

**“THY SECRET MIND INFALLIBLE”:
THE CASTING OF LOTS AMONG LEADERS
OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH METHODISM**

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*And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias;
and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.
(Acts 1:26, KJV)*

Although Charles Wesley’s twelve-line poetic paraphrase (c. 1762) of Acts 1:26 echoes the essential sound and the sense of James I’s translators, the Methodist poet, accidentally or consciously, thrust open the gate to a broader issue that governed a number of decisions and actions which, in turn, exposed frailties that at times challenged the strength of eighteenth-century Methodism. Note, initially, the full text of Wesley’s paraphrase, beginning with a rhetorical question:

When reason can no further go,
And providential openings fail,
Dost Thou not, Lord, Thy counsel show,
Thy secret mind infallible,
To souls who in Thy ways stand still,
And dread to miss Thy perfect will?

For the poet, there emerges but a single, obvious response:

In solemn doubts of import great,
We know, Thou wilt for us decide
Thy people waiting at Thy feet
By sure unerring wisdom guide.
Dispose the lot, Thine own decree,
T’ explain, and clearly speak for Thee.¹

In this paraphrase of a single verse from the Acts of Jesus Christ’s apostles, Charles Wesley appeared to have sought a common ground upon which he might demonstrate a relationship between the ideals of the Biblical world and the complex considerations within the more confined geographical environs of eighteenth-century Methodism. In so doing, the poet/preacher directed his readers’ collective attention upon the potential solution to all issues and problems requiring reasonable and decisive solutions—the *lot*, defined by Wesley as God’s “own decree” sent down to explain, and clearly speak for,” the word of God.”

¹ Charles Wesley, cited in Samuel Rogal, ed., *A New and Critical Edition of George Osborn’s “The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley” (1868–1872)* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2009–2013), 12:1, 250.

The Biblical Lots

In the Biblical world, the casting of lots proved a common (and certainly simple) means of persons' attempts to answer questions and to determine actions. The lexicographers have pointed to the term *lot* as referring to a variety of objects—sticks, stones, human fingers, pieces of wool, coins—as instruments of selection or decision by chance. Serious students of the Holy Scriptures (or at the least of Dr. James Strong's *Concordance*) should recall that in Numbers 26:55, 33:54, 34:15, as well as Joshua 21:4, 6, and 8, *lots* determined the assignment of land to the Hebrew tribes in Canaan. In Esther 9:24 and 9:26 (KJV), Haman, the so-called “enemy of all the Jews,” devised the plan to cast *lots* to execute the policy against them—essentially “to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them.”² The terrified Phoenician mariners, as recorded in Jonah 1:6–7, relied upon *lots* in their attempts to determine the cause of “a mighty tempest” sent upon them by God: “And they said, every one to his fellow, Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon [the sleeping] Jonah.” In Judges 20:9, the people of Israel selected, by *lot*, those persons who would arise against Gibeah, as well as the means by which they would accomplish that task.

Turning the attention to the New Testament, one should recall the most traumatic context in Scriptures wherein the word lies: that at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at Golgotha, the soldiers of the Roman governor drew *lots* for Christ's garments, “that it might be fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet” (Matt. 27:35). The apostles' prayer, immediately preceding the casting of lots for a replacement for Judas Iscariot, appears equal in importance as the exercise that follows in Acts 1:24–25:

Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two [Joseph, called Barsabas and surnamed Justus; and Matthias] thou hast chosen,

That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, by which Judas from transgression hath fell, that he might go to his own place.³

The careful reader will notice, moreover, a close relationship between the intent and substance of Charles Wesley's poetic paraphrase of Acts 1:26 and the prayer of the eleven apostles. Finally, consider the words of the apostle Paul in his address to the Israelites of Pisidia, reminding the small congregation there that when God “destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he directed their land to them by *lot*” (Acts 13:19).⁴

From the outset of a commitment to devout and holy lives—beginning

² “Pur” emerged the word “Purim,” the festival commemorating the deliverance of the Jews from genocide through the heroic efforts of Esther. All biblical citations are KJV unless noted otherwise.

³ See also Lev. 16:8; Joshua 8:6, 10; 1 Sam. 14:41–42; 1 Chron. 24:31, 25:8, 26:13–14; Neh. 10:34, 11:1; Prov. 1:14; Ps. 22:18; Joel 3:3; Obad. 11; Micah 2:5; Luke 23:24; and John 19:24.

⁴ Emph. mine. Pisidia was a relatively small area in the province of Galatia in southern Asia Minor and bordered by Pamphylia, Phrygia, and Lyconia. The Romans gained control over the area in 25 b.c. and, reportedly, created Antioch as its capital. See *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed., ed. Chad Brand (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015): 1271–1272.

with the conduct and activities of the Oxford Holy Club, extending to the Georgia mission, and culminating with evangelical conversion—the brothers Wesley stood beholden to the words, the traditions, and the practices of Holy Scriptures. Thus, when necessity demanded, the practice of casting lots emerged, from their perspectives, as the proper instrument for arriving at a decision. However, viewing those instances and those practices from the safe distance of time, one cannot always applaud the outcomes.

Charles Wesley

Unfortunately, even within the varied and comparatively lengthy Methodist experiences of Charles Wesley, the opportunities for observing any practice of casting lots have been severely limited by the disruptive state of his extant correspondence, journals, and sermons. What little remains in autograph and in print yields but a fragment of what might have possibly or actually occurred.

However, one example from the manuscript journal must and will suffice. On Wednesday, March 14, 1744, Charles Wesley journeyed from Birstall, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, intent upon reaching one of the Methodist societies established by itinerant preacher John Bennet (1715–1759).⁵ While on the road Charles Wesley received word that a constable awaited him with a warrant “in which my name was mentioned.” Wesley eventually sent for that officer who, upon arrival, presented him with the document, which he retold to be an order

‘to summon witnesses to some treasonable words said to be spoken by one Westley.’
The poor man trembled, and said that he had no business with me, and was right glad to get out of my hands. He was afterward of my [sermon] audience, and wept, as did most.

Wesley then proceeded to ride away from the site where he had been preaching, but he “found such a bar or burden crossing me that I could not proceed.” Further, members of the local Methodist society pleaded with him to remain, “lest the enemies should say I durst not stand trial,” adding, “I knew not how to determine, but by lot. We prayed, and the lot came for my stay.”

The issue came to a close shortly thereafter, apparently at a hearing, when one identified by Wesley merely as “a woman” came forth to admit that she had heard Charles Wesley speak of some form or manner of treason, but her accusation proved false and the justices, at Wakefield, excused the accused.⁶

⁵ A native of Chinley, Derbyshire, John Bennet would achieve a shallow niche in Methodist history through his marriage to Grace Norman Murray (1716–1803) on October 3, 1749, an exercise manipulated by Charles Wesley to prevent the possibility a union between the widowed Mrs. Murray and John Wesley. Bennet, having become dissatisfied with the strict discipline of Methodism, detached himself from the Wesleyans in 1752. See Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A. Founder of the Methodists* (New York, Harper, 1872): 1:472, 541, 543; 2:12, 42–46, 57, 129.

⁶ Charles Wesley, in *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.*, eds. S.T. Kimbrough and Kenneth Newport (Nashville: Kingswood/Abingdon, 2007–2008), 2:394; Henry D. Rack, “Charles Wesley and the Supernatural,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University of Manchester*, 88:2 (2006): 65.

John Wesley

In sharp contrast to the fragmented state of Charles Wesley's written narratives, editions of John Wesley's journals, diaries, sermons, prose tracts, and letters—and revisions thereof—have come forth steadily since the Methodist leader's passing more than two centuries ago. Thus, students and scholars have ample access to and evidence of narratives of a substantial number of occasions upon which the elder Wesley demonstrated reliance upon the casting or drawing of *lots*.

Further, from a critical perspective, Richard Heitzenrater has guided those students and scholars to what he claimed to have been “a tension between law and gospel” that began in the early 1730s and brought confusion into the mind of John Wesley during his effort “to see how the Pauline concept of Christian liberty could be understood within the demands of the holy living tradition.” In such a state, John Wesley “fluctuated between obedience and disobedience,” and “his intention to live by rule and method was losing its firm grip upon his mind. He began testing the necessity of some of his rules by casting lots, using this practice to determine whether God would have him rise early, omit breakfast on fast days, and maintain other aspects of the Methodistic regimen of self-denial. The lot was authoritative for Wesley and others [including Charles Wesley?] because they felt it operated under the guise of divine providence.”⁷

Thus, the discussion of the extent of John Wesley's reliance upon the casting of *lots* might well begin at Oxford University in February, 1735, there and then creating the casting of *lots* as a means of determining God's direction toward specific actions and in answer to a variety of theological and ethical questions. Not surprisingly, toward the end of 1735—Tuesday, December 9, to be exact, only days prior to the *Simmonds* hoisting her sails and setting forth to the Georgia settlement—at Crown Harbor, off the Isle of Wight, Hampshire, John Wesley and his three closest associates in that endeavor composed an “Agreement.” Together with Benjamin Ingham, Charles Delamotte, and Charles Wesley agreed “That in the case of an equality [two of them in agreement, two having disagreed], after begging God's direction, the matter shall be decided by lot.”⁸

Once the *Simmonds* cast anchor in the Savannah River off Tybee Island and within sight of the primitive Savannah settlement and discharged its passengers, the issue of casting lots would soon be put to its most severe test—one that underscored John Wesley's pervasive inability to reconcile within his own self the conflict between the passion radiating from the heart.

⁷ Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2013): 59; Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003): 72.

⁸ John Wesley, in *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curmook (London: Culleu/Kelly, 1909–1916), 1:127. This document does not appear in the initial volume (1988) of the most recent edition John Wesley's journals and diaries (the eighteenth volume, *Diaries and Journals I*, of *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. R. Ward and Richard Heitzenrater [Nashville: Abingdon, 1988]).

That is, Wesley's tension between embodied sexuality and the demands and responsibilities placed upon a male totally committed to the spirit and the word of his God.⁹

Having arrived at the Georgia colony, the Wesleys entered upon occasions and circumstances that, in their indecisive minds, justified the casting of lots. Thus, at Frederica, Georgia, on Thursday morning, April 15, 1736, between 5:00 and 7:00, following prayers, meditation, we are informed of "a conference," and the taking of bread. John Wesley—perhaps with Charles Wesley, who had been with his brother at Frederica for the past week—"cast lots." However, John Wesley's diary entry for that day includes nothing in the way of a reason or explanation for having engaged in that exercise.¹⁰

Ten months later, however, the reasons for the casting of lots would have a profound effect upon John Wesley's entire mission to the Georgia colony. The conflict between human passion and religious commitment mentioned above began for Wesley in early March, 1736, and he prefaced that struggle with two citations from Psalms from the *Book of Common Prayer*: "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are but vain" (94:11); and "O Give me not up unto mine own heart's lust, neither let me follow up my own imagination" (81:12). He placed the Psalmist's appeals within the context of his own situation, first, by lamenting that fact that he had undertaken the Georgia mission with the ideal of converting to Christianity the native Indians and, perhaps, the Negro slaves, but upon the departure of the Church of England parish priest of Savannah, the Georgia trustees had "induced" him to assume that office. In so doing, he assumed that "offenses would come." Secondly, Wesley embraced the notion that part of his ministerial responsibilities included speaking privately, once per week, with each member of his congregation. Had he so quickly forgotten that "At my first coming to Savannah, in the beginning of March, 1736, I was determined to have no intimacy with any woman in America"?¹¹

At any rate, on Thursday, March 13, 1736, Wesley first approached the not quite eighteen-year-old Sophia Christiana Hopkey (1718-?), the niece of Thomas Causton, the storekeeper and head magistrate of Savannah, Sophia being a maiden fifteen years Wesley's junior. He began the relationship by endeavoring to explain to her "the nature and necessity of inward holiness," and for the next year he buried his true romantic affection for her beneath a theological barrage of informal lectures on similar topics. Instead of proposing marriage to her, he taught her French, they read devotions and sermons and Scriptures; they sang and recited Psalms, they prayed. Wesley's manuscript journal reveals the dilemma brought about by a mature, scholarly and extremely devout clergyman treading upon the fragile high wire

⁹ . . .and from the britches, one might add. Alexander Pope: "True wit is nature to advantage dress'd, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd" (Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* [1711], 2:1:96-97).

¹⁰ John Wesley, *Diaries and Journals I*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, in *Works*, 18:377.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:365.

between human passion and professional responsibility. Wesley lay siege to Sophia Hopkey's heart, mind, and soul. He wanted to love her, marry her, convert her, and educate her—all with a single stroke. The seventeen-eighteen-year-old Sophia Hopkey proved herself immature and uneducated, unable to understand the complexities of her suitor's motives, his inhibitions, and his limitations. She spent considerable time looking at her minister, but she never really responded to him.

There remained one solution for John Wesley. At Savannah on Friday, March 4, 1737, he was finally determined to reach a decision whether he should propose marriage to Sophia Hopkey. The Caustons would have eagerly handed her over to him. Thus, with Charles Delamotte, he "sought God by deep consideration, fasting, and prayer." By that afternoon the two men

conferred together, but could not come to any decision. We both apprehended Mr. [Benjamin] Ingham's objection to be the strongest—the doubts whether she was what she appeared. But this doubt was too hard for us to solve. At length we agreed to appeal to the Searcher of Hearts. I accordingly made three lots. In one was writ, 'Marry'; in the second, 'Think not of it this year.' After we had prayed to God to give a perfect lot [1 Samuel 14:41], Mr. Delamotte drew the third, in which were these words, "Think of it no more." Instead of the agony I had reason to expect, I was enabled to say cheerfully, "Thy will be done" [Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2]. We cast lots once again to know whether I ought to converse with her any more. And the answer I received from God was, "only in the presence of Mr. Delamotte."

After a review of the entire affair between Sophia Hopkey and him, Wesley resolved "(1) to think of marriage no more; (2) to speak no more with her alone."¹²

On March 12, 1737, Sophia Hopkey ran off to South Carolina with William Williamson to be married by an "irregular" Church of England. That union so upset and angered John Wesley—he believed Mrs. Williamson had lied to him and that the "irregular" priest had violated his (Wesley's) parish jurisdiction—that he denied the new bride access to Holy Communion. John Wesley's priestly action against Sophia Williamson in turn so angered her uncle and guardian, Thomas Causton, that he brought charges against Wesley to the grand jury of Savannah; that body indicted Wesley on ten counts, forcing the parish priest to evade arrest. He fled Savannah and returned to England, thus brining an abrupt and ignominious end to his Georgia mission.

John Wesley and the Moravian Brethren

The failure of John Wesley's mission to Georgia and the inability to resolve his first serious matrimonial dilemma hardly reduced John Wesley's reliance upon the casting of lots as a solution to his personal spiritual and theological problems. "As to extraordinary directions," he wrote to the widowed Lady Mary Bethel Cox from Oxford on March 7, 1738, "they do not doubt but in extraordinary cases too difficult to be determined by reason, as

¹² *Ibid.*, 18:479–480.

perhaps depending upon many future contingencies, and yet too important to be left undetermined, God will if applied to by fervent prayer ‘give a perfect lot’ [1 Samuel 14:41].”¹³

The influence of the Moravian Brethren during this time should not be ignored, shaping specific aspects of the formation and development of John Wesley’s evangelical thinking, particularly following his visits with the Brethren at their settlement in Herrnhut, Saxony, in eastern Germany. For example, he inserted into his journal for August 11–14, 1738 “An Extract of the Church of the Constitution of the Moravian Brethren at Herrnhut, Laid before the Theological Order of Wurttemberg [in Saxony] in the Year 1733.” Paragraph 16 of that document reads:

they have a peculiar esteem for lots, and accordingly use them both in public and private to decide points of importance, when the reasons on both sides appear to be of equal weight. And they believe this to be the only way of wholly setting aside their own will, acquitting themselves of all blame, and clearly knowing what is the will of God.¹⁴

Evidence that the Moravians’ preference for appeal to God by way of casting lots had carried over to English soil arose shortly thereafter. Later that year, at Oxford, John Wesley received a letter (written on November 23, 1738), from the London bookseller James Hutton (1715–1795) who had been appointed by Wesley, in his absence, to administrator to the London religious societies.¹⁵ Hutton reported to the effect that Friday, November 24, had been designated

a day of solemn fasting and prayer, to beg of God to be with us on Monday next [27 November], when we shall first . . . cast a lot to see whether it will be good for us [the society at Fetter Lane, London] to have a president for a year, whose business is to preside at our meetings, and only see to the execution of who shall be determined by the whole society. We are unanimous almost that such an office will be of use, but as a doubt may arise, we will cast a lot about it.¹⁶

John Wesley in London and Bristol

John Wesley returned to London on Thursday, March 15, 1739, and a week later (March 22–23) received a letter from George Whitefield, pleading him to come to Bristol and to carry forth the evangelical work there. Wesley’s presence was for Whitefield a necessity, apparently, in light of

¹³ John Wesley, *Letters I*, ed. Baker, 25:534. Lady Mary Bethel Cox was the daughter of William Bethel, Esq., of Swinton, in the South Riding of Yorkshire, and the second wife of Sir Richard Cox (?–1726), second Baronet of Dumbleton, Gloucestershire, Lady Cox resided in Queen Square, Bath, with her sister, Bridget Bethel. She proved to have been one of George Whitefield’s early converts at Bath and stood among his sponsors, as well as a friend of the Calvinist Methodist patron, Selina Shirley Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. Lady Cox also claimed a passing acquaintanceship with Charles Wesley. See *Journal and Diary II*, in *Works of John Wesley*, 19:397; *The Letters of John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 1:233, 291; and *Letters I, 1721–1739*, ed. Frank Baker, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 25:532.

¹⁴ John Wesley, *Journals and Diaries I*, in *Works*, 18:297.

¹⁵ Hutton would, eventually, shift his theological allegiance to the London Moravians.

¹⁶ John Wesley, *Letters I*, ed. Baker, in *Works*, 25: 586.

Whitefield's forthcoming voyage to British North America. According to the rules of the religious society in Fetter Lane, any person desirous of a change in locale to pursue the work had to consult with and gain the approval of the bands of the society. Thus, on Wednesday, March 28, 1739, John Wesley set forth his proposal to move on to Bristol:

But my brother Charles would scarce hear the mention of it; till, appealing to the oracles of God,¹⁷ he received those words as spoken to himself and answered not again: "Son of man, I take from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke; yet shall thou not mourn or weep, neither shall my tears run down" [Ezekiel 24:16]. Our other brethren, however, continuing to dispute without any probability of coming to one conclusion, we at length all agreed to decide it by lot. And by this it was determined I should go.¹⁸

Thus, twelve days of inconclusive debate and the drawing of lots had to go forth before the seeds for the eventual development of Methodism in Bristol could be planted. One can only speculate as to the effect of a distinctly different single straw or a single slip of paper in that lot-casting process would have had upon the work in a town so important to the rise of the evangelical movement in eighteenth-century England. Consider this: In 1765, the first year in which membership records appeared in the annual *Minutes* of the Methodist conferences, the Bristol society could claim 1,113 members—more than the total numbers reported for the societies in the towns of Yarm (1,060) and York (998); throughout the counties of Wiltshire (976) and Staffordshire (733); for Sheffield (725), Derbyshire (706), Barnard Castle (708), Devonshire (565), Scotland (490), Cheshire (447), Wales (366), and Norwich (313).¹⁹

John Wesley left London for Bristol on the very next day. Interestingly, Charles Wesley's four-sentence manuscript journal entry for Wednesday, March 28, 1739, includes not a word about the *actual* lottery process that sent his brother to Bristol, but one cannot escape note of the younger Wesley's thinly veiled reference to it: "A great power was among us He [John Wesley] offered himself willingly to whatever the Lord should appoint."²⁰

Once in Bristol, on April 9, 1739, John Wesley wrote to brother Charles,

¹⁷ See 2 Sam. 16: 23, Acts 7:18, Rom. 3:2, Heb. 5:12, and 1 Pet. 4:11. The Biblical *oracles* generally have been considered the divine means of communication for the messengers of God, conveying the will of God to humankind by means of dreams; by way of the marked stones ("urim" and "thummim") worn in a pouch over the heart of the high-priest and placed under the frame of his breastplate; by the utterances of the prophets or priests; by certain acts of mystery or magic. See Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lee Miller, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1955): 509, 579.

¹⁸ John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, in *Works*, 19:38.

¹⁹ Those localities with reported numbers of Methodist society members exceeding that of Bristol in 1765 included Cornwall (2121), London (2000), Newcastle-upon-Tyne (1700), Lancashire (1610), Lincolnshire (1300), Birstall (1213), and Leeds (1140). *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, ed. Henry D. Rack, in *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2011), 10: 506.

²⁰ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, 1:169. See also Rev. 18:1: "And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory."

evidencing a hesitancy as to when, exactly, he should return to London:

The [Church of England] clergy here *gladiatorio animo ad nod affectant viam* [hunt us down like gladiators]. But the people of all sorts receive us gladly. Hitherto I have had so full employment here that I think there can be no doubt that I should return already or no. You will hear more from time to time, and judge accordingly. But whenever it seems expedient I should return, a lot will put it out of doubt.²¹

Within a week following that letter, still at Bristol, John Wesley had quickly discovered that those in attendance at religious societies of that town proved well acquainted with the exercise of casting lots.

On April 16, 1739, he wrote to James Hutton (intending his narrative to be shared Fetter Lane society members) that during a meeting of the religious society in Baldwin Street, “After prayer their leaders were chose, and the bands fixed by lot”²² Further, in what emerges as a variation of the dog chasing its tail, John Wesley added a postscript to his letter to Hutton, relating an instance wherein

Having a desire to receive a holy woman of deep experience into the female bands [of the Baldwin Street society], we doubted what to do, because she is a Dissenter. The answer we received from Scripture was Gal[atians]. 3, verse 8. This seemed clear. However, having determined to cast lots, we did so; and our direction was, “Refer to the bands (at London), to be decided by lot.”²³

One can only speculate upon the extent of John Wesley’s influence in encouraging individuals and groups within these religious societies to cast lots in order to arrive at decisions—the majority of which focused upon what easily might be considered “routine” matters.

Perhaps a response to such speculation concerning the extent to which the casting of lots served as a significant in the formations of John Wesley’s decisions and actions during those early years at Bristol will be observed in yet another of the epistolary accounts sent to James Hutton and the members of the London Fetter Lane religious society on April 30, 1738.²⁴ The issue at hand concerned Wesley’s opposition to the doctrine of predestination and his support of universal redemption through faith. He informed his readers that he wished to restrain himself from speaking publicly on the issue, but since John Purdy (?–1759), who had accompanied him from London to Bristol to serve as his scribe, “pressed me to speak and spare not, we made four lots, and desired our Lord to show what he would have me do. The answer was, ‘Preach and print,’ Let him see the event.”²⁵

²¹ John Wesley, *Letters I*, ed. Baker, in *Works*, 25:630. The Latin phrase is referencing the Roman playwright Terence (Publius Terentius Afer, 185–159 BCE), from the comic play *Phormio*.

²² *Ibid.*, 25:631.

²³ *Ibid.*, 25:633. Galatians 3:8: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

²⁴ The full text of which is in *Letters I*, ed. Baker, in *Works*, 25:637–641.

²⁵ A native of Bladon, Northumberland, four miles from Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Purdy, among the earliest members of the Fetter Lane society, resided both in London and Bristol. He eventually joined the Methodist itinerancy at some point prior to 1747. See *Journal*, ed. Curnock, 2:166, 323.

One year later, on Sunday morning, April 29, 1739, Wesley continued this narrative. “[B]eing so directed by lot) I declared openly for the first h[our] against the ‘horrible decree’ before about four thousand persons at the Bowling Green.”²⁶ That “decree” referred to a section of John Calvin’s 1536 *Institutes* (3:23:7, “*Decretum Guidem Horribile Fateor*”): “The decree [of predestination of certain persons to eternal death] I admit, is dreadful.”²⁷ Wesley later proceeded to write, deliver, and publish (the last in August, 1739) his thirty-five-page tract drawn from Romans 8:32, *Free Grace: A Sermon Preached at Bristol*, drawn from Romans 8:32, with Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Universal Redemption,” attached.²⁸ That tract set forth John Wesley’s total rejection of the doctrine of predestination and quickly became the rhetorical sword that led, beginning late June, 1739, to a lasting theological divide between George Whitefield and him. One should note that, according to Whitefield, John Wesley had agreed, upon the former’s request, not to publish the sermon until Whitefield had left England for British North America. At any rate, Professor Albert Outler described the rift between the two, with accuracy and eloquence, as “the still toplofty don’s disdain for the erstwhile Oxford servitor.”²⁹

George Whitefield and the Casting of Lots

Essentially, George Whitefield (1714–1770) wanted little to do with the practice of casting lots, preferring, instead, to communicate to God and to seek guidance from God through prayer. Nonetheless, during the major portion of the 1730s and upon sporadic occasions thereafter, when he enjoyed cordial relationships with the Wesleys and with a number of Moravian Brethren, he did not always refrain from engaging in the casting of lots. Thus, according to his nineteenth-century biographer, Rev. Luke Tyerman (1820–1899), at some point in 1738 in Georgia, Whitefield attempted to rely upon the drawing of lots to determine whether one of his servants, Joseph Husbands, should be returned to England.³⁰

²⁶ The Bowling Green comprised a large open area near the middle of the town. When Charles Wesley preached there on Sunday, September 2, 1739, he estimated the gathering “to be above four thousand.”

²⁷ By “dreadful” Calvin means to be of that which one would view with terror, fear, awe, or reverence. One could easily equate both “dreadful” and “eternal death” with residence in Hell.

²⁸ Romans 8:32: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?” “Universal Redemption” was subsequently published in the Wesleys’ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), in thirty-six stanzas of four lines each, beginning: “Hear, holy, holy, holy Lord, / Father of all mankind, / Spirit of love, eternal Word, / In mystic union join’d” (1:1–4). For full texts of sermon and hymn, see *Sermons, III, 71–114*, ed. Albert Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 3:544–563. One might note further that Wesley’s *Free Grace* extended to at least eleven editions during the writer’s lifetime (or to 1791).

²⁹ *Sermons II*, in *Works*, 3:542. The term “servitor” formerly identified an Oxford University undergraduate (such as George Whitefield at Pembroke College, Oxford) who received his lodging and a major portion of his board *gratis*, as well as being exempt from lecture fees. The servitor might also have been required to function as a servant to one of the fellows of his college.

³⁰ Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield, B.A., of Pembroke College, Oxford* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876–1877), 1:193–194.

Further, on Friday, January 5, 1739, at Islington, London, Whitefield attended a conference “concerning several things of great importance with seven true ministers of Jesus Christ, despised Methodists, whom God has brought together from the East and the West, the North and the South.³¹ What we were in doubt about, after prayer, we determined by lot, and everything else was carried on with great love, meekness, and devotion.” The group extended its session until three o’clock in the morning, at which time the participants departed “with a full conviction that God was going to do great things among us.”³²

Charles Wesley, in his manuscript journal entry for that day, contains no mention of a “conference,” only that the participants (by name) “all set upon me. But I could not agree to settle at Oxford without further direction from God”—a statement that indicates the possibility of the casting of lots.³³ As for John Wesley, his journal extract (not published until 1742) lacked an entry for Friday, January 5, 1739, but the diary entry for that date notes an 8:30 a.m. gathering of the same collection of persons at Islington, which extended for approximately ninety minutes. That entry identifies nothing more than “tea” and “religious talk” on the agenda and the reaction that “God came mightily upon us”—a possible allusion to, but never a specific mention of, the casting of lots.³⁴

With regard to a more direct demonstration of the extent of George Whitefield’s involvement with the ritual of casting lots, consider an incident at New York on Friday, October 31, 1740. There, Whitefield discovered “a bitter pamphlet written against me by some of the Presbyterian persuasion, and [I] found freedom given me to answer it.” The thirty-two-page tract bore the title, *The Querists: or, an Extract of Sundry Pages Taken Out of Mr. Whitefield’s Printed Sermons, Journals, and Letters. Together with Some Scruples Propos’d in Proper Queries Raised on Each Remark. By Some Church Members of the Presbyterian Persuasion* (1740).³⁵ Whitefield quickly responded on November 1, 1740, with eight printed pages of *A Letter*

³¹ In addition to Whitefield, attendees included John Wesley and Charles Wesley; Benjamin Ingham (1712–1772); Benjamin Seward (1705–1756?); Charles Kinchin (1711?–1742); John Hutchings (1716–?), Kinchin’s curate at Dummer, Hampshire; and the Wesleys’ brother-in-law, Rev. Westley Hall (1711–1776), who had married John Wesley’s younger sister, Martha (Patty) Wesley (1706–1791) in September, 1735.

³² *Whitefield’s Journals*, 196.

³³ Charles Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, 1:158.

³⁴ John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries II*, in *Works*, 19:29, 369. As an item of more than passing interest and coincidence, one should note that John Wesley’s journal extract entry for Monday, January 1, 1739, includes a listing of the same persons who would attend the “conference” at Islington so labeled by George Whitefield four days later (29). However, in his diary John Wesley identified the occasion as a “love feast” held in Fetter Lane (not Islington) that began at 9:30 p.m. and extended, again coincidentally, until approximately 3:00 a.m. (369).

³⁵ Printed at Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin, who also published Whitefield’s *Letter* of response. A careful examination of Roberts’ 765 pages of *Whitefield in Print* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1988) will reveal the number of titles by, for, and against Whitefield printed by Franklin. One might also consider as more pleasant Peter Charles Hoffer’s *When Benjamin Franklin Met the Reverend Whitefield: Enlightenment, Revival, and the Power of the Printed Word* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011).

from the Rev. Mr. Whitefield, to Some Church Members of the Presbyterian Persuasion,³⁶ in Answer to Certain Scruples Lately Proposed in Proper Queries Raised in Each Remark (1740). Therein the Methodist field preacher maintained, “I am no friend to casting lots, but I believe, on extraordinary occasions, when things can be determined no other way, God, if appealed to and waited on by prayer and fasting, by lot as well as formerly.”³⁷

Almost a decade later, a more mature George Whitefield arrived at a different conclusion concerning the casting of lots. At Boston in 1749 appeared his 32-page tract, *Remarks on a Pamphlet Entitled ‘The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar’d.’* [March, 1749] *Wherein Several Mistakes in Some Parts of My Past Writing and Conduct Are Acknowledged, and My Present Sentiments Concerning the Methodists Explained. In a Letter to the Author.*³⁸ In his response, Whitefield maintained that “Casting lots I do not now approve of. nor have I for several years; neither do I think it a safe way (though practiced, I doubt not, by many good men) to make a lottery of the Scriptures by dipping [opening to random pages] into them upon every occasion.”³⁹ Clearly, the issue of casting lots represents but a single example of George Whitefield in the late 1740s and early 1750s, having stepped well beyond the boundaries of influence established for him earlier by the Wesleys and the Moravian Brethren.

Whitefield’s Response to *Free Grace* and the Casting of Lots

George Whitefield responded to John Wesley’s sermon on *Free Grace* in an epistolary essay to the latter, written from Bethesda, Georgia, on December 24, 1740, and initially published at Boston in 1741.⁴⁰ Significant portions of that letter become germane to the discussion on the casting of lots. To begin, Whitefield rhetorically begs,

give me leave to take a little notice of what, in your preface, you term an indispensable obligation to make it [your sermon] public to all the world. I must own, that I always thought you were quite mistaken upon that head . . . When you were in Bristol, I think you received a letter from a private hand, charging you with not preaching the gospel, because you did not preach up election. Upon this you drew

³⁶ Essentially, the majority of the members of the Presbyterian Church in British North America treated George Whitefield positively and courteously.

³⁷ Whitefield, “Letter to Some Members of the Presbyterian Persuasion,” in *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield, M.A., Late of Pembroke College, Oxford, and Chaplain to the Re. Hon. [Selina Shirley Hastings] the Countess of Huntingdon. Containing All His Sermons and Tracts from the Year 1734 to 1770* (London: Printed for Edward and Charles Dilly in the Poultry . . . , 1771–1772), 4:48.

³⁸ The author proved to have been George Lavington (1684–1762), Bishop of Exeter (1747–1762). John Wesley wrote two epistolary essays in response to the Bishop’s *Enthusiasm*—the first in 1750, the second in 1751.

³⁹ Whitefield, *Works of Whitefield* (1771–1772), 4:245.

⁴⁰ *A Letter from the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley in Answer to His Sermon entitled “Free Grace”*; the text appears in *George Whitefield’s Journals*, ed. Iain Murray (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960): 569–588. Benjamin Franklin, no stranger to George Whitefield, printed and sold a twenty-four-page edition of Whitefield’s *Letter to Wesley* in 1741. For further editions of Whitefield’s *Letter*, see Richard Owen Roberts, *Whitefield in Print*, 32–33.

a lot: the answer was “preach and print.” What immediately follows appears to be—at least on this occasion—Whitefield’s distrust in the belief of casting lots. “I have often questioned, as I do now, whether in so doing, you did not tempt the Lord. A due exercise of religious prudence, without a lot, would have directed you in that matter However . . . the lot came out “preach and print”; accordingly you preached and printed against election.”⁴¹

Whitefield would not relax his grasp upon what he viewed as the questionable practice of casting lots and his impression of Wesley’s tendency to employ it. He complained to Wesley that if he had printed his sermon,

in answer to a lot, I am apt to think, one reason, why God should so suffer you to be deceived, was, that hereby a special obligation might be laid upon me, faithfully to declare the scripture doctrine of election, that thus the Lord might give me a fresh opportunity of seeing what was in my heart, and whether I might be true to his cause or not; as you could not but grant, he [God] did once before by giving you such another lot at Deal [Kent, on the Strait of Dover]. The morning [of 2 February 1738] I sailed [aboard the *Whitaker*] from Deal for Gibraltar [eventually bound for Georgia], you arrived from Georgia. Instead of giving me an opportunity to converse with you, though the ship was not far off from shore; you drew a lot and immediately set forwards to London. You left a letter behind you, in which were words to this effect: “When I saw God, by the winds which was carrying you out, brought me in, I asked counsel of God. His answer you have enclosed.” This was a piece of paper, in which were written these words. “Let him return to London.”

Once again, Whitefield appeared to question the need and expressed his surprise at “a good man telling me he had cast a lot, and that God would have me return to London.” The problem, of course, arose from the vague statement on the lot: Whitefield believed that the pronoun *him* referred to himself, which meant that Wesley hoped that Whitefield would somehow cancel his mission to Georgia and return to London. Wesley, on the other hand, upon immediately debarking from his vessel, pondered over whether he should remain at Deal in hope that the *Whitaker* would not be able to reach the open sea and be forced to return to Deal. In this instance Whitefield might be discharged from the vessel, allowing the opportunity for the two men to meet. Or, should he, Wesley, set off at once for London? In the end, for him to Whitefield such a fragment on a slip of paper proved, simply, a departure from sound judgment.⁴² Even Wesley himself eventually would recognize it as such.

Unfortunately, the issue at Deal did not fade easily or quickly into the past. Continuing the response to John Wesley’s sermon on *Free Grace*, George Whitefield brought to the attention of the elder Wesley that “Some months after [May–June?, 1738], I received a letter from you at Georgia, wherein you wrote words to this effect: ‘Though God never before gave me a wrong lot, yet, perhaps, he suffered me [at Deal] to have such a lot at this time to try what was in your heart.’” Why would Wesley have the audacity to question Whitefield’s feelings and motives? Once again, Whitefield, aroused, raised his opposition to the practice of drawing lots in such circum-

⁴¹ Whitefield, “Letter,” in *Journal*, 572.

⁴² *Whitefield’s Journals*, 572–573; John Wesley, *Letters I*, ed. Baker, in *Works*, 25:527–528.

stances. “It is plain,” he responded, sounding an unguarded note of irritation, “you had a wrong lot given you here, and justly, you tempted God in drawing one.” Then, quickly turning his attention to a more important issue, Wesley’s decision to preach and then to publish *Free Grace*, Whitefield admonished, “. . . let not the children of God, who are mine and your intimate friends, and also advocates for *universal redemption*, think that doctrine true, because you preached it up in compliance with a lot given out from God.”⁴³

In the end, however, George Whitefield could not bring himself to doubt the honesty and sincerity of John Wesley’s beliefs as set forth in his sermon on *Free Grace*. However, “. . . you have been much mistaken, in imagining that by tempting God, by casting a *lot* in the manner you did, could lay you under an *indispensible obligation* to any action, must less to publish your sermon against the doctrine of *predestination to life*.”⁴⁴

John Wesley’s Continued Consideration of the Lot

Returning to John Wesley as the principal character in the eighteenth-century pre-Methodist serialization of religious lottery, observe another in the stream of journal-type letters from Wesley at Bristol to James Hutton and the members of the London religious society in Fetter Lane. On June 4, 1739, Wesley reported that on Tuesday, May 22, one Elizabeth Cutler and six other women, having completed their month-long trial period, subjected themselves to a drawing of lots that satisfied their admission into their several bands.⁴⁵ Although Wesley, himself, might not have prepared or even drawn the lots, he most likely oversaw the process with approval—or, at the least, observed it but refrained from objection to it. Writing again three days later (June 7, 1739), he informed Hutton and the others that on the evening of the day immediately preceding, following a meeting of the religious society in Baldwin Street and “in obedience to God’s command by lot, he went forth” to the home of Mrs. Cooper, “the supposed prophetess.”⁴⁶ “Her agitations,” noted Wesley, “were nothing near so violent as Mary [or Margaret] Plewitt are” (the latter referring to another French prophetess whom he had visited at London in late January, 1738). Mrs. Cooper spoke with Wesley for more than half an hour, and “The words were good,” responded her listener.⁴⁷

As indicated above, instances arose wherein although John Wesley did not himself actually engage in the casting or drawing of lots, but such action by others did involve him directly. Note, for example, the case of Richard Viney (?–1750?), a member of the Fetter Lane religious society since 1737, who rose in theological opposition to the Wesleys. His disagreement led to his joining the Moravian Brethren, becoming a warden of the Moravian

⁴³ *Whitefield’s Journals*, 573; cf. *Letters I*, ed. Baker, in *Works*, 25:750.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Letters I*, ed. Baker, in *Works*, 25:654.

⁴⁶ Mrs. Cooper (her Christian name not identified), a French Protestant (Huguenot), had established herself in Bristol as a French prophetess—a role dating from the late seventeenth century and the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), identifying a visionary possessed of extreme religious enthusiasm and whose exercises gave rise to moments of equally extreme hysteria.

⁴⁷ *Letters I*, ed. Baker, in *Works*, 25:658.

societies in Yorkshire and Lancashire, and rising to the office of *Vorsteher* (head, director, a form of president) in the Moravian Church. However, in November, 1743, Viney became involved in a theological-political dispute of sorts with August Gottlieb Spangenburg, and found himself excluded from the Church.⁴⁸ At London on Sunday, February 19, 1744, Viney visited and sought the advice of John Wesley, explaining that he had harbored doubts concerning Moravian Church discipline, and until those could be removed, he wished to resign his office and remain in the Church as a private member.

Spangenburg refused the request, and Viney remained in his position until May, 1743, at which time he presented himself before the principal officers of the Moravian Church. That body, in private session, considered “(1) Whether Richard Viney were not of Satan and an enemy of the Church? And (2) whether his objection to the discipline of the Brethren did not spring from anger, and self, and pride?” After four hours of deliberation, the officers recalled Viney, who denied the substance of their questions and “desired they would cast lots, which after a little debate they did,” adding, “the lot came,” . . . their questions proved “just,” and in November, 1743, he found himself ousted from the Church and “delivered over to Satan.”

At that point, Viney determined to approach John Wesley for guidance. For his part, Wesley offered Viney a variation of the practice of casting lots: “If you go back, you are welcome to go; if you stay with me, you are welcome to stay. Only whatever you do, do it with a clear conscience, and I shall be satisfied either way.” Richard Viney returned to Yorkshire to confer with his wife. “The Brethren saw him again, and I [John Wesley] saw him no more.” Actually, the two did meet again, at Birstall, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, on Wednesday, May 16, 1744. There and then Viney reviewed his past differences with the Moravian Brethren, concluding that “they greatly abused the lot in support of their arbitrary power.”⁴⁹ Wesley did not press the matter.

Finally, let us turn the page to John Wesley’s defense of the practice of casting lots, as set forth in his 1746 tract, *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explain’d: Occasioned by the Reverend Mr. Church’s Second Letter to Mr. Wesley: In a Second Letter to That Gentleman*.⁵⁰ Church had asserted, in his criticism of Wesley and Methodism, that “Your private life I

⁴⁸ The Prussian born clergyman Spangenburg (1704–1792) labored for the Moravian Church in Georgia and Pennsylvania in 1735, prior to his appointment as bishop in 1744.

⁴⁹ John Wesley, *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. Gerald Cragg, in *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), 11:414; Samuel Rogal, *A Biographical Dictionary of Eighteenth-Century Methodism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1997-1999), 8:357–361.

⁵⁰ Thomas Church (1707–1756), vicar of Battersea (1740–1756) and prebendary of St. Paul’s, London (1744–1756), had reacted to the fourth extract of John Wesley’s *Journal* (July, 1744) with his extraordinarily lengthy titled tract, *Remarks on the Rev. John Wesley’s Last Journal, Wherein He Gave an Account of the Tenets and Proceedings of the Moravians, Especially Those in England, and of the Divisions and Perplexities of the Methodists, Showing by the Confessions of Mr. Wesley Himself the Many Errors of Relating Both to Faith and Practice Which Have Already Risen among These Deluded People, and in a Particular Manner Explaining the Very Fatal Tendency of Denying Good Works To Be Conditions of Our Justification* (dated November, 1744). See Rogal, *Biographical Dictionary*, 1:306.

have nothing to do with"; yet, complained Wesley, his critic had proceeded to

enlarge on my method of consulting Scripture and "using lots." Of both which by and by. But meantime, observe this does not affect the question. For I neither cast lots, nor use that method at all, till I have considered things with all the care I can. So that, be this right or wrong, it is no means of proof that I do not carefully "consider every step I take."

Continuing his argument that the casting of lots emerges as a valid practice once the avenues of reason have been exhausted, Wesley cited Proverbs 16:33 ("The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord"): "This I believe is truth and reason," asserted Wesley,

and will be to the end of the world. And I therefore will subscribe to the declaration of the Moravian Church (laid before the whole body of divines in the University of Wurttemberg [1733], and not by them accounted *enthusiasm*): "We have a peculiar esteem for lots, and accordingly use them both in public and private to decide points of importance, when the reasons brought on each side appear to be of equal weight. And we believe this to be then the only way of wholly setting aside our own will, of acquitting ourselves of all blame, and clearly knowing, what is the will of God."⁵¹

Neither John Wesley's denial or defense of the practice of casting lots, nor his citation of a Moravian Church document supporting that exercise, eased the criticisms or accusations hurled at him and at his Methodist followers upon that subject. As late as 1779, appeared a scurrilous piece of verse, penned anonymously and housed in a volume bearing the title *Fanatical Conversion; or, Methodism Display'd. A Satire*. Casting John Wesley as Reynard the Fox—the traditional and immediately recognizable image of the person who preys upon society, but avoids justice and punishment because of his cunning—the poet, at one point, declares,

Numberless vouchers Reynard's chances bring:
He never dips but demonstrations spring
In ev'ry lot, to shew that Heav'n design'd
All males and females shou'd produce *their kind*.⁵²

The poet inserted a footnote after the word "chances," drawing the reader to "see [Wesley's journal entries of] May 25; June 1, 1, 4, and 6, October 29, 1738; April 20, 1741; and a thousand other places." In reference to "*their kind*," his note reads, "Satan, well knowing that some saints pique themselves by putting every point of their pious theory in practice, at one time, in a most unfriendly manner, personated the apostle [John Wesley] of the Foundery and made dreadful ravages among the female converts."⁵³ The poor quality of the writer's verse and the absurdity of his declarations, accusations and verifications prove sufficient reasons for bringing this aspect of

⁵¹ John Wesley, in *Methodist Societies*, ed. Cragg, in *Works*, 9:199, 204.

⁵² Both text and the poet's footnotes cited from Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2nd ed., 302. The piece carried a subtitle, *Illustrated and Verified by Notes from J. Wesley's Fanatical Journals, and by the Author Unravelling the Delusive Craft of That Well-Invented System of Pious Sorcery Which Turns Lions into Lambs, Called in Derision Methodism*.

⁵³ "The Foundery" refers to the former King's Foundery in Windmill Street, Upper Moorfields, London, and John Wesley's first London chapel, which he occupied initially in 1739.

the discussion to a close. Simply, such ill-wrought wit had no lasting effect upon the impregnable walls of faith behind which stood the faithful, holding firmly to their various rituals.

Conclusion

Given the depth and the extent of the Wesleys' faith in God and in God's Word conveyed through Holy Scriptures, there could be no serious challenge—satiric, poetic, or rhetorical; from Bishops of their Church, minor clerics of that same Church, playwrights, novelists, and versifiers—to their rights to exercise the casting of lots to arrive at decisions. That option arose, essentially, as one more instrument by which to express their firmly established faith.

George Whitefield, on the other hand, could legitimately claim to have possessed the same measures of faith as the Wesleys, but he came to view the casting of lots as an unnecessary means of communication with God. Instead, he would offer prayer to fulfill that need. The Wesleys also advanced the need for prayer, both public and private, but in defense of the casting of lots, they might well have argued that the latter provided an immediate result, an immediate response from God, as it were, while they had no way of knowing when, or even if, God's answers to their prayer would manifest themselves.

The most important aspect of this discussion, however, remains the focus upon John Wesley, the dominant figure in any discussion relative to the history of eighteenth-century Methodism. As the authoritarian administrator of a religious organization, he could, with fair degrees of decisiveness, develop circuits; appoint, assign, rotate, and dismiss preachers, as well as assign specific ministerial duties to them. He could allocate, deny, and regulate funds; provide for a variety of social needs; establish criteria for the construction and financing of chapels; etc. He did not require the casting of lots to determine how and when to exercise his notion of administrative authority.

Yet there arose situations, both during his early years and throughout the long decades of his maturity, when John Wesley confronted dilemmas or problems that he could not alone solve—issues that both affected him personally and situations involving others who came to him for advice and solutions. He could pray in private or advise others to do so, or he could cast lots and suggest others to seek the same means toward a solution. In such contexts, John Wesley proved no different from myriads of persons of past, present and future generations who had and would evidence deep and sincere faith so strong and constant that they could never stray far from their reliance upon Holy Scriptures or from their God. That faith provided them with protection from the world. The problem, of course, centered upon a perception among those who lacked such depth and understanding of faith. For those critics who doubted Wesley's faith, such exercises as the casting of lots and the random opening to pages of Scriptures exuded the aroma of the supernatural, the mysterious, the magical, and excessive enthusiasm—an unacceptable contrast to the orthodoxy of their own religious thoughts and feelings. In an age of reason, the casting of lots seemed totally unreasonable.