

## LEGALIZING METHODISM: JOHN WESLEY'S DEED OF DECLARATION AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE LAW

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To students and scholars familiar with the rise and development of Methodism in the British Isles during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the specific circumstances leading to John Wesley's need to legalize his Methodist organization and the substance of the actual Deed of Declaration (1784) that did so require little beyond summary.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, as early as the late 1740s, Wesley sought the means to strengthen the appearance of Methodism as an evangelical branch of the Church of England (as opposed a Dissenting sect) to elevate it beyond the limitations imposed upon Protestant Dissent within the provisions of the various Toleration Acts. In 1763, he prepared a "Model Deed" for the Methodist chapels (or preaching houses), consisting of standards that he expected all societies to follow for trusteeship, construction, and even worship. By the mid-1770s, he began to turn his attention to the survival and the continuation of his religious organization after his death. Through the Deed of Declaration—enrolled in the High Court of Chancery on February 28, 1784—he sought (with assistance from Rev. Thomas Coke [1747-1814], then John Wesley's principal assistant in London) to solidify his power and that of his successors by controlling two principal areas of the Methodist organization: (1) the construction of local Methodist society preaching houses and the trusts that would govern them; and (2) the legal definition of the term "the Conference of the people called Methodists" and identification of the membership of that body. Secondary and tertiary elements of the Deed included regulations for the conduct of the annual Conference, the sites of the Conference, the publication of Conference *Minutes*, and the time limits placed upon a Methodist preacher for service within an assigned circuit.

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<sup>1</sup> See G. Stringer Rowe, "A Note on Wesley's Deed Poll," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 1 (1897), 37-38; Charles E. Wansbrough, "Notes on Wesley's Deed Poll," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 1 (1897), 39-41; John Smith Simon, "John Wesley's Deed of Declaration," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 12 (1919), 81-93; E. Benson Perkins, *Methodist Preaching Houses and the Law: The Story of the Model Deed*. Wesley Historical Society Lectures No. 18 (London: Epworth Press, 1952); Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 213, 238-239, 277-278, 282-283; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 495-505; Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 205, 208, 339, 350-351, 354, 360, 366.

A number of elements related to the 1784 Deed of Declaration have not, however, received the fullest light of day in the courts of scholarship: (1) the organization of the document; (2) the lawyers who wrote the Deed, as well as Wesley's commentary concerning the legal profession; and (3) its language, including Wesley's critical reaction to legal language. Although the Deed provided legal status for Wesley's evangelical religious organization while its founder remained alive, the radical shifts in organization and philosophy that came to Methodism, both in Great Britain and the United States, within five years of John Wesley's death on March 2, 1791 rendered the document practically obsolete for his 19<sup>th</sup>-century successors, whose efforts began the slow but steady development of Methodism into one of the largest Protestant denominations in the western world. Nonetheless, the Deed remains important to the early history of Methodism, as well as to the consideration of a larger topic, the place and function of legal documents within the history of organized religion.

The earliest printed copies of the Deed of Declaration (technically termed the "Deed Poll")<sup>2</sup> consisted of five folio pages (barren of punctuation marks) with the endorsement page headed "The Rev. John Wesley's/ Declaration and Appointment/ of the Conference of the People Called Methodists./ Enrolled in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery."<sup>3</sup> The opening single-sentence salutation emphasized and attests to the authority of a single person: "To all to whom these presents shall come, John Wesley, late of Lincoln College, Oxford, but now of the City Road, London, Clerk, sendeth greeting:"<sup>4</sup> Then follow four paragraphs (the third of which contains fifteen sub-sections) that contain the substance of the Deed: (1) the preaching houses and adjoining buildings and grounds, the status of the trustees of those properties, and the purposes for which the trustees will employ them; (2) the establishment of the annual Conference, including purpose and locations of meetings; (3) the principal portion of the document, naming those specific Methodist preachers (known as "the Legal One Hundred") who will comprise the annual Methodist Conference, followed by the fifteen rules and

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<sup>2</sup> The term "poll" referring to a register of electors which, of course, places the emphasis upon those named as members of the annual Methodist Conference. The irony, of course, resides with the fact that members of the annual Methodist Conference voted only when Wesley chose to allow them to do so.

<sup>3</sup> The original copy remained in the Wesleyan Methodist Conference Office, City Road, London; a printed attested copy went round to the preachers; another copy found its way into the possession of "an old Methodist family in the city of Chester," who passed it on to the Rev. Nehemiah Curnock (1840-1915), the principal editor of the then eight-volume standard edition of *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909-1916). See *Journal*, ed. Curnock, 6:479, 481.

<sup>4</sup> All references in my text to the Deed of Declaration from the reprint in *Journal*, ed. Curnock, 8:335-341; other reprints will be found in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 4:503-512; George Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1857-1861), 1:705-709; Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* (London: Epworth Press, 1965-1988), 4:195-196.

procedures by which those Conference members will be appointed and succeeded and the regulations governing their responsibilities and actions; and (4) the declaration that "nothing herein contained shall extend or be construed to extend, to extinguish, lessen, or abridge the life-estate of the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley,<sup>5</sup> or either of them, of and in any of the said chappels [*sic*] and premises, or any other chapels<sup>6</sup> and premises, wherein they the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley, or either of them, now have or may have any estate or interest, power or authority whatsoever" (Curnock, 8:341). The sixth and final paragraph of the Deed contains the legal endorsement—date and signatures of Wesley and the lawyers who witnessed the signing. In all, the document extends to approximately four thousand words. John Wesley's name appears therein on nineteen instances, while the name of Charles Wesley appears on seven occasions.

The issue of the Methodist preaching houses appears first in the Deed simply because it arose prior to the need to consider the legalizing of the annual Conference and owing to the problem of those houses having proved a long and steady pain in John Wesley's organizational side. As early as 1746, he had drafted and presented to the Conference a model deed for all of the Methodist preaching houses scattered throughout England, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland,<sup>7</sup> which he revised in 1763 and continued to revise until the drafting of the 1784 Deed of Declaration.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, he devised what he termed "the Methodist Plan," encouraging local Methodist societies to pay for their chapels or preaching houses prior to construction, thus eliminating long-term debt, and ceding to Wesley the sole right to appoint those persons who would preach therein. Wesley held firm to the opinion that if he could not control those who occupied the pulpits in the preaching houses of the societies, then he could not, in turn, determine the specific preachers whom he would assign to the various circuits.

Specifically who composed the Deed of Declaration cannot unconditionally be determined. The first name ruled out of contention would be that of Wesley, himself, for, as we shall see, neither his skills nor his interest lay in the language of the law. The notion of the necessity for legal status for Methodism came to Wesley by way of Thomas Coke. Coke had received

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<sup>5</sup> Whether John Wesley viewed his younger brother, Charles (1707-1788), as a true partner in the leadership of the Methodist organization, or even thought of him as a willing and capable successor, remains a matter of debate. Most certainly, he intended that Rev. John William Fletcher (1745-1785), vicar of Madeley, Shropshire, succeed him as leader of the work, but then Fletcher died prematurely of consumption.

<sup>6</sup> Curnock (or one of his editorial assistants, or a typesetter) appears to vacillate between "chapels" and "chapters"; Jackson, in his text (4:511), relies upon "chapels" for both references.

<sup>7</sup> The form for the "Model Deed" for the preaching houses will be found in "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others; from the Year 1744 to 1769," in *Works*, ed. Jackson, 8:329-331. According to Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1872), 3:417-418, the number of Methodist chapels had reached 359 by 1784.

<sup>8</sup> Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*. Vol. 9, *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 8-19.



such advice from a fellow Welshman, a little-known barrister of Lincoln's Inn and St. Andrew's Holborn, by the name of John Madocks (or Maddocks), who had been involved in one of the chapel disputes at Birstall, in the West Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>9</sup> The actual composition of the Deed most likely came from the pen of the London solicitor William Clulow (?-1811), the principal witness to the document and John Wesley's London solicitor and overall legal adviser. A native of Macclesfield, Cheshire, and the son of John and Elizabeth Clulow—the father a Methodist and a master baker—Clulow practiced law at Macclesfield before removing to London in 1783, eventually establishing offices in Quality Court, Chancery Lane. He also wrote Wesley's will, and the names of both he and his wife, Elizabeth, appear as witnesses on that document (February 20/25, 1789).<sup>10</sup> Clulow's name appears in Wesley's diary on eleven occasions between Sunday, December 22, 1782, and Sunday, February 13, 1791, eighteen days before Wesley's death. The actual signing of the Deed of Declaration occurred at 11:00 a.m. (or shortly thereafter) on Saturday, February 28, 1784, when Wesley met with Clulow to conduct "necessary business."<sup>11</sup> Clulow's clerk, Richard Young, also witnessed the signing of the deed and possibly had a hand in its composition as well as its transcription. Acknowledgment of receipt at the Public Office bears the name Edward Montagu, while Thomas Brigstock attested to the Deed having been enrolled with the High Court of Chancery on March 9, 1784.

Insofar as concerned the legal profession at large, Wesley rarely assumed a positive attitude toward its practitioners. There did arise an occasion, on Tuesday, October 2, 1764, when, at Devizes, Wiltshire, he breakfasted with a "Mr. B\_\_\_\_, a black swan, and honest lawyer," and afterward the two rode together on to Pewsey, also in Wiltshire.<sup>12</sup> However, that remark proves as

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<sup>9</sup> Rack, 502-503. Originally from Fron Yw, near Llandyrnog, Denbighshire, Madocks eventually served as Member of Parliament for Westbury, Wiltshire (1786-1790); see the *Dictionary of National Biography* under his son, William Alexander Madocks (1774-1828). A John Edward Madocks (1760-1806), also from Fron Yw, appears fleetingly (as does his wife, Elizabeth [1768-1799]) in letters of Hester Lynch Thrall Piozzi; see *The Piozzi Letters. Correspondence of Hester Lynch Thrall Piozzi, 1784-1821*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989-1993), 3:56, 57, 58, 59. Finally, Samuel Johnson engaged in brief legal dealings, in September 1776 and October 1782, with a barrister named John Maddox (?-1794); see *The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Bruce Redford (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992-1994), 2:354-355, 4:76.

<sup>10</sup> W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Journal and Diaries VII, The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 24:64; Curnock, 6:481, 7:339

<sup>11</sup> Ward and Heitzenrater, 23:478. The event has been recorded in the diary only; the published extract of Wesley's journal does not note the event, there being a gap during 22-29 February 1784.

<sup>12</sup> Both Curnock and Ward identify (with qualification) Wesley's companion as Henry Samuel Biggs (?-1798), an attorney at Devizes, whose remains lie buried in Bronham churchyard.; see *Journal*, ed. Curnock, 5:98; Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:91. *The Oxford English Dictionary* suggests a general association between "black swan" and any uncommon species. One should also be aware of the close friendships between John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield with Ebenezer Blackwell (1711-1782), a junior partner (beginning 1746) in the financial firm of Martin's Bank, Lombard Street, London, and a legal and financial advisor for Methodism.

rare as the metaphorical black swan. When, in August 1767, one of Wesley's female Methodist friends, Mary Bosanquet (1739-1815)—later to marry Rev. John William Fletcher (1745-1785)—received a substantial legacy from the will of another Methodist, Margaret Lewen (1742?-1766), who had died the previous October, Miss Lewen's relatives contested the action, claiming that Miss Bosanquet had placed death-bed pressure on Miss Lewen to bequeath money to her. Wesley entered into the dispute, negotiated a peaceful settlement with Margaret Lewen's father, and concluded, rhetorically, that "the harpy lawyers are happily disappointed – and the design of the dying saint in some measure answered."<sup>13</sup> Wesley even managed to find opportunities in a theological tract to demonstrate his disagreements with the legal profession. For instance, in *The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* (1757), he raised the question of the perversion of justice within the public courts: "Can it not be said in any Protestant country, 'There is a society of men among us, bred up from their youth in the art of proving, according as they are paid, by words multiplied for the purpose, that white is black, and black is white'?" He proceeded with an hypothetical example of a neighbor who, covetous of his cow, hires a lawyer to prove that he (the neighbor) rightfully and legally ought to have possession of the beast. Then follows a lengthy legal process involving "whether the cow be red or black, her horns long or short, whether the field she grazes in be round or square, and the like. After which they adjourn the case from time to time; and in ten or twenty years' time they come to an issue." He concluded with the observation that, "A Lawyer who does not finish his client's suit as soon as it can be done, I cannot allow to have more honesty (though he has more prudence) than if he robbed him on the highway."<sup>14</sup> Essentially, although Wesley would admit to the existence of honest attorneys, solicitors, and counselors, he complained that he found the number of such persons spread too thinly among the profession as a whole.

Moving on to the final point, the language of the 1784 Deed of Declaration, one finds as the immediate problem not so much the inclusion of legalistic terminology—indeed the document contains relatively little of that—but the insertion and the repetition of referents that confuse the reader and obscure the object and meaning of the sentence. Further, one cannot always easily determine when one sentence idea ends and another begins,

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<sup>13</sup> Ward and Heitzenrater, 22:98. One might recall the closing lines of the second stanza of Oliver Wendell Holmes' "Old Ironsides" (1830)—"The harpies of the shore shall pluck/The eagle of the sea!"—in reference to the mythological, ravenous, plundering, and filthy winged monster.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, 9:221, 229.

<sup>15</sup> Compounding the problem, somewhat, rises the fact that later editors of the text did not follow a consistent practice of punctuating the Deed. Curnock, 8:335 notes that "The original document contains no punctuation marks, and thus he supplied them wherever he saw fit. Jackson,, 4:503-512) also followed his own mechanical conscience.

which causes difficulty in grasping a complete thought.<sup>15</sup> For example, consider the opening “sentence” of the second paragraph:

Whereas divers buildings, commonly called chapels, with a messuage and dwelling-house, or other appurtenances to each of the same belonging, situate in various parts of Great Britain, have been given and conveyed from time to time by the said John Wesley to certain persons and their heirs in each of the said gifts and conveyances named, which are inrolled in His Majesty’s High Court of Chancery, upon the acknowledgement of the said John Wesley pursuant to the Act of Parliament in that case made and provided;... (8:335)

Of the eighty-seven words therein, and realizing at the same time the need for legal documents of any age to avoid even the slightest potential for ambiguity or misreading, note these obvious instances of redundancy and excess: (1) buildings/chapels, messuage,<sup>16</sup> dwelling-house; (2) to each of the same belonging; (3) situate in various parts; (4) given and conveyed; (5) from time to time; (6) said gifts and conveyances named; (7) in that case made and provided. The waters of the sentence immediately following become even more muddled (the heaviness of 18<sup>th</sup>-century prose style aside), and the reader must slog through piles of language to identify the essential elements of actor-action-object:

Upon trust that the Trustees in the said several Deeds respectively named, and the survivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and the Trustees for the time being to be elected as in the said Deeds is appointed, should permit and suffer the said John Wesley, and such other person and persons as he should for that purpose from time to time nominate and appoint at all times during his life at his will and pleasure, to have and enjoy the free use and benefit of the said premises, that he the said John Wesley, and such person and persons as he should nominate and appoint, might therein preach and expound God’s Holy Word;... (Curnock, 8:335-336).

“I hate anything that occupies more space than it is worth,” wrote William Hazlitt,<sup>17</sup> which appears as an accurate and succinct portrait of the language packed into this Deed. The intent of the sentence, of course, focuses upon those persons eligible to preach in Wesley’s chapels—John Wesley and those appointed by John Wesley; as long as Wesley lived. The trustees (including their “survivors. . . heirs, and assigns”) really had no voice in the matter. Insofar as what would occur following John Wesley’s death, the very next sentence—all 181 words of it!—stipulates that the responsibility for the appointment of preachers would pass to Charles Wesley, and after his death, to the annual Methodist Conference.

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<sup>16</sup> In legal terms, *messuage* refers to a dwelling-house with adjoining buildings, curtilage (enclosed courtyard), and lands.

<sup>17</sup> “On Familiar Style” (1821), in Ernest Bernbaum, ed., *Anthology of Romanticism* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948), 406.



The principal sentence in the entire Deed of Declaration begins the third paragraph. Brushing aside the opening thirteen words of legal introduction, the passage reads,

John Wesley doth hereby declare that the Conference of the people called Methodists in London, Bristol, or Leeds, ever since there hath been any yearly Conference of the said people called Methodists in any of the said places, hath always heretofore consisted of the Preachers and Expounders of God's Holy Word, commonly called Methodist Preachers, in connexion with and under the care of the said John Wesley, whom he hath thought expedient year after year to summons to meet him one or other of the said places of London, Bristol, or Leeds,<sup>18</sup> to advise with them for the promotion of the Gospell [sic] of Christ, to appoint the said persons so summoned, and the other Preachers and Expounders of God's Holy Word, also in connexion with and under the care of the said John Wesley, not summoned to the said yearly Conference, to the use and enjoyment of the said chapels and premises so given and conveyed. (Curnock, 8:336).

In other words, Wesley would identify (as he does in the fourth paragraph) those preachers (the "Legal One Hundred") who would constitute the annual Conference, while the remainder, although not Conference members, would continue to preach in Methodist chapels. One should note, also, that the heaviness of the legal style does not obscure the weight of John Wesley's authority: he "doth hereby *declare*" (my italics); the twice-repeated phrase "under the care of" functions as a benevolent euphemism for *under the authority and control of*. Finally, the combination of "Preachers and Expounders" underscores Wesley's long standing commitment to a large corps of non-ordained and not always educated Methodist men (and, on occasion, women) who mounted Methodist pulpits and stood before Methodist society meetings—commitment that brought to him considerable criticism from traditional Church of English clergy and prominent communicants of that denomination.

The language of the document would presumably have floated amid clearer streams once it moved beyond the names of the "Legal One Hundred" (in the fourth paragraph) and arrived at the fifteen "regulations" (also in the fourth paragraph) governing the composition and conduct of the annual Methodist Conference. However, brevity does not always produce clarity, and the writer(s) of the Deed continued along the circuitous route of redundancy. For example, the sixth regulation reads,

Immediately after all the vacancies occasioned by death or absence are filled up by the election of new members as aforesaid, the Conference shall chuse [sic] a President and Secretary of their assembly out of themselves, who shall continue such until the election of another President or Secretary in the next or other subsequent Conference, and the said President shall have the priviledge [sic] and power of two members in all acts of the Conference during his presidency, and such other powers, priviledges [sic], and authoritys [sic] as the Conference shall from time to time see fit to entrust into his hands. (Curnock, 8:339)

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<sup>18</sup> In 1786, the Conference added Manchester, Lancashire, to this list.

Simply, the writer(s) did not separate the limits of the *term* of the president from the *process* by which he will gain election to that office. The regulation immediately preceding refers clearly to “the yearly Conference” (Curnock, 8:339), which, when combined with this regulation, sets forth the term of the president as one year (or longer, should the Conference omit one or more of its annual meetings). Further, why would the Conference elect or select its officers from *outside* of that body—particularly when the names John Wesley and Charles Wesley head the list of the “Legal One Hundred”? The phrase “to him,” at the very end of the sentence would appear sufficient to replace “into his hands,” although sufficiency need not necessarily stand as the best substitute for a simple image—in this instance the final note of authority. Again, as proves true within the entire document, the need of the legal mind to dwell upon every possible consideration, to shut tightly every potential avenue of misunderstanding and/or misinterpretation, totally overrides the rhetorical respect for conciseness.

In 1789, when Wesley introduced to the Methodist Conference yet another revision of the model deed for the construction and maintenance of Methodist preaching houses, he indicated that the document had been “drawn up by three of the most eminent Lawyers in London. Whosoever therefore objects to it, only betrays his own ignorance.”<sup>19</sup> The reader ought not to interpret that declaration as Wesley’s final word on the language of the law, however. Throughout his mature lifetime, in both oral and written address, he sought the plain style—the style governed by specificity and clarity. “All the birds of the air, all the beasts of the field,” he once complained, “understand the language of their own species. Man only is a barbarian to man, unintelligible to his own brethren!”<sup>20</sup> Thus, on Wednesday, December 19, 1759, at London, he responded to a request to read a chancery bill, in which “‘A.B. tells C.D. that one who owed him thirty pounds wanted to borrow thirty more, and asked whether he thought the eighth part of such a ship, then at sea, was sufficient security. He said he thought it was. On this, A.B. lent the money. The ship came home. But through various accidents, the eighth part yielded only twenty pounds. A.B. on this, commenced a suit to make C.D. pay him the remainder of his money.’” The bill that documented the incident required, according to Wesley, “no less than one hundred and ten sheets of paper!” C.D. responded with an additional fifteen pages of “exceptions” to the suit, which Wesley determined “a quarter of a sheet might have contained!” He then met with the two parties and, without benefit of extra paper, negotiated a quick settlement.<sup>21</sup> At York on Friday, January 3, 1761, he came upon a prisoner in the castle who had been involved in smuggling gin and brandy, which brought to his attention another chancery bill—“an hideous monster,” in Wesley’s terms. To relate the

<sup>19</sup> “Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others; from the Year 1744, to the Year 1789,” in Jackson, 8:330.

<sup>20</sup> Sunday, March 6, 1748. Ward and Heitzenrater, 20:212.

<sup>21</sup> Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:236-237.



incident "the lawyer takes up thirteen or fourteen sheets of trebly stamped paper," an exercise that prompted Wesley to raise the question, "Where is the common sense of taking up fourteen sheets to tell a story that may be told in ten lines?"<sup>22</sup>

If excess language wasted paper, it also brought about the expenditure of unnecessary sums of money. For example, on Thursday, April 10, 1766, at Manchester, he examined the deed for the Pitt Street Chapel. Referring to the document as "wonderful," he supported his sarcasm with the such comments as, "(1) It takes up three large skins of parchment, and so could not cost less than six guineas [£6 6s.]; whereas our own deed, transcribed by a friend, would not have cost six shillings. (2) It is verbose beyond all sense and reason, and withal so ambiguously worded that one passage only might find matter for a suit in ten or twelve years in chancery. (3) It everywhere calls the house a 'Meeting House,' a name which I particularly object to."<sup>23</sup> The term "meeting house" contained strong association with the denominations of Protestant Dissent, most notably the Society of Friends. In the Deed of Declaration, only the word "chapel" appears in reference to Methodist houses of worship, although "preaching house" also met with Wesley's approval. On Tuesday, June 8, 1790, the aged Wesley noted in his journal that, "I wrote a form for settling the preaching-houses, without any superfluous words. ... I will no more encourage that villainous tautology of lawyers which is the scandal of our nation."<sup>24</sup> Thus, by the end of his long life, the language of the law had come to stand high among Wesley's list of "villainies," beside such activities as smuggling, the practice of medicine and the conduct of physicians, and the slave trade. The degree to which that notion manifested itself appears in his tract titled, appropriately enough, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Law, Reason and Experience* (1757). Gathering lawyers into a collective "society," and seasoning his words with the bitterest of linguistic herbs, Wesley assigned to them "a peculiar cant and jargon of their own, in which all their laws are written. And these they take special care to multiply; whereby they have so confounded truth and falsehood, right and wrong, that it will take twelve years to decide, whether the field, left me by my ancestors for six generations, belong to me or to one three hundred miles off."<sup>25</sup>

Both the 1784 Deed of Declaration and the various deeds executed for the establishment and maintenance of Methodist chapels represent two facets within the complexity of John Wesley's life and thought. For Wesley, the evangelical religious organization known as Methodism required, for its survival, authority and order. He, alone, assumed the responsibility for the existence and continuation of both. Thus, the Deed of Declaration stood as

<sup>22</sup> Ward and Heitzenrater, 21:332-333.

<sup>23</sup> Ward and Heitzenrater, 22:36.

<sup>24</sup> Ward and Heitzenrater, 24:178-179.

<sup>25</sup> Jackson, 9:221.

the last will and testament of Wesley's organization, a legal document that would, in his mind, assure the orderly inheritance of an entity and an ideal. Luke Tyerman referred to the Deed as "Methodism's Magna Charta,"<sup>26</sup> but then 19<sup>th</sup>-century biographers of Wesley could not always harness their emotions or their imaginations. Rather, Wesley, himself, late in his life, had come to understand that despite the weight of its language, the law represented the core of the very order that he sought. "You see then in all the pains I have taken about this necessary Deed," he wrote from Plymouth Dock on March 3, 1785, "I have been labouring, not for myself, (I have no interests therein,) but for the whole body of Methodists; in order to fix them upon such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure. That is, if they continue to walk by faith and to show forth their faith by their works; otherwise, I pray God to root out the memorial of them from the earth."<sup>27</sup>

If the core of order, the law, carried with it the strong qualifier of faith, there also arose, within Wesley's own mind, the conflict between the seemingly unnecessary complexity of the law and his view of the necessity for reducing such complexities to the level of general human understanding. In other words, Wesley's ideal of language as a simple and accurate instrument necessary to the conveyance of clear ideas clashed with the reality of the inescapable presence of the language of the law. Although, for instance, he could demonstrate an ability to function as his own physician,<sup>28</sup> since there did not exist an impenetrable medical, surgical, or apothecary "system," he could not circumvent the traditions of legal practice (including the language of the law) by functioning as his own lawyer—by appearing in the courts or by writing and then entering into chancery his own legal documents. Therefore, the practical Wesley sought and gained the practical ground. In the published extracts of his journals, in his prose tracts, and in his correspondence, he explicated and echoed his ideals and complained of the violations upon them. In those necessary actions carried forth for the benefit and survival of his evangelical organization, he tempered, for the occasion, the heat of his own idealism and bowed in recognition of the inevitabilities of conducting business in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century world.

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<sup>26</sup> Tyerman, 3:421.

<sup>27</sup> "Thoughts upon Some Late Occurrences," in Jackson, 13:250.

<sup>28</sup> See his *Primitive Physick; or, an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (1747) and his *Desideratum; or, Electricity Made Plain and Useful. By a Lover of Mankind and Common Sense* (1760).