesley’s Assistants to the office of Superintendent. The office provides an ecclesiologicaly respectable position for the Church, particularly when dealing with other denominations whose oversight is more hierarchical. The concept of the Superintendent as ‘serving ruler’ stands both in sympathy and in contrast with the Faith and Order Committees concept of the Superintendent as ‘first among equals’ and ‘leader amongst peers’.¹⁸⁴ Gregory applies to the Methodist presbyter the accolade:

Ruling servant and servant ruler...the impersonation of order and harmony, the key-stone of the arch of unity¹⁸⁵

This chapter will also take particular cognisance of the place of management, leadership and governance in the role of the Superintendent. These aspects are particular concerns of the British Methodist Conference reports *The Nature of Oversight* and *What is a Superintendent?* The Conference reports also impinge upon and have implications for the work of Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The reality of this is born out in the comments made during the responses in the questionnaire and survey of Superintendents, referred to in chapter three. It is also in this part of the chapter that particular regard will be taken of Croft and Grundy in their approach to oversight and authority in Church leadership, as it will assist in answering the research question.

4.1 Sign of Unity

David Carter is quite correct when he observes that for both John and Charles Wesley and for the early Methodists, there was a shifting and complex ecclesiology in process.¹⁸⁶ This has not ceased and as the Faith and Order Committee commented:

Out of all these pragmatic considerations and tensions a process of evolution has occurred since the time of Wesley.....that process led to the influential role of the Superintendent in the 20th century Church.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Carter, *Love*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁴ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 17 to 20.

¹⁸⁵ Benjamin Gregory, *The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), p. 103.

¹⁸⁶ Carter, *Love*, p. 1.

Organizations grow and develop and the Methodist Church is no exception. The early Methodist movement grew and developed from a scriptural holiness movement within the Church of England, to an independent Church.¹⁸⁸ This structural change occurred without the assent and approval of the founding members of the movement.¹⁸⁹ The British Methodist Church continues in similar vein, but within this thesis it is important to understand that pragmatism, inherited from the Wesleyan tradition, is not the sole driver for institutional change and progress. It has been established in chapter two of this thesis, that there is a link between the Assistant and the Superintendent which is based upon missional focus and as a sign of Methodist unity. A sign of unity in contemporary terms, of the Superintendent being a manifestation and expression of the unity embodied in Connexional supremacy and authority of the British Methodist Conference.

The Superintendent has oversight of the Circuit in which she or he is set and again this may be contended as a sign of unity, for oversight links Connexion to the Districts, Circuits and churches and the superintendency forms a bridge in this linkage. Oversight is not solely personified in the Superintendent, but also in the all presbyters, deacons, preachers and in the laity more widely still. This is particularly so when the laity are discharging other offices of the Church, such as being a Circuit Steward or Vice-President of the Methodist Conference. Therefore, Standing Order 700(9) states:

Superintendents share with all the other presbyters appointed to the Circuit the pastoral charge of the Circuit and have oversight of all ministers and probationers stationed in the Circuit.¹⁹⁰

In adopting the Report '*What is a Superintendent?*' in 2005, the British Methodist Conference brought into its discipline, practice and polity, the concepts enshrined in that report. It is indicative of the Conference's mind and evidence of the contention that the Superintendent is a functionary of the Church when Conference accepts:

They (Superintendents) are expected to gather together any presbyters and any deacons appointed to or stationed in the Circuit and any lay workers employed in the Circuit....Superintendents do not just have oversight of all ministers, deacons

¹⁸⁷ Faith and Order, 'What is a Superintendent?' <http://methodistchurch.org.uk.htm> accessed 4.6.14.

¹⁸⁸ Haley & Francis, *British Methodism*, pp. 11-19.

¹⁸⁹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley*, pp. ix-xii.

¹⁹⁰ CPD, SO 700(9) The Conference report 'What is a Superintendent' in paragraphs 15 and 16 makes clear the supremacy of the British Methodist Conference in the nature of oversight. Paragraph 16 refers to lay officers and others in the Circuit having oversight alongside the Superintendent.

and probationers stationed in the Circuit, but also allow themselves to be “watched over in love”...In all this they are taking the lead.¹⁹¹

There does seem to be an undercurrent in this statement, which has caused controversy in Methodism in recent years. It concerns ordination and the office the minister holds. Methodism, as, Davies advances, does not entertain a priestly office and is opposed to any form of sacerdotalism.¹⁹² However, Shier-Jones believes there is a blurring of the distinction through a growing understanding of Methodist ministry as being ‘equivalent in kind to Anglican priesthood.’¹⁹³ Although not the position of the Methodist Church, Shier-Jones’ contention might suggest that the 2005 statement from the Faith and Order Committee, reveals that there could be an ontological, as opposed to functional aspect to the superintendency and ministry more generally. Being a focus for unity, for leadership and for mission could be seen in terms of episcopal or functional oversight. However, it needs to be clearly stated that it is not the position of the Methodist Church, that there is any ontological significance in the office of Superintendent, it forms merely an office and function of the Methodist Church. Neither is there any sense of apostolic succession in the superintendency; it is a functional office and title does not transfer or remain with a Superintendent on leaving the office, as it does with, for instance, a bishop of the Church of England.¹⁹⁴ Kirby has indicated that within American Methodism there is a two-fold order of ministry, presbyters and bishops, but this is not to be viewed as being part of an historic succession and neither is there any ontological sense to the office of bishop.¹⁹⁵

4.2 Leader

The Assistant of the Reverend John Wesley’s era was his creation and, as has previously been noted, the Conference was Wesley’s means of entering a conversation with the Methodists, but authority rested with Wesley.¹⁹⁶ The contemporary Superintendent is not Wesley’s creation. The Superintendent is a leader, expressing the oversight and authority of the British Methodist Conference. A.R.George contends ‘of all the familiar institutions

¹⁹¹ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 18.

¹⁹² Davies, *Methodism*, p. 168 and Section 4 of *the Deed of Union*

¹⁹³ Shier-Jones, *A Work*, p. 266.

¹⁹⁴ Below p. 75.

¹⁹⁵ Kirby, ‘Episcopacy’, p. 233.

¹⁹⁶ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 247.

of British Methodism none is more familiar than the Superintendent'.¹⁹⁷ His use of the term 'institution,' arguably, signifies the deep seated organizational and ecclesial adoption of this office. The Faith and Order Committee of the British Methodist Conference saw in the office of the Superintendent, that of the role of Chief Officer of the Circuit Leadership Team.¹⁹⁸ The Faith and Order Committee has identified leadership as a key requirement of the Superintendent. In doing so this reflected an earlier Faith and Order Committee report, *The Nature of Oversight (2002)* The report identified and defined leadership as:

Inspiring people to be imaginative and to participate in the development of new vision and empowering them to share their ideas and act upon them.

Articulating and considering the content of that developing vision, initiating action and allowing people to follow; providing examples of taking risks...taking responsibility...providing models of exercising power.... with authority, justice and love.....These expression of leadership are always related to the Word, rooted in the sacraments and undergirded with prayer.¹⁹⁹

Leaders therefore, in this analysis, exhibit these qualities and by its rendering in the discussion on superintendency, by implication, are qualities desired in the Superintendent. The final section of the definition roots the definition in Christian language, separating it from secular models of leadership. Burdon saw the early Methodist Assistants as 'Sons of the Gospel.'²⁰⁰ The Faith and Order Committee aligns the Superintendent firmly in that tradition, seeing the transformative sacramental nature of the Superintendent's office, together with all presbyters, as being vessels of inspired transformation.²⁰¹ This moves the place of the Superintendent into a different light, for the Superintendent is now, arguably, no mere functionary. The combination of ordinary leadership qualities, which may be identified in any person, is then transformed into something 'extraordinary' through the operation of the *Missio-Dei* in the Superintendents' ministry. This is an echo, a recovery even, of an earlier Wesleyan commissioning of the 'extraordinary messengers' of the early Methodist movement. However, if this thesis attempted to claim such a reality, then it is bound to fail as the 'extraordinary' aspect claimed for the Superintendent, is not restricted to that office, but is seen in the presbytery and laity also. This grounds the Superintendent

¹⁹⁷ George, 'Superintendency' p. 79.

¹⁹⁸ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 18.

¹⁹⁹ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 18.

²⁰⁰ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 22.

²⁰¹ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 12.

as a presbyter and not in any superior office or rank in ministry, but neither does it detract from the Superintendents' role as a leader.

When the Superintendent ministers, who exercise both leadership and oversight, in the Plymouth and Exeter District were asked: "The present model of superintendency works well?" none of the Superintendents felt that the current model of superintendency should be abolished. However, almost 70% of the Superintendents felt there should be changes to the current model of ministry. This may reflect, that over 60% of the Superintendents felt that their main role in being the Superintendent was tied-up with administration. Nevertheless, when asked if they were willing to be a Superintendent in the future, none stated that they would be unwilling. This tends to suggest that there may be an underlying concern about certain aspect of being the Superintendent, but it would not be sufficient to prevent or deter a willingness to be a Superintendent minister. Indeed, over 60% of the Superintendents felt that there should be some form of selection procedure for those willing to be considered as Superintendents. The implication of this is, that the office of Superintendent is a vital one for the Church and its status either is in need of protection or enhancement. All four Superintendents who were more fully interviewed, expressed the opinion that the Superintendent was a focus for mission, oversight and unity. Leadership and oversight harmonising in the practice of the office.

4.3 *Missio Dei*

The understanding of those four Superintendents is significant in terms of missiology. If, 'the *Missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*', then for the British Methodist Church, in the office of the Superintendent, there is a real opportunity for this office to be the missional impetus and focus for the Circuit and its constituent Methodist churches.²⁰² The *Missio Dei*, Bosch argues, is an expression of the will of God. It is an activity which Karl Barth saw as revealing the activity of God in the world. The revelation is not in terms of ecclesiology per se, nor in terms solely of soteriology; it is as an evident expression of the Trinitarian nature of God. Thus God's oversight and involvement in the contingent world, is given expression by:

²⁰² David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: NY, Orbis Books, 2004), p. 370.

the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and God the Son sending the Holy Spirit...to include another 'movement': Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the Church into the world.²⁰³

Where the Methodist Church is sent into the world, emulating the world parish view of John Wesley, then R. George Eli argues that the missiological approach of the Methodist Church is dominated by its aim 'to spread social holiness'. Through revealing the Grace of God by living grace-transformed lives so the *Missio Dei* is revealed.²⁰⁴ The Wesleyan heritage, imbued with its evangelical desire to know lives transformed and the salvific effects of redemption in Christ, spreads down the generations. This was the work of the early Assistants to John Wesley and this claim on the work of the contemporary Superintendent has not diminished. If the Superintendent minister is a catalyst for mission and the *Missio Dei* is operative in this office of the Church, then the Church as a partner in the work of the Trinity, reveals the missional activity of God in the Church and its wider context.

The Faith and Order Committee in its report *What is a Superintendent? (2005)* clearly prioritised the role of the Superintendent in exercising the ministry:

Ensuring the provision and ordering of preaching, interpretation, apologetics and evangelism in the Circuit.²⁰⁵

This reflects the importance of the place and focus of such priorities through the office of the Superintendent. Its importance is the ability of the Superintendent to facilitate the out-working of the *Missio Dei*, ensuring that God's self-revelation is not fettered, by the Church's inability to be effectively obedient. Thus, Martyn Atkins, is assuredly correct when he states that:

Church derived from the *Missio Dei* means that whenever church and mission in pursuit of the Kingdom are not synonymous, things can be said to be wrong.... So, whenever mission is relegated or supplanted as the essential defining

²⁰³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 390.

²⁰⁴ R. George Eli, *Social Holiness: John Wesley's Thinking on Christian Community and its Relationship to Social order* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 64.

²⁰⁵ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 24(a)

characteristic of church things are deemed to be amiss or incomplete. Church defined by the *Missio Dei* never finds its true centre by looking in on itself.²⁰⁶

It is then part of the culture of the Superintendents' office, if that office stands in continued sympathy with the tradition of the New Testament Church and the Wesleyan revival, not to be blindly introspective, but rather doggedly proactive in its desire to promote the mission of the Church. In Wesleyan terms to 'spend and be spent in saving souls' or in contemporary Methodist parlance, to be spent in the outworking of the British Methodist Church statement, 'Our Calling.'²⁰⁷

Standing Order 500 states that:

The Circuit is the primary unit in which Local Churches express and experience their interconnexion in the Body of Christ, for purposes of mission, mutual encouragement and help.²⁰⁸

The Standing Order makes it abundantly clear what the purpose of the Circuit is. It affirms the missional basis for the Circuit, which stands in continuity with its early Wesleyan heritage. Standing Order 502 amplifies the central role the Superintendent has in the life of the Circuit, by conferring on the Superintendent the power to chair all church meetings and committees. The Superintendent also confirms in writing those presbyters, deacons, probationer ministers and lay person who may function in the Superintendents' stead. The provisions of Standing Order 502 underline the authority of the Superintendent in terms of leadership, management and governance. The Standing order has considerable effect on the ministry of the Superintendent not only in the Plymouth and Exeter District, but also in the British Connexion. This Standing Order invests considerable authority in the Superintendent, as there is no aspect of Circuit-life which the Superintendent is not, by right, entitled to attend and chair. Although in practice, very few Superintendents would act in such a way, the ability to control and affect the agenda and life of the Circuit and individual churches is apparent.²⁰⁹

The Reverend John Wesley, in his earlier thought, before being influenced by Stillingfleet and King, had much admiration for the ecclesiastical understanding of Cyprian, the third

²⁰⁶ Atkins, *Resourcing Renewal*, p. 19.

²⁰⁷ Our Calling is a Methodist Church statement authorised by Conference in 2000.

²⁰⁸ CPD, SO 500.

²⁰⁹ CPD, Standing order 502 sub sections 1-10.

century Bishop of Carthage. He was particularly influenced by his views on episcopacy, even if he was later to modify his view:

Thus you should know that the bishop is in the Church and the Church in the bishop and if anyone be not with the bishop he is not in the Church.²¹⁰

James D.G. Dunn notes that Ignatius, like Cyprian, was clear in his appraisal of the place of the bishop as a focus for unity:

You should all follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father... Nobody must do anything that has to do anything with the Church without the bishop's approval...²¹¹

Although it is not a part of this thesis to make such an extravagant claim on behalf of the superintendency, there is a sense in which it is an *a priori* statement in British Methodism that, without the Superintendent there is no Circuit; for without such the Circuit lacks its central focal point for leadership and missional impetus. Dunn accepts the focal position of the bishop as a source of unity.²¹² In John Wesley there is the notion of him being an extraordinary *episkopos* for his extraordinary messengers. It is not an extravagant claim to view therefore, the office of Superintendent as a focal point for unity in the Circuit. This does, one has to acknowledge, depend on the gifts and graces of individual Superintendents in the exercise of leadership. Neither is it any part of this thesis, to recover the autocratic leadership model of John Wesley for the present age, as this would now be seen as anachronistic and excessively paternalistic.

Indeed, the report *What is a Superintendent?(2005)* was an inclusive and collegial expression of the desired attributes of leadership in the Superintendent. It advocated that the Superintendent had responsibility in terms of leadership:

- (a) To inspire people, lay and ordained, to be imaginative and to participate in new vision, by empowering them to share ideas and act upon them;
- (b) To encourage and enable colleagues and others to discern the work of God by stimulating theological reflection and to help people to see what they can learn from failure as well as from success;

²¹⁰ Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: OUP, 1964), p. 74.

²¹¹ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 112.

²¹² Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 112.

- (c) To provide examples of risk taking, once the realities of a particular situation have been rationally assessed and commitment has been made to accept responsibility for the results of the actions undertaken;
- (d) To ensure that colleagues enable the voice of the least and lowest to be heard and the poor and disadvantaged to be included;
- (e) To provide models of exercising power (not least with the regard to management of resources) with authority, justice and love.
- (f) To challenge colleagues and others who exercise power in other ways.²¹³

Again the authority conveyed in Standing Order 502 is revealed in paragraph 32 of the Faith and Order Committee's report in 2005. However, it may be contended that the Trinitarian aspect which has already been mentioned in this thesis, is again revealed in what may be termed as the pneumatological language of 'inspiration', 'encouragement', 'friendship' (paragraph d) and as one who 'challenges'. In the Superintendent minister there is an expectation that these gifts and graces will not only be identified but also seen in action.

Once again the question may be raised here with regards to the similarities and differences between the Superintendent and the Chair of District. As has already been noted, there is a sense that the Chair of District is the Superintendent writ large. Both the Chair and Superintendent are required to exercise 'power' to 'encourage' and 'inspire', but the Chair of District has wider influence within the Connexion and is a Methodist representative person on a national stage.²¹⁴

The British Methodist Church has identified in *What is a Superintendent? (2005)* some clear qualities of leadership. Bill Hybels, leader of the evangelical church Willow Creek, in the United States, identifies varying styles of Church leadership; visionary, directional, strategic, managerial, motivational, shepherding, team-building, reengineering and bridge-building.²¹⁵

To be directional, in Hybels' terms:

²¹³ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 32.

²¹⁴ Faith and Order, *District Chair?* pp. 104-107.

²¹⁵ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Michigan, MI: Zondervan, 2002), pp. 141-157.

The strength of this leader is his or her God-given ability to choose the right path²¹⁶

This style may have something of the Wesleyan vision and inspiration about it, but is only a part of what it is to lead. The Faith and Order Committee acknowledge, not all leaders have all these qualities, which in fairness to Hybels he acknowledges.

Steven Croft articulates a concept of *episkope* which though grounded in the Anglican tradition is applicable to the Methodist context. Indeed, Croft expressly mentions the Methodist milieu when he states:

An essential part of *episkope* ... is the guarding of the unity of the local congregation and the development of its common life and mission within the surrounding community....in the parish churches, or local churches or Methodist Circuit.²¹⁷

Croft, along with Hybels, views 'vision' as being one of the essential and dynamic forces in action in the local church and it is part of the oversight, superintendency or *episkope* of the minister. This is rendered in Methodist terms, both to the specific action of a Superintendent within the Circuit and with all presbyters in individual churches. Croft is quite correct when he identifies that *episkope* is a shared responsibility. It is not the case that if the Superintendent is viewed as the sole focal point for mission or for leadership in the Circuit and that sole responsibility lies there.

Churchwardens in an Anglican parish and Stewards in a Methodist Circuit are called to exercise *episkope* as part of their office.²¹⁸

In creating effective leadership the one charged with superintendency is charged by the Methodist church to provide 'models of exercising power.'²¹⁹ Croft argues that in the exercise of *episkope* there is more to the concept than modern management titles; true oversight comes from the tradition of the Church as it is influenced by Scripture. Models of power therefore, must be influenced by Scripture and tradition, arguably however, they must also be influenced by reason and experience. This features profoundly in the

²¹⁶ Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, p. 142.

²¹⁷ Croft, *Ministry*, p. 154.

²¹⁸ Croft, *Ministry*, pp. 170-171.

²¹⁹ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para.32.

Conference report on ecclesiology, *Called to Love and Praise (1999)*²²⁰ This means that there is a place for ecclesial and secular understandings of oversight to be exercised in the Church, which is complimentary and not in conflict with the ethos and revered tenets of the Church.

Stephen Pattinson however, would take a different view:

One of the threats to Christian...identity and distinctiveness could be its uncritical acceptance of managerial theories and methods....It is essential, then, that those who look to management as a solution to the practical problems of churches should engage in rigorous critical examination of its theories and practices.....²²¹

Pattinson is critical of unthinking and uncritical acceptance of secular management approaches to Church issues of governance and leadership. The Methodist academic Richard Hindmarsh draws on Pattinson's critique and, in part, is acceptant of it. However, he is critical of Pattinson's view that 'much of modern managerial practice consists of unproven and unprovable faith assumptions'. Hindmarsh articulates a view that there is much empirical evidence which would suggest otherwise.²²² Hindmarsh articulates the view that management theory has much to say to the Church and the Methodist Church in particular.

Croft, Pattinson and Hindmarsh advance ideas which are not mutually exclusive, but complimentary. They offer critically informed views of leadership, *episkope*, oversight and management, which derive from their milieu.

As one considers how power is exercised, it is interesting to note how both the Church of England and the Methodist Church approached the question of oversight and *episkope* in *An Anglican - Methodist Covenant*.²²³ Both Churches accepted that the universal Church is:

a fellowship (*koinonia*) of those baptised into the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ. All baptised believers share in the threefold messianic office of Christ who is

²²⁰ Faith and Order *Called to Love and Praise* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), pp. 1-33.

²²¹ Stephen Pattinson, *The Faith of the Managers* (London: Cassell, 1997), pp. 165-166.

²²² Jane Craske and Clive Marsh (ed), *Methodism and the Future: Facing the Challenge* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 82-83.

²²³ *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2001), pp. 54-59.

Prophet, Priest and King. Participating in his royal priesthood, Christians share in the governance of his Church.²²⁴

This, in line with Croft, sets out a reasonable formula which incorporates both a scriptural grounding and a considered reading of Church tradition. *The Covenant* explores how oversight may then be observed and considered as both personal and collegial. Collegially, oversight was seen in terms of upholding biblical foundations, as being partners in the Gospel (Philippians 1:5) and as sharing in one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) In terms of the Methodist Church personal oversight was exercised by:

Ministers in local churches, Circuit Superintendents, District Chairs and the President of the Methodist Conference as its representative. The office of all these persons is recognised as conferring authority and influence. They are respected as representative persons. It is important to the Methodist ethos that personal *episkope* should wherever possible be exercised in a collegial or communal context.²²⁵

The personal and collegial exercise of power is recognised by those ministers who were interviewed in person during the field-work section of this thesis. All four ministers had made reference to the term 'bridge-builder' as part of their oversight of the Circuit. It is a feature of the personal oversight the Superintendent, thus minister B states:

It's an oversight thing, getting to know and being known by the people in the churches and looking after the staff.....being missional.

The 'bridge-builder' is recognised by Hybels as a key aspect of an effective leader, not simply in the church setting but also in industry.²²⁶ The concept of the Superintendent as being a 'bridge' is a significant appreciation of the role of Superintendent, by those interviewed for this thesis. It means that the Superintendents' personal *episkope* and the effect of how the Superintendent exercises power and authority, is one which has profound effects. For instance, it may be in that oversight the Superintendent, as 'bridge,' interprets for the local churches and Circuit, the mind of Conference or the policy of the District.

²²⁴ Anglican-Methodist Covenant, p. 54.

²²⁵ Anglican-Methodist Covenant, p. 57.

²²⁶ Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, pp. 154-156.

However, one conceives of the Superintendent, there is an assumption made by the British Methodist Conference and, anecdotally, in the Circuits, that the Superintendent will be a leader. *What is a Superintendent (2005)* states that Superintendents:

Have a responsibility to help circuits to create strategy and policy for their worship and mission, witness and holiness. Methodism arose as a missionary movement...His vision was of restoration and renewal of things through grace...Superintendents should similarly be women and men of vision with the capacity to enable and inspire staff, the stewards and the churches of the circuit to look beyond the institution to the kingdom of God.

Minister A commented in regard to leadership that:

It is almost instinctive really, when one has a good leader in a Superintendent, it goes unnoticed; when one has a poor Superintendent, it's very obvious.

4.4 Management, Leadership and Oversight

In terms of management, the Superintendent has considerable responsibilities. The Assistants of the early Methodist movement were charged by Wesley to undertake administrative, supervisory and oversight duties, as has already been noted in this thesis.²²⁷ This continues in the work of the contemporary Superintendent. Those surveyed in the Plymouth and Exeter District overwhelmingly agreed that a main role of their superintendency was in administrative duties and concerned with oversight.²²⁸

Management of probationer minister, student minister and colleagues was seen as a significant area of the Superintendents' supervisory role.

The Faith and Order Committee stated that in terms of management the Superintendent would:

Ensure that after governance decisions are made by the relevant bodies (ie the Circuit Meeting) appropriate people, systems and strategies are set in place to enact them and proper processes established to review them.

To ensure human, financial, capital...and technological resources are deployed to fulfil the particular objectives set for the implementation of those strategies;

To help any other presbyter appointed to and stationed in the Circuit to fulfil their role to the best of their ability;

²²⁷ Rupert Davies, A.Raymond George, Gordon Rupp, *A History of Methodism*, p. 70.

²²⁸ Table 6 and Questions 10 and 11, Chapter 3 in this thesis above.

To ensure any probationers...are appropriately inducted into the exercise of a public ministry and properly supervised, supported and assessed;

To ensure that colleagues are appropriately and adequately supervised in their professional practice²²⁹

The managerial qualities required by the Superintendent, may be totally alien to the minister and one for which the Church has failed to provide adequate training. Previous life experience may contribute to the adequate provision by the Superintendent to various aspects of managerial functions. However, this may be nothing more than a happy coincidence. It is the responsibility of the Connexion to ensure that in demanding of those charged with oversight on behalf of the British Methodist Conference, that there is adequate provision in terms of training and expertise. It would be an indictment on the Methodist Church, if it required of its Superintendents, qualities of leadership which involve a degree of managerial and governance acumen and then failed to support, supervise and assess the quality of that provision. If the managerial focus of the Superintendents' ministry was too onerous or far removed from the concept of being a presbyter, then it may prove deleterious to the recruitment and retention of Superintendents. It must be remembered that Superintendents are not selected, but show a 'willingness' to become Superintendents. This was seen as a deficiency by the Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District, with 61% of the Superintendents believing that selection was a better means of recruiting Superintendents.

Hindmarsh's views have already been offered in this thesis, but again it is worth noting his critique of Methodism's approach to management and structure of the British Methodist Church. Writing prior to the report of 2005, he was clear Wesley offered an example of leadership and management, but not necessarily a good one.²³⁰ He saw Wesley's management style as being bossy, meddling, controlling and 'derogatory'. Wesley was an 'interfering manager' who did not allow his Assistants and Superintendents much autonomy. However, Carter offers a riposte to this criticism as he notes the '*esprit de corps* fostered by their common discipline'; this Carter attributes to Wesley's authentic and extraordinary ability as a leader.²³¹

²²⁹ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 32.

²³⁰ Craske and Marsh, *Methodism*, p. 85.

²³¹ Carter, *Love*, p. 29.

Hindmarsh sees the superintendency as having a powerful strategic potential:

It is Circuit Superintendents, with their power over almost every detail of Circuit activity, who are in a constitutional position to be the modern Wesleys. Whether they are or not is of course up to them.²³²

Hindmarsh is also in sympathy with the view prevalent in the nineteenth century Methodism that ‘there should not be another king in Israel’, that is, an end to the autocracy of John Wesley.²³³

Avery Dulles offers a model of Church leadership, alien to Hindmarsh’s view of Methodism, which since the autocratic rule of John Wesley and which, would not find much sympathy with the current Methodist condition and practice, when he states:

The Church is not conceived as a democratic or representative society, but as one in which the fullness of power is concentrated in the hands of a ruling class that perpetuates itself by co-option.²³⁴

Indeed, the Superintendents found that any notion of grooming presbyters early in their ministerial vocation, as having potential and being ‘fast-tracked’ into the superintendency, was not a model they wished to pursue.²³⁵ The writer Robin Greenwood, critiqued the appointment of bishops in the *Church Times* as being ‘an elite appointed by an elite’.²³⁶ This form of selection of leadership appears to be a far cry from the open and accountable means of selection and effective deployment of ministry, envisaged in the British Methodist Conference report *Releasing Ministers for Ministry (2003)*²³⁷ The Conference report was advocating transparency, as much in the selection of Superintendents, as with the selection of presbyters more generally.

Nevertheless, Grundy is surely right when he advocates, that in terms of developing Church leaders and in the provision of oversight, those leading the Church should be

²³² Craske & Marsh, *Methodism*, p. 85.

²³³ Craske & Marsh, *Methodism*, p. 73.

²³⁴ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1989), p. 38.

²³⁵ Table 7 and Question 12 of this thesis above.

²³⁶ Malcolm Grundy, *Leadership and Oversight: New Models of Episcopal Ministry* (London: Mowbray, 2011), p. 72 citing *The Church Times*, 2nd November 2002.

²³⁷ Faith and Order Committee, *Releasing Ministers for Ministry* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2003), p. 455.

aware of those with particular ability. Grundy, speaking from and into an Anglican perspective, does not see ambition for personal advancement as incoherent with a vocation, even if it should not be overt.²³⁸ The Methodist concept of ‘willingness’ to be a Superintendent, may well be nothing more than a veneer, for the ambitious.

Transparency in determining future leaders of the Church, appears to be an objective of the British Methodist Church and in Anglicanism. The Baroness Perry report *Working with the Spirit: Choosing Diocesan Bishops* makes that aim clear.²³⁹ Again Grundy is apposite when he identifies that transparency is often necessarily masked by the need for confidentiality. This insight applies as much to the British Methodist Church as to the Church of England.

The view of the Methodist Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District with regard to identification of potential Superintendents, is not one which Joseph Pilling would lay much credence.²⁴⁰ Pilling searches for a systematic approach in both identifying and developing the potential of those deemed likely to be future leaders in the Church. It is, arguably, a weakness in the position of the Plymouth and Exeter District Superintendents’ thinking on this issue. For those in industry, the Law, the military or police, the potential to be a future leader is a feature of internal progression and continual assessment. Being a presbyter may not be seen as a career, but as a vocation. This may hold a considerable influence on the thinking of those consulted in the Plymouth and Exeter District.

The role of the Superintendent as a leader of the Circuit and having devolved oversight from the British Methodist Conference, is a key understanding for the office of Superintendent. In comparing *episkope* in the Church of England with that of oversight in the Methodist Church, Grundy questions whether or not *episkope* is the same as oversight, through the insight of Colin Podmore, an Anglican theologian.²⁴¹ Podmore argues that a bishop is not simply a superintendent of the clergy or solely having a ministry of oversight; but close bound and more fundamental still to the understanding of a bishop, is that of being a focus for unity and a successor to the apostles.

²³⁸ Grundy, *Leadership and Oversight*, p. 75.

²³⁹ Baroness Perry, *Working with the Spirit: Choosing Diocesan Bishops* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001), p. 1405.

²⁴⁰ Joseph Pilling, *Talent and Calling*, (London: Church House Publishing, 2007), p. 24.

²⁴¹ Grundy, *Leadership and Oversight*, p. 85.

The Methodist Superintendent is not seen as being in any form of historic succession with the apostles, in the sense which Podmore speaks. In that sense, the Superintendent, in Podmore's, terms could never be a bishop. However, as Grundy has rightly ventured, this is to conflate superintendency. Oversight is greater than superintending a church or clergy, but *episkope* is a shared and corporate idea which finds its meaning in an Office and more widely still in the Church community.²⁴²

The spectre of E.W.Thompson's Apostolic-Man, has no place in the argument as to whether the Superintendent could be seen as being a Wesleyan form of apostolic succession. Kent had dismissed the concept, as the Methodist Conference of 1791 had repudiated Wesley's ordinations and any concept of succession died in that Conference.²⁴³

Kent may not be entirely correct in his analysis of the situation however. John Bowmer agrees that Wesley, after 1746, ceased to hold any belief in the traditional view of Apostolic succession, in it being an 'uninterrupted succession.' The ordination by Wesley of John Pawson in 1786 assisted by the Anglican clergymen Dr Coke, and the Church of England priests Creighton and Peard was an example of Wesley's pragmatic scriptural-episcopacy. Following Wesley's death and despite of the Methodist Conference's decree in 1791, there were many ordinations, which gave rise to the impression of a Methodist succession.²⁴⁴

The far-reaching decision of that early Methodist Conference speaks to the superintendency of the present age. The office of Superintendent is confined to a span and is not enduring. A Superintendent minister on transfer to a new station may not retain the title. The office of Superintendent is confined to the Circuits and is not found in the ranks of those who hold Connexional office. The authority to ordain is not in the hands of the superintendency, but in that laying-on of hands by the President of the British Methodist Conference²⁴⁵. There is therefore, a succession of sorts, from the Wesleyan Methodist movement to the present age. It is not however, an uninterrupted apostolic succession observed by those of other traditions.

²⁴² Grundy, *Leadership and Oversight*, p. 86.

²⁴³ Kent, *Disunity*, p. 177.

²⁴⁴ John C Bowmer, *The Sacraments of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre Press, 1951), p. 158-161.

²⁴⁵ CPD, *Standing Order 728A(5)(c)*

However, the system does demand a continued succession of Superintendents which is a functional succession, but which delivers many features of the historic episcopacy. Shier-Jones may have seen this as a ‘confusing’ element in how Methodists perceive representative ministry, imbuing it with ontological elements when only function necessity is required.²⁴⁶ However, if Burdon is right, Wesley never intended there to be an ontological understanding of Methodist superintendency, it was a ‘ministerial conveyance’, a commissioning to a function.²⁴⁷

In the Methodist Conference report *What sort of bishops?: Models of Episcopacy and British Methodism* (2002) there is wide consideration of how the concept of being a ‘bishop for life.’²⁴⁸ The idea was seen as possible and that various officers of the Methodist Church might be made life-long bishops, such as the President and Past-Presidents of Conference, Connexional officers, Chairs of District and Superintendents. Making the President a bishop aligned a sense of historic succession with the Conference, but implied too much identification with an individual. Making bishops out of Past-Presidents and Connexional officers had merit in locating episcopacy with the life of the Connexion, but could create an *ad hoc* episcopacy. Superintendents seemed to best fit Methodist practice and theology, but was thought to be ecumenically insensitive, demanded structural change on a major scale and would create too many bishops.²⁴⁹ This report was not adopted by Conference and represented a view and not a final endorsement and definitive statement of British Methodism. It is however, significant that question was raised and is still alive in Methodist thinking and was clearly so in the work of Shier Jones.²⁵⁰

Minister B, during the interview phase of the survey, asserted that there was little profit to be had in linking the superintendency of the Wesleyan era, to the contemporary praxis of the office. In certain respects he is correct, the twenty-first century is vastly different to the eighteenth century. Carter makes it clear that the Wesleyan concern for the doctrine of the ministry was focussed on Wesley’s adherence to Scripture and to pragmatic concern for

²⁴⁶ Shier-Jones, *A Work*, pp. 262-264.

²⁴⁷ Burdon, *Authority and Order*, p. 7.

²⁴⁸ Faith and Order Committee, *What sort of bishops?: Models of Episcopacy and British Methodism* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2002), para. 51-81.

²⁴⁹ Faith and Order, *What sort of bishops?* para. 69.

²⁵⁰ Shier Jones, *A Work*, pp. 262-264.

pastoral care of the Methodist people.²⁵¹ The concept of ‘watching-over’ and being ‘watched-over’ is still alive in the function of the Superintendent minister to this day. That sense of oversight is acknowledged by Carter in the setting of the Class Meeting²⁵². David Lowes Watson sees early Methodist ecclesiology as having a ‘mutual accountability’.²⁵³ This too is reflected in the mutual accountability that presbyters and Superintendents hold together in both personal and collegial *episkope* in the current praxis of ministry²⁵⁴. Watson views the Class Meeting as a feature of mutual oversight which is a hallmark of Methodist identity and therefore comments:

Methodists week by week gave account of their progress in grace and discipleship....In the class meeting experiences joyous, painful, salutary alike...were shared that others might be encouraged, warned and enlightened.²⁵⁵

The collegial style of ministry in the twenty-first century British Methodist Church, is greatly different to the more autocratic style of the Wesleyan age. Carter identifies an important Wesleyan concept of the ministry which would not now hold. Carter sees in Joseph Benson, a promulgation of later Wesleyan doctrine on the ministry, when it is stated:

Ministers are not servants of the people. Christ has entrusted the Church....not to the people but to the ministers of the Gospel....they are not at liberty to give up the steering or government into other or less skilful hands.²⁵⁶

This perpetuates a view which was common among Methodists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century²⁵⁷. Its scriptural basis is found in Hebrews 13 verse 17:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing, for that would be harmful to you.

²⁵¹ Carter, *Love*, p. 40.

²⁵² Carter, *Love*, p. 15.

²⁵³ D. Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting, its Origins and Significance* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1985) cited in Carter *Love*, p. 9.

²⁵⁴ CPD, *Standing Order 523*. The Conference report *The Nature of Oversight* paragraphs 1.5 to 1.15 have the concept of being ‘watched over in love at its heart.

²⁵⁵ Watson, *Class Meeting*, p. 9.

²⁵⁶ Carter, *Love*, pp. 40-41.

²⁵⁷ Carter, *Love*, pp. 40-41.

Hindmarsh as has been previously noted, presents a concept of leaders as being servants.²⁵⁸ This offers a direct critique of earlier Methodist views of leadership, as it appertained to ministers. This is not the sentiment, intention or flavour of the Deed of Union and section 4 of the Methodist Church Act 1976, which has a lasting and significant effect on the superintendency.

Christ's ministers in the church are stewards in the household of God and shepherds of his flock. Some are called and ordained to this occupation as presbyters and deacons. Presbyters have a principal and directing part in these great duties but they hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people....The Methodist Church holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers that no priesthood exists which belongs to an exclusive class or order of persons...the principle of representative selection is recognised.²⁵⁹

The Methodist Church Act 1976 does not identify the Superintendent as a particular identity within the presbyteral ministry, but as has been advanced in this thesis, the Superintendent is a clearly identifiable office since the time of Wesley. The Minutes of the Methodist Conference of 1796 identify the formal title 'Superintendent of the Circuit' and Mather had been ordained as a Superintendent, by Wesley, for work in Britain.²⁶⁰ The Superintendent in its contemporary setting is multi-faceted and, in a sense, still exhibits Wesley's inspired pragmatism. The role of the Superintendent is therefore, deeply involved with leadership and also, 'executive management'.²⁶¹

4.5 What sort of bishops?

It is a contention in this thesis that the Superintendent, is a focus for mission and unity in the life of the Circuit. The British Methodist Conference report *What Sort of Bishops?* does not argue in favour of Superintendents becoming bishops, but as previously evidenced, considered presbyters becoming bishops and bishops for life.²⁶² The report offered some insight as to what a Methodist bishop in Britain may be. Thus the following characteristics were observed:

²⁵⁸ Craske & Marsh, *Methodism*, p. 83

²⁵⁹ CPD, *Part 1 Deed of Union*, p. 213.

²⁶⁰ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 8.

²⁶¹ Faith and Order, *What is a Superintendent?* para. 18.

²⁶² Above pp. 99-100.

Lead by example in the search for a contemporary way of holy living.

Be a presbyter.

Be a bishop for life.

Take their place within a version of the three-fold order of ministry.

Exercise personal episcopate which might vary according to various situations.

Be a leader in mission and ministry.

Need to possess authority appropriate to expected responsibilities.

Be expected to engage in the promulgation of the Christian faith.²⁶³

This recommended course would have a significant effect on oversight in the Methodist Church in Britain. It would have meant that for the first time the Methodist episcopacy would be a life-long appointment and designation. This would have married well into the Anglican form of episcopacy and this too would have chimed with the Anglican-Methodist Covenant. A significant departure at that time, was the Office would be open to women, which it is not as yet in the Church of England.

The question for British Methodism is still whether or not to adopt episcopacy into the current polity of the Church. *What sort of bishops?* is a discussion document and did not identify clearly what scheme of bishops should be incorporated into the life of the British Methodism. It would have been a defect in British Methodist episcopacy, in the traditional sense of a bishop, if the Methodist version had no right or a restricted authority to ordain. For the most part, all the elements that Grundy sees as both explicit and implicit in Anglican episcopacy, are evident in the Methodist construct.²⁶⁴

It is a fact that British Methodism has no bishops. The British Methodist Church receives its oversight from the Conference and the devolved oversight of Synods, Circuit Meetings and Councils. Its leadership is offered by both lay and ordained. There is a mutual accountability of oversight expressed in the connectedness of the Church institutions, of

²⁶³ Faith and Order, *What sort of bishops?* para. 47

²⁶⁴ Grundy, *Leadership and Oversight*, p. 71.

which the superintendency is of very significant importance. Carter and others argue, and I believe correctly, that:

Its (methodism's) connexional system as having a rather better basis in the practice of the apostolic Church than rival systems of church government claiming an exclusively apostolic basis.²⁶⁵

It may be argued that British Methodism has little need of a permanent three-fold episcopate, for the focal, missional and uniting elements of *episkope* are clearly identifiable in the leadership and oversight of the Superintendent.

What is a Superintendent? (2005) also made it clear that governance was a significant feature of the leadership and management function of the superintendency. The vital work of strategic implementation, strategy development, financial good practice, stewardship of buildings, the formation of good employment practice, ministerial development, safeguarding and policy development, feature highly in the work-load of a Superintendent. These elements of *episkope* come to the very heart of the administrative function of contemporary superintendency. It is in one sense, a continuation of the oversight implicit in the work of Wesley's Assistants, but it is also far more complex than any simplistic comparison could or should make.

One might raise the question as to how leadership, oversight and *episkope* are connected. In one sense it is in the translation of the word *episcopus*, for this denotes elements of leadership and oversight which is translatable into contemporary language and in contemporary terms as being one with authority, power, responsibility; the leader, the managing director. However, there is something far more profound when one considers *episkope* in terms of being a focus, imbued with a sense of the holy which stands over and against, but which is not dismissive of contemporary management interpretation. Being a focus is being a focus for mission and for unity, which consequently becomes identified with the *Missio Dei*, whereby the Church finds a focus for governance, management and mutual empowerment for the Church and wider community of faith. In Methodist terms, this is not seen as identifiable with an individual person, but in the pragmatic functionality of an office which, nevertheless, has the capacity to be shaped by the gifts of those willing to be Superintendents, but not in any ontic sense. This is where the connection is found between *episkope*, oversight and leadership.

²⁶⁵ Carter, *Love*, p. vii.

Standing Order 515(2) alleviates the burden from the Superintendents' shoulders by widening their responsibility to other people. However, the criticism of the Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District is, that the level of training, for the multi-faceted and complex nature of superintendency of the present age is inadequate. Too often, Superintendents have to locate, source and formulate their own training, as Methodist Church provision is absent. It has also to be acknowledged that those Superintendents surveyed believed training to be better now than in the past, particularly with regard to supervision and safeguarding.

An aspect of the research question is the 'implication for mission in the Plymouth and Exeter District'. This sets the historic superintendency in the context of current mission and praxis. During the interview stage of the survey, in questions 8 and 9, changes to Circuits and the future role of the Superintendent were discussed. Fewer Circuits were seen as having the potential to release ministers from superintendency to exercise their ministry as presbyters. However, there was real concern that for those remaining as Superintendents, would become over-stretched and ill-equipped for their extended role. If, Connexionally, there was an expectation for the Superintendents to be increasingly oriented towards leadership, management and governance, then adequate training and support had to be provided. If the Superintendent is to be a focus for mission, unity and service and the Superintendent is to be the 'ruling server', effective systems need to be created in selection and development of the role.

Within the Plymouth and Exeter District the Superintendents compose a significant nexus. The role of Superintendent is a complex mix of oversight, leadership, governance, pastoral care and management. The Superintendent has both to combine the width of ministry of the general practitioner with the knowledge of a specialist. Croft designates this manner of working as holding a portfolio.²⁶⁶ Croft is correct in this analysis, for the role of *episkope* holds a broad remit of responsibility. The implications for Superintendents within the Plymouth and Exeter District is that without sufficient training and resourcing, the workload of that portfolio may be excessive. If the British Methodist Church moves towards having fewer Circuits and ending the role of the District, in favour of regional governance, support and direction then this criticism has greater significance for the remaining Superintendents of larger Circuits.

²⁶⁶ Croft, *Ministry*, pp. 189-190.

In *The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission* Ralph Winter introduced two concepts of modality and sodality, into the missiological perspective of the Universal Church.²⁶⁷ The *modal church* was postulated as the prevailing, organised, structured church, for instance, a parish church or a local Methodist church. Winter uses *Sodality* to depict a missional grouping, using the Latin word *Sodalis*, as its derivative root. Roman Catholic religious Orders such as the Franciscans or the Jesuits would fall within the scope of this term. So too the early Methodist bands and classes, the Anglican Church Mission Society and in contemporary terms, the Northumbria Community and the Iona Community fall within its meaning. Likewise, churches which pioneer mission would reflect a break from the *modal church* to a *sodal community*. Winter may have given the impression that the reality of Church was either one or other, either-or. However, it is not as clear as Winter may have deemed it to be, for churches may tend to exhibit both elements within a single church, but almost inevitably across a Circuit.

The implication for the Superintendents of the Plymouth and Exeter District, if Winter's hypothesis is correct, is to determine styles of ministry accordingly in both Circuit ministers and churches. It is also incumbent upon the Superintendent to identify the reality of being inclined to one or other category, or finding sympathy and a synergy with both. There may be a creative dynamism between both categories which is not dysfunctional or liable to create a polarity of category claims.

The implications of the Superintendent being an effective 'bridge', where the Superintendent knows and is known by those in the Circuit, then shows the significance of the statement. The discerning mind of the Superintendent who acts with wisdom in that 'knowing' has important implications for governance, leadership and as being a functional sign of unity.

Whether one refers to the Superintendents as a nexus or as a *sodality* or both, the Superintendent has the authority to influence the mission of the Circuit. The work of the early Assistants for the Revd John Wesley and the first Superintendents destined for the American work, was intensely missional. There is a legacy from the Wesleyan paradigm to the current practice of superintendency, which has as its focus, mission. This stands in the tradition of the Great Commission to the Apostles (Matthew.28:18-20) which was not lost on the Methodist movement. Indeed, the early Methodist movement, it may be

²⁶⁷ <http://www.frontlinemissionfellowship.org/uploads>. Accessed 1.6.14.

contended, is a *sodal* paradigm of a mission grouping within a *modal* eighteenth century example of the Church in England.

There is a real challenge to the work of superintendency which stems from Winter's thesis. It is whether or not the superintendency is so much a part of what A.R. George referred to as an 'institution,' that the superintendency has become fixed in maintenance mode.²⁶⁸ The challenge which *sodal* orientation brings is that the Superintendents' oversight, leadership and management has a prime focus. There is however, an inherent weakness in the present formulation of how Superintendents accomplish their role, in that they are dispersed and the connectedness, which is an alleged part of connexionalism, is weak. There is a tendency towards insularity and a lack of inter-circuit cooperation. There is therefore, a distinct lack of cohesion in how Superintendents support, encourage and mission together. The Superintendents' collegial oversight is minimal and any New Testament sense of being 'watched-over in love' (Acts 20:28) is deficient or minimal. This both weakens and negates the possibility of the superintendency being a catalyst for mission and service, which is dynamic part of its heritage and which should have important implications for the contemporary superintendency.

Haley does not offer an explicit critique of Winter, however, there are elements of Haley's project which do offer a sustainable critique. *Sodality* may be a feature of a church which has a 'like-mindedness' to it in terms of theology and ecclesiology. Haley observes this is so often not the case in Methodism where theological perspectives, multiple pastorates and personal considerations, mitigate against such a response.²⁶⁹ Haley is critical of the Methodist system of multiple pastorates and the perception in the minds of younger ministers that the system is inherently deleterious to mission.²⁷⁰ Haley presents, in his terms, the varied reasons why a *modal* sense of Church could be and is maintained and where geography and sense of community features highly. Once again Haley describes the implicit failings of the churches in terms of mission and this may be shown as a failure of *sodality* to manifest itself and thrive in so many Methodist situations.²⁷¹

Carter's observation concerning the '*esprit de corps*' among Wesley's early preachers and ministers, is perhaps, a valid criticism of the present situation within the Plymouth and

²⁶⁸ George, *Superintendency*, p. 79.

²⁶⁹ Haley & Francis, *British Methodism*, pp. 186-188.

²⁷⁰ Haley & Francis, *British Methodism*, p. 248.

²⁷¹ Haley & Francis, *British Methodism*, pp. 248-249.

Exeter District as far as superintendency is concerned. Far from being a powerful group as envisaged by Hindmarsh, a nexus; the superintendency has become a pale imitation of its potential. Its limitations are in part caused by the isolation of the office, being overburdened with administrative tasks and a perceived lack of confidence in superintendency being seen as a powerful office for mission, oversight and unity. This stands in stark contrast to Campbell's assessment, which may, in part, be applied to that of the Assistants and the coming superintendency:

Early Methodism is a study in brilliant leadership, an administration for growth.²⁷²

In the light of Campbell's comment on early Methodism in regard to leadership, it is worth considering the similarities and difference between a bishop and a superintendent, in particular regard to their leadership and authority. Anglican or Roman Catholic bishops may, through long standing tradition, embody signs of unity, authority and being a focus for mission. This may not readily be seen in the office of Superintendent, but what Campbell identifies is, it is contended, still part of the hallmarks of the potential of superintendency. However, it is possible that the functional nature of the superintendency; its lack of permanence, contrasts poorly with the ontological status of the historic episcopate, which may tend to diminish its authority. Indeed, status may be a significant factor in the difference between the title bishop and Superintendent in the British Methodism, as there may be a latent suspicion in regard to clerical hierarchy and clerical authority within British Methodism.²⁷³ In turn this may diminish the office of Superintendent and subtly impair its effectiveness in terms of authority and being a sign of unity.

Campbell makes an astute observation when he notes that:

Ministry in Methodism has always been characterised more by emphasis on practicality and results than by theology and tradition...Over the course of more than two hundred years, there has been a perpetual tension within Methodism in

²⁷² Campbell, 'Ministry', p.265.

²⁷³ David M. Chapman, 'Methodism and the Future of Ecumenism' in William Abraham & James E. Kirby (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 460-461.

regard to the meaning of ordination...and the various churches that make up the worldwide Methodist family.²⁷⁴

John Wesley was an ordained priest of the Church of England. His ordination as a priest is permanent, unless he was put out of the priesthood. Wesley created his Assistants and his Superintendents with no such sense of permanence. They appeared through his sense of missional order, exhibited in the functional pragmatism of Wesley's commissioning for a purpose and for such time as Wesley alone saw fit. Overtime, the sense of vocation and being 'set apart' does offer a sense of permanence to the Methodist presbyter, but one can understand Campbell's 'tension' when applied to Methodist ordination. And yet, as Chapman has observed, there is a reluctance in Methodism in Britain to invest too much power in any one individual. This may stem from the early Methodist memory of John Wesley's autocratic rule, the influence of democratic movements in Methodism in the nineteenth century and the allegiance to a 'corporate and distributed' form of authority.²⁷⁵ It may also reflect a fear in the weakness of the individual and the individual abuse of authority. However, this fails to recognise the frailty of corporate bodies.

More significantly, is the differentiation between a 'Royal Priesthood' which embraces an individualistic and corporate sense of priesthood and the priestly nature of ordained ministry.²⁷⁶ Again this reflects on the differentiation between the permanent and priestly nature of ordained ministry, which John Wesley held as an ordained priest of the Church of England and the transient status of ministry in the early Methodist movement. Controversially, it may be part of the Wesleyan legacy, that because Wesley never intended to separate from Anglicanism, British Methodism still has an ambiguity about ordination, which in turn produces a lack of confidence in naming a Superintendent a bishop. Add to that the 'fierce resistance to associating the ordained ministry with any form of priesthood that does not belong to all Christians' tends to make any acceptance and reception of the threefold order of ministry into British Methodism less than likely.²⁷⁷

Whereas a bishop may ordain, no such authority resides with a Superintendent, unless that Superintendent is either President of the Methodist Conference or a Past-President. This represents an example of personal, collegial and communal *episkope* which may be

²⁷⁴ Campbell, 'Ministry', p. 262.

²⁷⁵ Chapman, 'Ecumenism', p. 461.

²⁷⁶ Chapman, 'Ecumenism', p. 461.

²⁷⁷ Chapman, 'Ecumenism', p. 461.

interpreted as a threefold ordering of ministry making connection between the Conference, the presbyters and the Methodist community, indeed, the Connexion.

So too, in terms of governance, a bishop may lead the Diocesan Synod. The Superintendent may chair the Circuit Meeting, but a Chair of District leads the District Synod. There are similarities in office but also marked divergence. It is a pretence if one considers a Superintendent as being on a par with a bishop of the Church of England or the Catholic churches. As a scriptural *episkopos* there are similarities and even perceived equality in status, but history, tradition and what may be termed, the evolutionary experience of the Methodist movement into the Methodist Church, has created an ecclesial and theological divergence that cannot be easily reconciled.

4.6 Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the origins of the superintendency in British Methodism. It has examined the role of the contemporary superintendency in the Plymouth and Exeter District and its implications for mission.

Chapter One explores some of the influences on Wesley's thought and churchmanship, in terms of his family, his social milieu and the impact of his education at Oxford University. Understanding Wesley's hinterland is significant, for the influence of those such as bishop Taylor, Thomas a Kempis, William Law, Clayton, King and Stillingfleet have considerable impact on Wesley. Thus King and Stillingfleet's contentions have an explicit effect on Wesley's conduct in relation to the later superintendency, which continue to have implications for the contemporary expression of the office. The Chapter also describes and reflects upon Wesley's conflict with the Church of England as he moves from Anglican orthodoxy, with regard to authority and oversight, to one of schismatic potential.

Chapter Two engages with the development of the superintendency through the role of Reverend Wesley's Assistants who are the forerunners of the superintendency. This is significant to the travel of this thesis, as it is a contention of the thesis that there is an enduring relationship with contemporary superintendency, in terms of mission, governance and leadership.

In Chapter Three, the thesis engages with Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District of the British Methodist Church. The Superintendents were invited to respond to a

questionnaire and four of the Superintendents were subject to further detailed interview. The purpose of the questionnaire and interviews was to answer the research question by means of Qualitative Research methods.

Finally Chapter Four presents the implications for contemporary superintendency in the Plymouth and Exeter District, through engagement with the national British Methodist Church and its governing Conference. The chapter engages with the concept of *episkope* in terms of oversight and leadership, introducing the insight of contemporary Anglicanism and historic Methodism.

The research question demands to know what is a Superintendent minister for John Wesley and for today and its implications for the mission of the Plymouth and Exeter District. This thesis has set out to determine that. Therefore, the thesis has shown in Chapter One that Wesley began to promote a serious minded religious life within the Church of England. Wesley's Assistants were there to 'feed and guide, teach and govern the flock'. This has a serious implication for Wesley's Superintendents and it has an enduring impact, in my submission, for the work of contemporary superintendency. The pastoral and governance implications are still alive in the Conference report *What is a Superintendent? (2005)* It is also a finding of this chapter that Wesley is intensely pragmatic and pragmatism is a feature of Wesley's early Methodist movement.

One of the more significant findings of this thesis is observed in chapter two. It is that for Wesley when he does 'ordain' those to become Superintendents, both at home and in America, that such ordination is, as Burdon suggests, a 'ministerial conveyance' and not an ontological act conferring priestly rights. The continuing implication is that Superintendents are 'commissioned' for their work and it has no ontological implications. It is a functional office.

Another significant finding of this thesis is, that notwithstanding the integrity of Wesley's position, as a priest of the Church of England, he had no authority to ordain. His reading of King and Stillingfleet, ignored the later retraction of their assertions, and he continued in error. The natural corollary was that a new independent Church should be formed, where ordination could be valid. This however, was perhaps, too much for Wesley to contemplate.

The questionnaire and interviews provide an original piece of research in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The analysis of the questionnaire and interviews determined a range of views pertinent to the contemporary praxis of superintendency and its implications for mission. Almost 70% of Superintendents saw their role as having an oversight function and 61% as that of administration. 92% saw their role as promoting circuit mission which has a direct implication for the research question. Although almost 70% of those surveyed believed the office of Superintendent needed to change, none thought it needed to be abolished. There was significant dissatisfaction with training and how selection for the superintendency was achieved.

The Interviews portrayed the Superintendent as a leader, had oversight and was a focus for mission which are key features of the thrust of this thesis. It was a disturbing finding of this thesis that two Superintendents had very little or no knowledge of the origins of the superintendency. By implication, this may mean that the historic origins have little or no relevance to contemporary praxis. One of the interviewees suggested that this was true, as any recovery of the historic superintendency was anachronistic and of little contemporary value. One Superintendent felt there was a link which should be acknowledged.

Chapter Three identifies areas of concern particularly with regard the selection, retention and training of Superintendents. It also reflects an underlying loyalty to the office and its potential as a means for unity and focus for mission. This is a significant research finding and the tools of Qualitative Research were utilized to such effect. The work of Winter and Hindmarsh contributed to the findings, particularly Winter's concept of sodality. Sodality enhances the understanding of the potential of superintendency and is noteworthy in this thesis. This chapter increases our knowledge of the praxis and missional implications of superintendency.

It has to be noted however, that this chapter also has significant flaws. The survey is narrow and restricted to one District. There were few female participants, which limited the study, though this was out of the researcher's control. The questionnaire and interviews failed to elicit any opinion on the 'extraordinary' nature of the ministry of those early Assistants and the 'extraordinariness' of contemporary superintendency. Omitting to establish a link or otherwise is a failing, as it reduces room for comment, critique and analysis. These limitations means that the study findings need to be interpreted cautiously.

This thesis has added to the body of literature concerning Wesleyan studies and the early Methodist movement. The research extends our knowledge and understanding of the origins of Methodist superintendency and the means by which authority and mission was maintained. By engaging with the scholarship of those such as Heitzenrater, Outler, Burdon and Rack this thesis confirms previous findings. Through critical engagement with those such as Atkins, Carter, Croft, Shier-Jones and Kent the research question is engaged more deeply and field-work contributed additional new evidence, concerning the implication for the missional purpose of superintendency in terms of oversight, leadership and governance.

The research has several practical applications. Chapter Three will inform decision making within the Plymouth and Exeter District in relation to its training of Superintendents and to a debate on how Superintendents are stationed. It will also contribute to the British Methodist Conference work 'Larger than Circuits'. The functional utility of the office identified in Chapter Two and Chapter Four, together with the office's capacity to promote aspects of unity and focus for mission leadership and oversight is significant. It may form the basis of further studies, particularly in the ecumenical dialogue between Anglicans and Methodists on the nature of *episkope* and Methodist understanding of order and authority in the Church.

The research question seeks implications for mission based on historic and contemporary considerations. By engaging with primary sources and engaging in a critical debate with modern scholarship, this thesis has maintained there is still an enduring link between Wesley's Assistants and Superintendents and the contemporary superintendency. If anything, there is more akin in the role of the Assistant and the modern Superintendent, in terms of administration, oversight and the promotion of mission. There is a perceived need to further study the role of superintendency and its potential, which Hindmarsh has merely alluded to. Although much has been written on Wesley studies and Methodist Church history, there is a lack of scholarship concerning what Burdon, a notable exception, calls 'Authority and Order' in the early Methodist movement. It is in appreciating the essential pragmatism of Wesley in fulfilling the Methodist movement's mission, that insight may be found and developed in the role of the contemporary superintendency as a focus for mission, unity, leadership and good governance.

The British Methodist Church now has to face various challenges in how it uses the office of Superintendent. The first challenge is identified by Minster B, that the contemporary

Methodist Church is far removed from its eighteenth century ancestors. There is a real danger that the British Methodist Church has an idealised and heroic image of Wesley which goes far beyond any accurate portrayal of the ‘real’ John Wesley and his capabilities.²⁷⁸ This means that the British Methodist Church must not attribute to Wesley a heroic status, which makes him a legendary figure whose every action is imbued with every perfection. However, Cracknell argues that going ‘back to Wesley’ has much to offer as long as one does not expect him to ‘jump out of his eighteenth century skin’.²⁷⁹ It is a challenge to the Methodist Church in Britain to engage with the pragmatic missional genius of Wesley, while being cognisant of the limitations of historical perspective and the chronological, social and societal distance between the eighteenth and twenty first century. The office of Superintendent owes much to Wesley, but its future lies not with Wesley, but firmly in the mission of the contemporary British Methodist Church.

For that office to form a vital role in the future of the Methodist Church, it will be necessary to select and train those whom the Church sees as having the qualities required. This means having a radical overhaul of the present system, which was largely seen as inadequate, by Superintendents in the Plymouth and Exeter District. The provision of detailed, accurate and professionally delivered initial training needs to be provided, with regular in-service training and assessment.

It also became apparent during the Interview stage of this thesis that there is a lamentable lack of knowledge concerning the office of Superintendent and perhaps, more widely still, early Methodist history. It is a responsibility of the theological colleges and those who train Methodist preachers to ensure that there is sufficient depth in Methodist Studies to capture this. Without such knowledge the Methodist people are being deprived of a significant element of their history and the collective memory is diminished. It is the writer’s experience that congregations know there is a Superintendent, but not ‘why’ there is a Superintendent, which is indicative of a lack of awareness, knowledge and understanding.

Being ‘willing’ to become a Superintendent is not the sole criteria for selection. In similar vein to the selection of a District Chair and other Connexional officers, a process of selection needs to be established.

²⁷⁸ Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, pp. 47-50.

²⁷⁹ Kenneth Cracknell, *Our Doctrines: Methodist Theology and Classical Christianity* (Calver: Cliff College Publishing, 1998), pp. 23-24.

There needs to be fewer Superintendents. For example, within the Plymouth and Exeter District there need only be five Superintendents allocated to the North, South, East, West and Somerset areas of the District. This may be seen as part of the *Larger than Circuit* process. Each Superintendent may only be allocated pastoral charge of a single pastorate. The Superintendents would work closely with the District Chair in the formulation of missional, governance, management, pastoral and ecumenical relationships, offering leadership and direction.

The reduction in the number of Superintendents would release many ministers from the burden of superintendency, allowing them to pursue their calling as presbyters. Determining those who have the gifts and qualities for a new form of superintendency, may enliven and enrich the superintendency. If the Superintendent had a single pastorate there are at least two advantages immediately; firstly that the Superintendent remains in pastoral contact with a church and secondly that, the Superintendent is released from the tyranny of multiple pastorates which divert the Superintendent from the task of superintendency.

The British Methodist Church may consider the re-designation of the title Chair of District as District Superintendent. Or more radically still, in line with elements of the Conference report *What sort of bishops* (2007) that this may be time to allocate the title bishop to the superintendency. Rather than being ecumenically insensitive, it may tend to be ecumenically informative, in line with other areas of the World Methodist Church experience. The term Superintendent may tend to bring to mind the rank of a police officer, rather than an office of the Methodist Church. The title bishop is, arguably, more readily accessible than Superintendent which has little resonance beyond the walls of the Methodist Church, despite A.R. George's assertion to the contrary.²⁸⁰ If the title bishop is granted then that title should be enduring and for the life of the person on whom the title is conferred.

Adopting the term bishop instead of Superintendent may be controversial in British Methodism. It may offend ecumenical sensitivities. It may enrage those who perceive the Methodist Church as becoming more clerically oriented and imposing a notion of priesthood alien to the concept of 'Royal priesthood'. And yet, if the British Methodist Church accepts the priesthood of Christ as being its sole priesthood, there is the potential

²⁸⁰ George, 'Superintendency', p. 79.

for the ordained ministry as being seen to have a priestly nature. From this flows the possibility of an order of Church leadership and *episkope* which translates and transforms the superintendency into the episcopacy.²⁸¹

The pragmatic ‘brilliance’ of the early Methodist movement, if adopted, would allow a blending of the contemporary outworking of the title Superintendent for bishop, as being a sign of unity, a focus for mission and leadership into the contemporary experience of British Methodism. This may be seen as ‘extraordinary,’ if it is driven by a missional imperative to provide a better equipped, better trained and more widely understandable form of church leadership. If it is simply semantics, changing one name for another, it is doomed to failure. Equipping the superintendency, by changing nomenclature, changing paradigms of church leadership, including selection of potential candidates for the office; by reviving the ‘extraordinary’ that is, being bold for the cause of mission, is potentially transformative and part of the early Methodist movement’s legacy for contemporary British Methodism.

However, the most significant challenge for the British Methodist Church is that action is taken in a timely and appropriate manner. The urgent need for well-equipped and motivated Superintendents or bishops, to offer effective leadership so as to be a focus for mission and unity is a present reality. The office of Superintendent has much to learn from the experience of those early Assistants to Mr Wesley, but it also has to be focussed on the mission of the contemporary Church. This, arguably, is what Wesley provided for the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century and which needs re-interpretation for the current age.

²⁸¹ Chapman, ‘Ecumenism’, p. 461.

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Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

Revd Simon H Leigh: Questionnaire – M.Phil. University of Manchester – Cliff College.

How Superintendency is understood and exercised by Superintendent ministers within the Plymouth and Exeter District of the British Methodist Church:

A qualitative research project investigating the views of Superintendent ministers in relation to their current practice and future development of the office of Superintendent.

This questionnaire is confidential and for the purposes of this study only. The identity of the respondent will not be divulged to any other person or organization and all materials obtained will be destroyed.

It is intended that a more detailed follow-up interview will be conducted with 5 selected Superintendents. Each interview will last for approximately 30 minutes and the interview will be transcribed from the recording. A sample of the interviews may be attached to the appendices of the Master of Philosophy submission.

If you are willing to participate in this interview please indicate: Yes/No.

Your assistance in this study is greatly appreciated.

(Please underline or circle your response to each question unless otherwise directed)

Are you a male or female minister?

Male Female

What age group do you belong to?

- a) 20-30
- b) 31-40
- c) 41-50
- d) 51-60

e) 61-70

1. How long have you been a presbyter?

a) 0-5 years

b) 6-10 years

c) 11-15 years

d) 16-20 years

e) 21 to 25 years

f) Over 26 years

2. How many appointments have you held as a presbyter? (Not Superintendent)

3. How many appointments have you held as a Superintendent minister? (Including your present one)

4. How many colleagues do you superintend in your Circuit?

Lay (paid):..... Ordained:..... Probationer:..... Student minister:.....

5. For how many churches are you in pastoral charge?:.....

6. In the stationing process did you indicate a willingness to be a Superintendent minister?:

Yes/No.

7. My main role as a Superintendent is:

Administrative:

Strongly agree/agree/ neither agree or disagree/ disagree/strongly disagree.

Oversight and supervision:

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

Pastoral

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

Promoting Circuit mission.

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

8. Being a Superintendent minister means I have far greater opportunity to influence the mission, ministry and direction of the Circuit:

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree, disagree/strongly disagree.

9. I would be willing to serve as Superintendent minister again?

(a) Yes. (b) No (c) Not sure

10. How much Connexional training did you receive to become a Superintendent minister?

3 days or more

1 to 2 days

Less than a day

11. I found the training adequate:

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

12. Suitable ministers should be identified early in their ministry as future Superintendents and equipped for such ministry.

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

13. There should be a selection procedure for Superintendent?

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

14. (a) The present model of superintendency works well:

Strongly agree/agree/ neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

- (b) The present model of superintendency needs changing.

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

- (c) The present model of Circuit superintendency needs abolishing:

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

15. The Methodist Church in Great Britain is moving towards larger Circuits, in such circumstances the Superintendent minister should:

Be the focus for mission, ministry and service?

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

Not have pastoral charge of a church:

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

Not have pastoral charge of more than one church:

Strongly agree/agree/neither agree or disagree/disagree/strongly disagree.

Appendix 2 - Specimen Interview (extract): Minister B

Q.1: How do you understand the role of Superintendent?

A: I suppose it is a leadership thing really. We have had staff meeting this morning and the ministers have a chance to share whatever is on their minds. We have learnt to develop a greater degree of trust between us all and as the Superintendent I have been able to take the lead in this. We've recently had a student minister on placement and she made the comment that our staff meeting is more people led rather than business led. That surprised me as I didn't realise that had happened, but it's interesting.

You know, you develop a sense of oversight of your people and an understanding and you show that you are concerned about the things they are concerned about. I try to see things from their perspective and I think that brings about good working relationships

Q: So leadership and oversight is important?

A: Of course it is. I try and get around my Circuit so that I am known to people outside of my own churches. You could become very remote from people if the only place they saw you was at the Circuit Meeting or on a preaching visit to a church. Some of 'em when I came around thought that I was just checking up on them. I really tried to convince them that it really wasn't like that. I suppose I wanted them to know that I cared for them and that even though I had some sort of authority I was there for them. Sometimes it's like being a bridge, that's why I have just set up 'Superintendent's conversations'. Tomorrow we're starting this and I am going to meet some of my people in a pub in one of the sections of the Circuit. We'll just have lunch and have a chat, but they'll have my attention and I can hear from them. It's an oversight thing, getting to know and being known by the people in the churches and looking after the staff.

Q: You are then a focus for mission in the Circuit?

A: Yeah, it's about trying to encourage our churches to be missional. It's up to me to get around and be a focus for so many of the things that go on in the Circuit and I hope that by meeting people in a pub for lunch and a chat with no agenda or anything like that, we'll just see how it goes. That's an opportunity given to me as the Superintendent. I doubt as a circuit minister it would be quite the same. Being the super gives me that opportunity.

Q: Being a bridge and being a focus for mission?

A: A Superintendent minister has that opportunity.

Q2: How would you describe the main differences between being a Superintendent minister and a presbyter.

A: As you know there are many responsibilities. Safeguarding, strategy, admin, finance for the circuit, all kinds of oversight. Inevitably it involves looking after one another, watching-over and being watched-over in love. My role is to be pastor to my colleagues at times and to offer a listening ear and advice when appropriate. I said about the staff meeting it's a time for us all to be build one another up in the faith. It's very important and all these sort of things make it different to being a minister in the Circuit. But strategy and developing the mission of the Circuit are different. It is again about leadership.

Q3: As Chair of the Circuit Meeting does the Superintendent set the agenda not simply for meetings, but for Circuit mission?

A: That's true, in part, but we do tend to do things together. That's why the staff meeting and building good relationships are so important and particularly in this Circuit. I am sometimes a bridge between the staff and other people and between the circuit and district. It's something I can do as the Superintendent. So looking at mission in the circuit is very important and I can help with this.

Q4: Why did you become a Superintendent?

A: Because I thought I should. I have been a minister for quite a long time and I have had a wide experience of churches. Other people had said to me that I should do it. So when this appointment came along I thought it would be right for me. Since I've been here we've united a Circuit, that's bringing two circuits together and that's been good. We've come a long way in two years. I've thrown a lot myself into this and brought my skills to it as well. I've had to be fairly firm at times and use my authority as Superintendent. I did wonder at times if I was doing a good job and was wondering if I was any good as a Superintendent, so I asked for some advice from people I trust and they were just worried I was going to burn-out. I think the challenge of being the Superintendent attracted me and this Circuit has challenged me and I think we've made solid progress even if things over finance and so on and so forth are difficult.

Q5: Was your training to become a Superintendent adequate?

A: I could have done with more leadership training and to have had far more provision in that area over the years. The annual Superintendents' consultation goes some way to remedy that, but there should be more courses on offer. I've had to search out material myself and sometimes to pay for my own training which isn't very professional. Sometimes I just look at people who seem to me to be fine examples of what it is to be a good and effective leader. Nelson Mandela always sets a good example to me; his forgiving and compassionate style speak to me. He does tend to unite people and that's important in the leadership of the church.

Q6: Should the Methodist Church identify ministers early in their ministry to become a Superintendent?

A: Not sure that would help at all. People change and develop as their experience grows and to mark someone as unsuitable at an early stage doesn't seem right. I could think of reasons not to fast-track people for superintendency, particularly as I think experience is important. I don't think it's a very sensible idea.

Q7: Should there be a selection procedure for Superintendents?

A: Possibly this is a good idea, but who would apply? I cannot see that there would be a great rush of ministers applying as you know the Connexion struggles to fill the posts. It would take careful consideration really and may be then it would be possible. I am not saying no, just that I can see it might prove difficult. I am also sure that just because you have been a minister a long time that that makes you fit to be a Superintendent, because it doesn't.

Q8: The Connexion is considering a report 'Larger than Circuits'; do you think larger Circuits and fewer Superintendents might be a way forward?

A: I am not sure there's any purpose in the Districts and a regional set-up is better. I do think a smaller number of Circuits is better and then they would form an effective bridge between the region and Connexion. The Circuits would require effective resourcing because the Circuit is where mission happens and the Connexion has to put its resources into that. The Districts are something which may not be able to afford and this will have to change. We are becoming a smaller Church nationally and there will have to be an economy

of scale. We can't continue to operate as we have as that will not do and there needs to be a set of changes which make the Church effective for where we are now and are likely to be in the future and not what we were doing fifty or sixty years ago.

Q9: How do you see the role of Superintendent developing?

A: It may be that there are fewer of us in larger Circuits. This will mean that the capacity for dealing with administration in its broadest sense will become an increasing demand. There'll be more health and safety, safeguarding, complaints and discipline, finance, policy, buildings, strategy, mission planning, stationing and so many other things that I haven't even considered. I think it's going get more complicated and not simpler. We'll also be dealing with the effects of decline and that will be very difficult and very demanding. You know there's so many demands on my time which is very far removed from being a minister. So often I am doing management and staff development, but we've come to accept this role. Somehow I have to keep an eye on what's important and what's not. But the Superintendent may be has to encourage and facilitate mission and be a focus for doing this. I suppose it's once again about leadership and oversight and again being that effective bridge between the local churches and wider Methodism. This will be a continuing thing.

Q.10: In your opinion what makes for a good Superintendent?

A: I think in the first instant somebody who is interested in and can work well with people from a range of different backgrounds and theological perspectives. So I think you have to have someone who is fairly open and tolerant and generally has good working relationships with people. Someone who can get along with difference and who can unite people. That's the first thing. Superintendency gives you the opportunity to set goals and a framework and context in which the Circuit can move forward. It allows you to influence how resources are used. Superintendency is about leadership and developing good leadership skills is essential so developing training access for that is necessary. So, it's all about mission, leadership, oversight and developing a pastorally sensitive ministry.

Q11: As part of my research I am looking at the influence of the Revd John Wesley in developing the role of the Superintendent minister. Do you know anything about this and do you think the Methodist Church has anything to learn today?

A: I do know about Mr Wesley's Assistants and how they became the Superintendents and I do know that the Superintendents were set up for work in America and later in this country. If you are asking me do we have anything to learn from this I would say, that we can always learn something from the past, even if it's a negative conclusion. So we may consider we don't need any more Revd Wesleys because he was too autocratic. I am not sure we should take anything too much from the late eighteenth century into the complex world of today. It doesn't fit. Mr Wesley's preachers were not as well educated as the preachers of today and training for ministers and the qualifications required to be a minister today are far in excess of Wesley's day. We might admire their enthusiasm and dedication and their missionary zeal but that is not absent today. We may admire Wesley's tenacity and his devotion. There are many equally devoted today. No, I am not sure we should take too much from the late eighteenth century to the present day. For the Methodists it may have been better if they had remained a movement rather than becoming a church, but we are where we are. There is a very real danger in reading too much from the past into the present role of Superintendent. We inhabit different ages and apart from the name we are in so many respects very different. It is anachronistic, so we mustn't make claims that simply aren't there.