It is often supposed that Methodism begins on May 24, 1738 when, at a meeting on Aldersgate Street, Wesley felt his heart “strangely warmed.” This alleged founding event is celebrated annually as “Aldersgate Sunday” in many of the denominations which trace their origins back to the ministry and mission of John Wesley. 1988 was even designated as the 250th anniversary of this event and so of Methodism. But is this really the origin of Methodism? I will argue that in the view of Wesley himself, it is not.

In order to make clear that Aldersgate plays no role in Wesley’s view of the origin of Methodism it is only necessary to attend to his own reflections on the history of the movement which he founded and then led for well over half a century. This inquiry is made easier by the fact that Wesley himself provided his followers with several accounts of their origins. These accounts were written from a variety of different perspectives and for disparate audiences. Thus, there are a variety of ways in which Wesley can speak of the beginnings of Methodism. One thing common to all of these reflections, however, is that Aldersgate plays no role whatever in any of these accounts. Other events do play such a role and it will be instructive to see which ones do have the significance of a founding event.

In what follows, I will attempt a chronological ordering of the various events to which Wesley assigns importance in his own accounts of Methodist origins. This will make clear that Aldersgate does not and cannot play any such role.

The Commitment to Holiness (1725)

Those whose knowledge of Wesley’s views is limited to the period 1738–48 (comprising the material from the first volume of his Journal, and Appeals and the initial set of Standard Sermons) will be surprised to learn that on at least one occasion Wesley attributes the origin of Methodism to William Law, his one-time mentor whom he repudiated during the stormy decade following his return from Georgia. In a sermonic essay in which Wesley surveys the history of Christianity from the standpoint of the corrupting influence of alliances with power and wealth, he notes the growth of wickedness in England even after the reform of the church in the sixteenth century. And what is the decisive turning point in this drama?
Some feeble attempts were made to stem the torrent [of wickedness] during the reign of Queen Anne; but it still increased till about the year 1725, when Mr. Law published his "Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection," and, not long after, his "Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life." Here the seed was sown, which soon grew up, and spread to Oxford, London, Bristol, Leeds, York, and, within a few years, to the greatest part of England, Scotland, and Ireland. (The Wisdom of God's Counsels VI, 330)

This sermon, published in the second series of sermons in 1788, takes the view that the emergence of the people called Methodists is a decisive turning point in the history of the church because it is the renewal of authentic Christian life. It is this renewal of life which leads him to point to Law as the origin of the movement of Methodism.

A somewhat fuller account of this origin of Methodism is found in the essay, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (1777). Here Wesley emphasizes the essential continuity of his concern for, and commitment to, holiness of life as the essence of Methodism.

In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor's "Rule and Exercizes of Holy Living and Dying." In reading several parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions; . . . . In the year 1726, I met with Kempis's "Christian's Pattern." The nature and extent of inward religion, the religion of the heart, now appeared to me in a stronger light than it ever had before. . . . I saw, that "simplicity of intention, and purity of affection," one design in all we speak or do, and one desire ruling all our tempers, are indeed "the wings of the soul," without which she can never ascend to the mount of God.

A year or two after, Mr. Law's "Christian Perfection" and "Serious Call" were put into my hands. These convinced me, more than ever of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined, through his grace, (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of,) to be all-devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance. (XI, 373)

Here it is not Law, but Taylor and Kempis who have the most prominent role in the emergence of the project of awakening holiness of life. In this recollection, Wesley seems more concerned to relate his own spiritual awakening than the history of Methodism. It would perhaps be better to speak here of Wesley's conversion than of the origin of the Methodist

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1 All references are to the 14-volume, Works of John Wesley, edited by Thomas Jackson. Roman numerals are used for volume numbers. Dates are used for letters and Journal entries.
2 Indeed, Wesley can on one occasion contest the assertion that Law was "the parent" of the Methodists without thereby denying or diminishing Law's influence (On God's Vineyard, VIII, 203-204). There is no direct contradiction here since, in the former passage, Wesley was speaking not of his reading but of Law's publication. Thus, the difference is between an objective event (Law's publication of his views on holiness) and a subjective event (how Wesley came to be acquainted with and committed to these views).
movement itself. Thus, in his sermon, On Leaving the World (VI, 473), Wesley is clear that his basic commitments have undergone no basic change since 1725. This is reiterated in his sermon, At the Foundation of City-Road Chapel:

As to the rise of it [Methodism]. In the year 1725, a young student at Oxford was much affected by reading Kempis’s “Christian Pattern,” and Bishop Taylor’s “Rules of Holy Living and Dying.” He found an earnest desire to live according to those rules, and to flee from the wrath to come. . . . (VII, 421).

Whether the reference is to Law, Taylor or Kempis, it is clear that Wesley himself thinks that there is essential continuity between the commitments these authors enabled him to make in 1725 and the multinational movement which he was leading more than half a century later. The significance of the study of these authors for Wesley’s own spiritual development is itself of lasting importance for the shape of the Methodist movement. Although Wesley proclaimed himself a “man of one book,” he published an entire library of Christian literature for the edification of the people called Methodist. The Christian Library is a lasting monument to the role of reading in the inception of Wesley’s lifelong commitment to entire holiness of life.

The Oxford Community (1729)

While Wesley’s commitment to the project of actualizing holiness begins in 1725, there is good reason for not taking this to be the birth so much as the conception of Methodism. Thus, while Wesley does occasionally point to 1725 as the origin of Methodism, it is more common, and indeed his regular practice, to speak of 1729/30 as the true beginning of Methodism. This, of course, is the beginning of a community of persons committed to this same project of actualizing what he would come to call “Scriptural holiness.” That this is the central fact of Methodism he makes clear in the following mini-history:

I cannot forbear mentioning one instance more of the goodness of God to us in the present age. He has lifted up his standard in our Islands, both against luxury, profaneness, and vice of every kind. He caused, near fifty years ago, as it were, a grain of mustard-seed to be sown near London; and it has now grown and put forth great branches, reaching from sea to sea. Two or three poor people met together, in order to help each other to be real Christians. They increased to hundreds, to thousands, to myriads, still pursuing their one point, real religion; the love of God and man ruling all their tempers, and words, and actions. (Of Former Times, VII, 166)

I have shown that Wesley cannot be said to have been converted at Aldersgate in “Wesley Against Aldersgate” Quarterly Review Fall, 1988. Aldersgate is regularly supposed to have the dual significance of being both Wesley’s conversion and the origin of Methodism. The present essay seeks to contest the latter supposition.
This rather poetic and allusive reference to Methodism does underline the connection between Wesley's commitment to entire holiness (1725) and the emergence of Methodism as a social or corporate phenomenon (1729) still committed to "real religion; the love of God and man ruling all their tempers, and words, and actions."

A rather more concrete description of the Oxford origin of Methodism is found in this passage from 1764:

In November, 1729, four young gentlemen of Oxford . . . . began to spend some evenings in a week together, in reading, chiefly, the Greek New Testament. . . .

The exact regularity of their lives, as well as studies, occasioned a young gentleman of Christ Church to say, "Here is a new set of Methodists sprung up;" Alluding to some ancient Physicians who were so called. The name was new and quaint; so it took immediately, and the Methodists were known all over the University.

They were all zealous members of the Church of England; not only tenacious of all her doctrines, so far as they knew them, but of all her discipline, to the minutest circumstance. They were likewise zealous observers of all the University Statutes, and that for conscience' sake. But they observed neither these nor anything else any further than they conceived it was bound upon them by their one book, the Bible; it being their one desire and design to be downright Bible-Christians; taking the Bible, as interpreted by the primitive Church and our own, for their whole and sole rule. (A Short History of Methodism 1764, VIII, 348-9)

There are then three reasons that cause Wesley to focus more upon this year as the origin of Methodism. The first and least important is that the name "Methodist" was first used in connection with this group of young scholars. The second is that Wesley's own commitment to actualizing holiness bears fruit in the development of this company of friends. Indeed, even in those places where he refers to 1725 as the origin of Methodism he notes that it was an incomplete beginning because of the lack of companions. One illustration of this may be helpful:

He [Wesley] found an earnest desire to live according to these rules [of Taylor], and to flee from the wrath to come. He sought for some that would be his companions in the way, but could find none; so that, for several years, he was constrained to travel alone, having no man to either guide or help him. (At The Foundation of City-Road Chapel VIII, 421)

This sense of the importance of companions is certainly in keeping with Wesley's view that Christian holiness is always and only social holiness. That is why Methodism really begins when it begins to be corporate, and why its distinctive form was to be that of a disciplined community.

The third reason for focusing upon the formation of the Oxford group as the true origin of Methodism is the commitment to the Bible as the guide to the realization of holiness. This is also the point emphasized by Wesley, when, in his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, (in which he places the beginning of Methodism in 1725) he goes on to say that:

In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion. (XI, 366-7)
Whatever the reasons, Wesley regularly refers to the small group at Oxford as the true origin of Methodism. In the sermon *On God’s Vineyard*, he defines “the people commonly called Methodists” as “that society only which began at Oxford in the year 1729, and remain united at this day” (VII, 202-3). In the sermon *On Family Religion*, he speaks of Methodism as “... this revival, [which] from its rise in the year 1729, has already lasted above fifty years” (VII, 77). And much the same point is made in the later sermon, *On the General Spread of the Gospel* (1788):

Let us observe what God hath done already. Between fifty and sixty years ago, God raised up a few young men, in the University of Oxford, to testify those grand truths, which were then little attended to:—That without holiness no man shall see God, who worketh in us both to will and to do;—that he doeth it of his own good pleasure, merely for the merits of Christ—that his holiness is the mind that was in Christ; enabling us to walk as he walked;—that no man can be thus sanctified till he be justified;—and, that we are justified by faith alone. These great truths they declared on all occasions, in private and public; having in design but to promote the glory of God, and no desire to save souls from death. (VI 281)

Here Wesley explicitly underlines the continuity between the Oxford Methodists, with their project of disciplined holiness, and the evangelistic movement which included the preaching of justification by grace through faith among its foundational doctrines. The possibility of doing so is provided by the fact that, from its beginnings, the Oxford group had a certain evangelical fervor, which led to its growth in a period of about five years from “two or three” to “about fifteen.” (*Thoughts Upon Methodism* 1786, VIII, 258; see also *Thoughts Upon a Late Phenomenon* 1788, XIII, 265).

From the consistency of Wesley’s reference to the Oxford Methodists as the true origin of Methodism there can be no doubt that this has by far the best claim to be the founding event of the people called Methodists. After Wesley had been preaching for thirty years across the length and breadth of the British Isles, overseeing the growth of the Methodist societies, he wrote to his brother Charles:

I often cry out, *Vita me redde priori!* Let me be again an Oxford Methodist! I am often in doubt whether it would not be best for me to resume all my Oxford rules, great and small. I did then walk closely with God, and redeem the time. But what I have been doing these thirty years? (Dec. 15, 1772, XIII, 141)

The desire to return to the beginning when all was pristine takes many modern Methodists back to Aldersgate. But not so with Wesley. He still longed for the original simplicity of Oxford.

**The Growth of Community (1729–38)**

Although Oxford has the single best claim as the birthplace of Methodism and 1729 as the year of that birth. Wesley is prepared to admit of
multiple moments of origin. Even when he refers to the earlier date of 1725, this is usually connected immediately to the Oxford group four years later. But later events too can be mentioned by Wesley as founding events in the history of Methodism.

One of the most interesting documents in this regard is his *A Short History of the People Called Methodists* which was written in 1781 as a supplement to the *Concise History of the Church*. This 80-page history is the longest of Wesley’s surveys of the history of Methodism and consists largely of extracts from his *Journals*. Wesley was an inveterate abridger of the books of others, seeking to present that which was of real value in larger works in a more readily accessible form. This *Short History* is then Wesley’s abridgement of Wesley. Despite the dependence of this text on the *Journal* (which is the only source in all of Wesley’s writings for the so-called Aldersgate experience) there is no mention whatever of Aldersgate! He does provide the reader with an account of the Oxford Methodists, followed by a surprisingly long account of the Savannah Methodists! Thus, when he comes to mention the founding of the Fetter Lane Society in May 1738 he reminds the reader:

> On Monday, May 1, our little society began in London. But it may be observed, the first rise of Methodism, so called, was in November 1729, when four of us met together at Oxford; the second was at Savannah, in April 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my house; the last was at London, on this day, when forty or fifty of us agreed to meet together every Wednesday evening, in order to a free conversation, begun and ended with singing and prayer. In all our steps we were greatly assisted by the advice and exhortations of Peter Bohler, an excellent young man, belonging to the society commonly called Moravians. (vol, XIII, 307)

Here Wesley identifies three founding events, each having to do with the founding of different sorts of community. The first is a community of scholars and priests in Oxford. The second is a society made up primarily of lay folk in Savannah. The third is a society constituted by persons who were members of several parishes and even denominations; an ecumenical community. Each of these “beginnings” serves to emphasize an aspect of the Methodist movement as a movement of persons in community seeking to enable one another to grow in holiness.

It is clear, then, that for Wesley, Methodism is truly launched when the commitment to entire holiness of life takes on the form of a community of persons committed to assist one another to this end.

**Justification by Faith**

By far the majority of Wesley’s retrospectives on the origin of Methodism point to 1725 or 1729 as the founding events of the movement. There are, however, a few references to a subsequent turning point by which Wesley came to be committed to the doctrine of justification by faith. Sometimes Wesley puts his commitment to this doctrine as early
as 1725, as in the passage cited earlier from his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (XI, 373). Some of these references put this together with the original Oxford group as in the passage already cited from the sermon *On the General Spread of the Gospel* (VI, 281). Others indicate an emphasis on saving faith which begins in 1734 or around the time of Wesley’s decision to go to Georgia. (*Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained* (VIII, 468). In the *Minutes of Several Conversations*, Wesley first notes the origin of Methodism at Oxford and then recalls: “In 1737 they saw holiness comes by faith. They saw likewise that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their point” (VIII, 300). Many of the references to this altered doctrinal emphasis, however, seems to point to 1738, the year of Wesley’s alleged conversion. It will become clear, however, that even here Wesley is not referring to “Aldersgate” but to something quite different.

In a letter of June 19, 1771, Wesley recalls:

> Many years since I saw that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” I began following after it, and inciting all with whom I had any intercourse to do the same. Ten years after, God gave me a clearer view than I had before of the way how to attain this; namely, by faith in the Son of God. And immediately I declared to all, “We are saved from sin, we are made holy, by faith.” (Letter to Lady _____, XII, 368)

This letter is especially revealing since it makes clear how the insistence upon faith is to be related to that upon holiness. The project of actualizing scriptural holiness remains constant from 1725. It becomes at once biblical and social in 1729. What changes in 1738, or sometimes appears to Wesley to change, is the awareness of the *means* to this end, namely faith in that divine grace made manifest in Christ. Thus, in a letter of 1746, Wesley maintained:

> I would just add, that I regard even faith itself, not as an end, but as a means only. The end of the commandment is love.... Let this love be obtained, by whatever means, and I am content; I desire no more. (June 25, 1746, XIII, 78-9)

It is clear that for Wesley, even becoming persuaded of the importance of faith played a subsidiary role at best in the origin of Methodism. Still, there are passages where he does give some attention to this apparent change in his doctrine. In his *Short History of Methodism* of 1764, Wesley, having emphasized the origin of Methodism in the group at Oxford, goes on to speak of the re-emergence after his return from Georgia and notes:

> Meantime, they began to be convinced, that “by grace we are saved through faith”: that justification by faith was the doctrine of the Church, as well as of the Bible. As soon as they believed, they spake; salvation by faith being now their standing topic. (VIII, 349)

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4Several of Wesley’s references to this are listed by Kenneth Collins in “The Continuing Significance of Aldersgate” *Quarterly Review* Winter, 1988. Unfortunately he also imagines that these references are to Aldersgate.
A somewhat more detailed reference to this alteration in Wesley's view is found in his *A Farther Appeal*:

As soon as, by the great blessing of God, I had a clearer view of [the nature of saving faith and justifying grace], I began to declare them to others also. "I believed, and therefore I spake." Whenever I was now desired to preach, salvation by faith was now my only theme. My constant subjects were, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins." These I explained and enforced with all my might, both in every church where I was asked to preach, and occasionally in the religious societies of London and Westminster; to some or other of which I was continually pressed to go by the stewards or other members of them.

Things were in this posture, when I was told I must preach no more in this, and this, and another church; the reason was usually added without reserve, "because you preach such doctrines." So much the more those who could not hear me there flocked together when I was at any of the societies. . . . (VII, 111-2)

The critical change then occurs when 1) Wesley is persuaded of the truth of the doctrine faith which then 2) leads to his preaching this doctrine and 3) to being excluded from the pulpits of London. The unwary reader, especially one whose judgement has been clouded by the customary rhetorical flourishes associated with the celebration of Aldersgate, will assume that this is the event which Wesley is referring to here. Even if it were, this would not serve to establish Aldersgate as the origin of Methodism since we have already seen that Wesley's mature judgment is that Methodism was well and truly begun long before 1738. Indeed, even in the *Appeals*, Wesley defines Methodism not in terms of the emphasis upon faith as: "... no other than love; the love of God and all mankind." This definition does not point to 1738 but to 1725 as the origin of Methodism.

But Aldersgate does not even have the subsidiary role of persuading Wesley of the truth of justification by faith. What does Wesley mean when he speaks of being "convinced" of the "nature of saving faith"?

The account which Wesley supplies of this process of being convinced is found in the *Journal* entry which is also the source for the account of Aldersgate. In this account the role of Peter Bohler is heavily emphasized.

11. *In my return to England, January 1738, being in imminent danger of death, and very uneasy on that account, I was strongly convinced that the cause of that uneasiness was unbelief; and that gaining a true, living faith was the "one thing needful" for me. But still I had not fixed this faith on its right object: I meant only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ. Again, I knew not that I was wholly void of this faith; but only thought, I had not enough of it. So that when Peter Bohler, whom God prepared for me as soon as I came to London, affirmed of true faith in Christ, (which is but one,) that it had those two fruits inseparably attending it, "Dominion over sin, and constant Peace from a sense of forgiveness," I was quite amazed, and looked upon it as a new Gospel. If this was so, it was clear that I had not faith. . . . (Wesley's retrospect, dated May 24th. See also Journal entry for Mar. 5, 1738.)*

Wesley then provides the following account of how he came to be persuaded of this truth:
12. When I met Peter Bohler again, he consented to put this dispute upon the issue which I desired, namely, Scripture and experience. I first consulted the Scripture. But when I set aside the glosses of men, and simply considered the words of God . . . I found they all made against me, and was forced to retreat to my last hold, “that experience would never agree with the literal interpretation of those scriptures. Nor could I therefore allow it to be true, till I found some living witnesses of it.” He replied, he could show me such at any time; if I desired it, the next day. And accordingly, the next day he came with three others, all of whom testified, of their own personal experience, that a true living faith in Christ is inseparable from a sense of pardon from for all past, and freedom from all present, sins. They added with one mouth, that this faith was the gift, the free gift of God; and that he would surely bestow it upon every soul who earnestly and perseveringly sought it. I was now thoroughly convinced. . . . (May 24. See also April 22, 1738.)

We have already seen that Wesley had determined to base all doctrine on the Bible in 1729. Thus his determination to test this view by the Bible is consistent with that policy. But the doctrine to be tested is not that of justification by faith (of which Wesley had long since been persuaded) but that this faith could really occur instantaneously and so produce in a moment those fruits which Wesley had supposed required the discipline of a lifetime to acquire.

But scripture alone could not decide this issue since what was at stake was not simply a doctrine, but the manner in which God worked. This is a point which in the nature of the case must be tested by experience since God’s acting in a particular way two thousand years ago was insufficient guarantee that this same modus operandi would obtain today. Thus Wesley insists that the doctrine be tested by experience. But what he means by this is quite different from what the celebrators of Aldersgate suppose. By experience here, he does not mean his own inward or interior experience but the life history of competent and credible witnesses. What is meant by experience is not a hidden and essentially private moment but public and reliable testimony. And it is this which fully and finally persuades Wesley of what he calls “the nature of saving faith.”

As we have seen, Wesley not only points to the process of being persuaded of this doctrine but also to the decision to preach it as having some importance for the emergence of the Methodist movement. Although Wesley’s being fully persuaded occurs around April 23rd, he had already begun to preach this doctrine more than a month before. In the Journal entry for March 4th, we find:

Immediately it struck my mind, “leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?” I asked Bohler, whether he thought I should leave it off or not. He answered, “By no means.” I asked, “But what can I preach?” He said, “Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith. (Mar. 4, 1738) Accordingly, Monday, 6, I began preaching this new doctrine, although my soul started back from the work. The first person to whom I offered salvation by faith alone, was a prisoner under sentence of death. (Mar. 4 and 6, 1738)
Clearly we are to reckon with successive stages of being persuaded. It is, however, this earlier encounter with Bohler which most clearly meets the description which Wesley later gives of being convinced “of the nature of saving faith” since his preaching of this doctrine begins in March. This preaching is not confined to death row. Wesley was later to note that he and his brother had been invited to preach in a number of churches owing to their return from the New World, a fact which also accounted for the numbers of hearers which they received for these sermons (*At the Foundation of City-Road Chapel* VIII, 432). Rather than speaking of the exotic experiences of living in deepest, darkest Georgia, however, the brothers announced the doctrine of which they had just been persuaded (and of which they had, as yet, a most imperfect understanding).

The result which Wesley sometimes attributes to the preaching of justification by faith is his expulsion from the pulpits of very nearly every church in which he appeared. In the weeks prior to Aldersgate, Wesley had already been excluded from several London pulpits on account of his doctrine of “free salvation by faith in the blood of Christ.” (See *Journal* entries for May 7, 9, 14, 21.)

But even here, there is some confusion. In the only explicit reference to May 24, 1738 (the date of the “Aldersgate experience”) in all of Wesley’s writings after that year, we find the following curious statement:

... it is true, that from May 24, 1738, “whenever I was desired to preach, salvation by faith was my only theme;” — that is, such a love of God and man, as produces all inward and outward holiness, and springs from a conviction, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost, of the pardoning love of God: and when I was told, “You must preach no more in this church,” it was commonly added, “because you preach such doctrine!” And it is equally true, that “it was for preaching the love of God and man, that several of the clergy forbade me their pulpits” before that time, before May 24, before I either preached or knew salvation by faith. (letter to “Mr. John Smith” Dec. 30, 1745, XII 71)

This is a curious passage not only because it is Wesley’s only subsequent reference to May 24 but also because it seems to be in direct conflict with the evidence of the *Journal* which we have already seen shows Wesley to have both known and preached the doctrine of salvation by faith before May 24, 1738. The easiest explanation is that Wesley, in his eagerness to avoid apparent self-contradiction, has simply overstated his point, something which happens with some frequency in this sort of response to criticism. The introduction to the long passage quoted above reads: “I was aware of the seeming contradiction at the very time when I wrote the sentence. But is only a seeming one. . . .” The sentence in question is from the previous letter (Sept. 28, 1745) in which Wesley maintained that he had no more “singular opinion” than that of “love of God and man” and says:
And it was for preaching this very doctrine, (before I preached or knew salvation by faith,) that several of the Clergy forbade me their pulpits. (XII, p. 63)

This appears to stand in contradiction to a passage already cited from his *A Farther Appeal* (VIII, 111-2). In attempting to defend himself, Wesley has put himself in a more awkward position.

From this quick survey of the evidence, it is clear that when Wesley speaks of being persuaded of the nature of saving faith he means not Aldersgate but the process of dialogue with Peter Bohler. This is verified by his account in 1740 of *The Principles of a Methodist* (VIII, 367) where he again speaks of being persuaded by Bohler, the Bible and Bohler's witnesses but does not mention Aldersgate. Both Wesley's preaching of this doctrine and the negative reaction of the ecclesial establishment antedate by months or weeks the events of May 24th, 1738. Thus the change in Wesley's doctrine and practice associated with the role and nature of saving faith appear to have nothing whatever to do with Aldersgate.

**Conclusion**

From Wesley's point of view, Methodism originates in the commitment to holiness of life, a commitment which he first makes in 1725 and which bears fruit in the emergence of a disciplined community in 1729. Subsequent events do sometimes play a role in some of Wesley's accounts of origin, but Aldersgate is never one of them. The celebration of Aldersgate as the origin of Methodism has no basis in Wesley's thought or in the factual history of the movement he launched and led. Whatever else may be celebrated by recalling May 24th, 1738, it cannot be the origin or even one of the origins of Methodism.

Wesley's own accounts of Methodist origins serve to emphasize that Methodism is above all concerned with the realization of scriptural holiness. The distinctive contribution of Methodism is to enable ordinary lay folk to join together in pursuit of this aim, mutually encouraging one another to allow the love of God and neighbor to become the center and aim of life. These are the aspects of Methodism which Wesley emphasized in his accounts of Methodist origins. The supposition that Aldersgate is the origin of Methodism substitutes for Wesley's own vision a view of Methodism which puts the stress on individual rather than community, on inner emotion rather than disciplined love, on conversion rather than sanctification, on the beginning of Christian life rather than its maturation and goal.

The continued celebration of Aldersgate Sunday as well as the celebration of the 250th anniversary of Aldersgate is both an historical fraud and a distortion of Wesley's own thought and work. It celebrates not the beginning but the end of Methodism.