

Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church¹

(1789)

1. From a child I was taught to love and reverence the Scripture, the oracles of God, and next to these to esteem the
 5 primitive Fathers, the writers of the three first centuries. Next after the primitive Church I esteemed our own, the Church of England, as the most scriptural national church in the world. I therefore not only assented to all the doctrines, but observed all the rubric[s]² in the Liturgy, and that with all possible exactness,
 10 even at the peril of my life.

2. In this judgment and with this spirit I went to America, strongly attached to the Bible, the primitive Church, and the Church of England, from which I would not vary in one jot or tittle on any account whatever. In this spirit I returned, as regular
 15 a clergyman as any in the three kingdoms; till, after not being permitted to preach in the churches, I was constrained to *preach in the open air*.

3. Here was my first *irregularity*. And it was not voluntary, but constrained. The second was *extemporary* prayer. This likewise I
 20 believed to be my bounden duty, for the sake of those who desired me to watch over their souls. I could not in conscience refrain from it; neither from accepting those who desired to serve me *as sons in the gospel*.

4. When the people joined together, simply to help each other
 25 to heaven, increased by hundreds and thousands, still they had no more thought of leaving the Church than of leaving the kingdom.

¹ *Arminian Magazine*, XIII.214-16 (Apr. 1790). As in his tributes to God's blessings upon Methodist progress (noted above, pp. 535-36, so in other distinct pronouncements he continued to protest his own fundamental loyalty to the Church of England, in spite of his seemingly unorthodox methods. This was one of the preoccupations of his failing years, as evidenced in this apologia, in which (faulty memory and all) he sought to emphasize this point above all in a capsulated history of Methodism, within which he claimed that to the end he would 'live and die a member of the Church of England'.

² This use of 'rubric' as a collective noun may possibly be deliberate rather than an error for the plural which he normally uses.

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 Nay, I continually and earnestly cautioned them against it, reminding them that we were a part of the Church of England, whom God had raised up, not only to save our own souls, but to enliven our neighbours, those of the Church in particular. And at the first meeting of all our preachers in conference, in June 1744, I exhorted them to keep to the Church, observing that this was our peculiar glory, not to form any new sect, but abiding in our own Church to do to all men all the good we possibly could.

5. But as more Dissenters joined with us, many of whom were much prejudiced against the Church, these, with or without design, were continually infusing their own prejudices into their brethren. I saw this, and gave warning of it from time to time, both in private and in public. And in the year 1758³ I resolved to bring the matter to a fair issue. So I desired the point might be considered at large, whether it was expedient for the Methodists to leave the Church. The arguments on both sides were discussed for several days; and at length we agreed, without a dissenting voice, 'It is by no means expedient that the Methodists should leave the Church of England.'

6. Nevertheless the same leaven continued to work, in various parts of the kingdom. The grand argument (which in some particular cases must be acknowledged to have weight) was this: 'The minister of the parish wherein we dwell neither lives nor preaches the gospel. He walks in the way to hell himself, and teaches his flock to do the same. Can you advise them to attend his preaching?' I cannot advise them to it. 'What then can they do on the Lord's day, suppose no other church be near? Do you advise them to go to a dissenting meeting? Or to meet in their own preaching-house?' Where this is really the case, I cannot blame them if they do. Although therefore I earnestly oppose the *general* separation of the Methodists from the Church, yet I cannot condemn such a *partial* separation, in this particular case. I believe to separate thus far from these miserable wretches who are the scandal of our Church and nation would be for the honour of our Church, as well as to the glory of God.

7. And this is no way contrary to the profession which I have made above these fifty years. I never had any design of separating

³ This should be 1755. Wesley's error was probably due to the fact that he first published an abridgement of his paper on separation for his Conference three years later (see Appendix C; and Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* [London, 1970], pp. 162-67).

from the Church. I have no such design now. I do not believe the
Methodists in general design it when I am no more seen.⁴ I do and
will do all that is in my power to prevent such an event.
Nevertheless, in spite of all that I can do, many of them will
5 separate from it (although I am apt to think not one half, perhaps
not a third of them). These will be so bold and injudicious as to
form a separate party, which consequently will dwindle away into
a dry, dull, separate party. In flat opposition to these I declare
once more that I live and die a member of the Church of England,
10 and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever
separate from it.

London, Dec. 11, 1789

John Wesley

⁴ See Acts 20:25.