



DISCOVERY

Edited by
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Another view of Wesley and the Methodists

Sometime ago I received an interesting item from my good friend John Vickers—that stalwart of Methodist research who is an authority on Thomas Coke and is currently busy working with the Wesley Works Editors. In his research he came across a letter from Henry Venn, at one time Vicar of Huddersfield, to his successor the Rev. William Moorhouse.

To better understand the excerpt one should know a little about the writer. Henry Venn was one of several evangelical Anglican clergymen connected with 18th century Methodism and John Wesley. He was born in Surrey March 1724 and was educated in London, Bristol, and Cambridge. He was ordained a deacon in 1747 and a priest in 1749. He served at least two parishes before becoming the Vicar of Huddersfield in Yorkshire in 1759. His preaching drew great crowds, but he objected to the Methodist preachers coming into his parish since he, himself, was as evangelical as any of them. He had a meeting with John Wesley in 1761 and they agreed that the Methodists should preach in Huddersfield only once a month.

In 1771 because of ill health, Venn moved to Yelling in Huntingdonshire from where in September 1772 he wrote the following excerpt of his letter to his successor William Moorhouse. According to Dr. Vickers, the full letter appears in *A Brief Memoir of the Rev. William Moorhouse by his Son* (1823) page 14.

It is difficult to discover what were “the proceedings at Huddersfield” mentioned in the letter. It probably had reference to a meeting in the market place where in July 1772 John Wesley preached to a large crowd of eager listeners. It is doubtful though that Wesley did any “railing” at that time. The chief difficulty between the Anglican evangelical clergymen and John Wesley had to do first with continuity. An evangelical Anglican might be followed by a totally unevangelical priest. This naturally had a chilling effect on the work of his predecessor. Wesley’s movement at

least had continuity, and for this reason he wished to appoint his preachers even to the parishes of the Anglican evangelicals. Secondly, most of the evangelical Anglicans were Calvinists in their theology and some were highly critical of the Methodists. Venn himself was critical of the Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection. His spirit, however, seems to be admirable, although it is amusing to hear him speak of the "poor aged man, Mr. Wesley." Wesley lived nearly thirty years after the date of the letter, whereas Venn died comparatively soon after writing it.

The letter is dated September 26, 1772.

. . . I am, you know, a Calvinist by principle, as well as yourself, and I rejoice to hear you preach doctrines practically and experimentally. In this way only the Lord will bless you. Many Calvinists are most unscriptural in their *manner* of proposing their doctrines, and therefore without success in their work. God frowns upon their way of handling His own truth; a way which exposes it to the world, and makes it suit the taste of a hypocrite.

It is with concern for that poor aged man, Mr. Wesley, that I hear of his proceedings at Huddersfield. I would advise you never to speak against him, or the Methodists; only speak against their errors, not mentioning any names. For I have often grieved to have such precious time spent in exposing their errors in private company, by name, when all present were free from them. Better, much better, it is to establish the truth by strong proofs from Holy Writ, and leave it to Mr. Wesley or the Baptists, to make their pulpits places to rail in. God's name be praised, that your church is in flourishing condition.