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WESLEY AT ALDERSGATE AND THE DISCOVERY OF A GERMAN NEW TESTAMENT

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This article has been peer reviewed

The recent discovery of a 1720 edition of Luther's German New Testament, in which the books of the New Testament follow on from Luther's Preface to the Book of Romans, invites another look at the accepted version of what happened at Aldersgate Street on 24 May 1738, the night Wesley's heart was 'strangely warmed.' The accepted belief that William Holland was the reader, and that the William Wilkinson [WW] English version (1594 or 1634) of Martin Luther's Preface was read that night follows from Holland's association with the Wesleys, and the assumption that the WW version was the only version available in English. A careful examination shows that this is a speculative reconstruction of what happened that night without any evidence to support it. It is shown that the WW English version understood to have been read that night was exceedingly rare in Hanoverian England. However, there were many German Pietists for whom the Luther German New Testament was the preferred version of the scriptures. Evidence is given to show that on 24 May 1738 Wesley attended a German religious society at Aldersgate Street, and there heard Luther's Preface read in German.

Introduction

The recent discovery of a 1720 pocketbook or purse-sized edition of a Luther German New Testament, with *Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* at the front of the edition, raises an intriguing possibility.¹ The Luther German Bible and the Luther New

¹ In April of 2007 while on a Bridwell Fellowship researching at the Bridwell Library of the Perkins School of Theology Dallas, I held this recently purchased German purse or pocket-sized New Testament. The Rev Page Thomas, Senior Librarian at Bridwell and overseer of an extensive Methodist collection of documents, had realised the significance of this New Testament when it became available for sale and arranged for its purchase by the Library. After a brief preface to the New Testament there follows, *Vorrede auf die Epistel St Pauli an die RÖmer* ('Preface to the Book of Romans'). The *Vorrede auf die Epistel* begins, 'Diese Epistel ist das rechte Hauptseuct des Neuen Testaments, und das ab lerlauterste Evangelium, melche wol weurdig und werth ist,

Testament, traditionally published in this form, were the preferred versions of the Bible for Pietists and Moravians. For three years prior to John Wesley's Aldersgate experience he was actively involved with Moravians. In Georgia he first lived with them and then was directly involved in worshiping regularly with them. On his return to England he met with Peter Boehler and his companions who read from such copies of the Luther New Testament.

It is possible that Wesley heard Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* read from such a German New Testament on the night of 24 May 1738 when his heart was 'strangely warmed.' It is most likely that he had heard the preface read in German before, and was now hearing it again at a time of crisis in his own life. This calls into question the widely accepted view that William Holland was the reader and that it was the William Wilkinson [WW] 1594 or 1634 English version which was read that night.²

It is surprising how little is known about the circumstances of this night, a key event in John Wesley's life. Wesley's minimalist description of what happened at Aldersgate Street does not indicate which society he was attending, who the reader was, the version read or the people who were present. Why did he go so unwillingly to 'a society in Aldersgate Street'? What sort of a society was it? Why would someone have been reading Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, and who was the reader? This paper takes another look at the evidence for what happened that night.

Identifying the Society at Aldersgate Street

The footnote to the words 'a society in Aldersgate Street,' in Ward and Heitzenrater's 1988 edition of Wesley's account provides the most up to date summary of what was known about this society.

Moravian sources (extensively quoted in Curnock, 1.475n.) suggest that this was a society which met weekly in Nettleton Court, Aldersgate Street. Among its members was James Hutton; Whitefield had

das sie ein Christen-Mensch, nicht allein von Wort zu Wort auswendig wisse, sondern teaglich damit umgehe, als mit teaglichem Brodt der Seelen.'

² John Wesley, *Journal & Diaries I (1735-38)* vol. 18 in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 249. Note 76 declares 'This work...was *A Methodical Preface prefixed before the Epistle of S. Paule to the Romanes, very necessary and profitable for the better understanding of it. Made by the right reverend father and faithfull servant of Jesus Christ, Martin Luther, now newly translated out of Latin into English by W[illiam] W[ilkinson] (London [1594]), and subsequently reprinted.*

ministered there in 1737; and Peter Boehler formed them into bands. The Wesley brothers were staying at different addresses nearby at the time.³

Curnock gives a fuller description, identifying the site as that of a room in Hall House in Nettleton Court on Aldersgate Street.

Until recently the sole evidence in support of this identification was a statement in Benham that James Hutton took a room in Nettleton Court, and had a 'Society' there. But in 1875 the Moravian *Messenger*, in an autobiographical memoir of Brother John West, a prominent member of the Fetter Lane church, threw additional light on Hutton's society. 'I attended,' West says, 'the ministry [of Whitefield] for the first time towards the latter end of 1737. I thought within myself, this is indeed something new, and omitted no opportunity to hear him. About this time I heard of a religious society which met weekly in Nettleton Court, Aldersgate Street, and it was not long before I joined them. The brethren James Hutton and John Edmunds were of the number. When brother Bohler came to England...at our request, he formed us into bands. After Mr Wesley withdrew from us, I was in great strait whom to follow...' It should be remembered...at this time...John was the guest of James Hutton in Wild Street, and the probability is that he would accompany his host to the society he had founded, which, it is clear, met in Nettleton Court.⁴

It is evident from these accounts that James Hutton (1715-1795) was a key figure in regard to the society in Aldersgate Street. What is known about him in 1738, is derived from the *Journals and Diaries* in Wesley's *Works*,⁵ the *Manuscript Journal of Charles Wesley*⁶ (not published until after his death), and the *Memoirs of James Hutton* written by Daniel Benham in 1856 which cites letters and diaries

³ *Journal & Diaries* I: 249, note 75.

⁴ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: A. M. R. Culley, 1909-1916) I: 475, note 1.

⁵ *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984 -), begun as *The Oxford Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1983). This major work documents John Wesley's total activities as author, editor, and publisher from 1733-1791 and includes the results of research and the comments from previous editions of his work. Publications still continue. This paper refers to vol. 18 *Journal and Diaries I (1735-38)*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), and vol. 25 *Letters I*, ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

⁶ S. T. Kimbrough, Jr and Kenneth G. C. Newport, eds. *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* 2 vols. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2008).

from the Moravian records held in Herrnhut.⁷ Recent research in the Moravian archives has provided fresh information about Hutton and these events, casting new light upon them as presented in Colin Podmore's *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760*.⁸

James Hutton first met the Wesleys when he was fifteen at Oxford while visiting school friends. Wesley's oldest brother Samuel lived next to James' parents and 'the Wesleys visited them when they were in London and stayed at their home in October 1735, prior to their departure for Georgia.'⁹ It was there, listening to John Wesley, that James was 'awakened' at the age of twenty, and wanted to go to Georgia with the Wesley brothers, but was not allowed, because he was still an apprentice. 'Hutton was much impressed, and as he had lived very wildly in the world his awakening became the more earnest.'¹⁰ According to Podmore, 'John Wesley sent his Georgia journals to Hutton, who read them in various societies, forming people who responded by donating money into an association for assisting the poor which soon had between 200 and 300 members.'¹¹

James completed his apprenticeship to an eminent bookseller while John Wesley was in Georgia.

At expiration of his apprenticeship, he commenced business as a bookseller in his own account, in a shop called 'The Bible and Sun' a little to the Westward of Temple Bar, where he at once held religious meetings. Hutton also engaged a room in Nettleton Court, Aldersgate Street, where he met a small society every week for mutual edification. He was at the same time a very active promoter, if not the sole author of an establishment for Christian fellowship at a house in Islington, but was obliged to give it up for want of proper persons to conduct it.¹²

This vital, energetic young religious man was no stranger to religious societies. He had grown up in a society his father held at

⁷ Daniel Benham, *The Memoirs of James Hutton; comprising the Annals of his Life, and connection with the United Brethren* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1856).

The memoirs were compiled from records at Herrnhut which include diaries of those involved in the Moravian work in London at the time.

⁸ Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁹ Podmore, 35.

¹⁰ Benham, 11.

¹¹ Podmore, 35. Hutton's memoirs note that it was Wesley's diaries that Hutton read, Benham, 12. Wesley's first *Journal* was not published until after he returned to London.

¹² Benham, 12.

his home, a somewhat 'lifeless' and 'slumbering group.'¹³ Set alight as a Methodist, he was at the center of the evangelical events that unfolded over the next years. It was Charles Wesley who introduced him to the great Moravian leader Count Zinzendorf when he visited London in 1737. Zinzendorf was there to discuss with the trustees of the settlement in Georgia a proposal for further Moravian settlers in addition to the two parties already there. He met the court chaplain and Halle Pietist, Friedrich Ziegenhagen, and with the help of Charles Wesley sought a meeting with Archbishop Potter for recognition of Moravian orders, vital for future ministry in the Church of England in Georgia. Zinzendorf also conducted household worship which 'was attended by London Germans, ten of whom he formed into an independent society, providing a set of rules.'¹⁴ After he left he showed no further interest in the group and 'several members fell away, although the majority remained loyal, despite Ziegenhagen's attempts to draw them away from Zinzendorf's influence.'¹⁵

It was not long after this that Hutton met George Whitefield another Holy Club member. Whitefield, 'the boy preacher' drew new members into these societies. As Curnock notes, Brother John West joined the Aldersgate Street society in 1737 because of Whitefield. By February 1738 there was...

...a small network of societies formed as a result of 'awakening' by the Wesleys and Whitefield. They had contacts and overlapping membership with the larger and older religious societies in which Whitefield's preaching had created a readiness for renewal. This newer network was linked, particularly through James Hutton, with the Oxford Holy Club and its former leaders the Wesleys, who were, in turn, among the Moravians' main English friends.¹⁶

On John Wesley's return from Georgia, Hutton's place became his London home.¹⁷ Hutton, a person who made things happen, was the 'active promoter' of two societies at this time, one at his home,

¹³ Benham, 9.

¹⁴ Podmore, 26.

¹⁵ Podmore, 27.

¹⁶ Podmore, 32.

¹⁷ Over the next two years John Wesley regularly stayed with Hutton when he was in London and when he was in Bristol sent letters to him describing the amazing work of God under way there. When John separated from the Fetter Lane Society (which he and Peter Bohler had been instrumental in starting on 1 May 1738), Hutton stayed with the Moravians.

and one at Aldersgate Street.

Wesley introduced Hutton to Peter Bohler soon after he arrived in England. Bohler was briefly in London on his way to Georgia. He had been given Wesley's name as a person to contact with regard to a visit to the Holy Club at Oxford which provided a wide devotional network of people who subscribed to the 'holy living' tradition, similar to the Halle Pietists, but 'diametrically opposed to that of the Moravians.'¹⁸ After he met Peter Bohler it was not long before 'James Hutton had become the leading figure among the English Moravians.'¹⁹ His shop was a regular meeting place for Holy Club members, prayer, visiting speakers, and Moravian visitors. At this time Wesley was the older man at thirty-four, while Hutton and Bohler were both twenty-five.

Bohler and his three companions only spoke German. They at first visited with German Christians, such as Pietists and others in the Lutheran Church who were open to the Moravians. His fourth companion, Abraham Ehrenfried Richter (who also only spoke German) had a specific task. It was to 'visit the remnant of the German society founded by Zinzendorf in 1737.'²⁰ He took in hand the 1737 society who were not yet Moravians²¹ and 'noted of the six who still met together'...

'They are still under the Law, and want to become good and lovely, before they come to the Saviour.' Here the disagreement with Halle Pietism was reflected in microcosm. The Moravians held that God accepts people as they are – as sinners, and that one should not struggle to achieve holiness through one's own efforts (that would be unnecessary and impossible), but 'become a sinner'; that is, accept one's sinfulness, simply believe, and await the salvation which is the gift of God's grace and cannot be earned by works or merit. During the first few days the society members found this teaching difficult to accept, but soon they began to come around.'²²

By 10 March 'the society had been organized into a band, and two weeks later daily meetings were being held; band meetings on three evenings, and prayer meetings on the others.'²³ According to

¹⁸ Podmore, 33.

¹⁹ *Journal & Diaries* I: 224, note 19.

²⁰ Podmore, 30.

²¹ Podmore convincingly demonstrates from Moravian records that there were no Moravians or Moravian societies in London prior to Bohler's visit in 1738.

²² Podmore, 31.

²³ Podmore, 31.

Podmore, 'Such intimate discipleship groups were hitherto virtually unknown in the Church of England.'²⁴ By 2 April 1738, Easter Sunday, thirty people were involved with this group, now a Moravian fellowship group, with sixteen meeting in two bands. 'After negotiations and arrangements for their Georgia undertaking, the daily meetings of this German society were the main commitment of the four Moravians, none of whom could speak English.'²⁵ The members of the group however had lived in England for at least a year, and probably much longer, and would be able to speak English and German. Where did this German group meet, especially after the group had grown and was organized into bands?

It is also important to note that it was from this day, 10 March, that on his return from Oxford Bohler began to meet James Hutton regularly. The following Wednesday Hutton invited him to speak at the regular society that met in his home. At Easter, 'Hutton's group planned to imitate the Easter watch kept through the night at Herrnhut.'²⁶ It is also likely he was the one who introduced Bohler to the society in Aldersgate Street which was soon formed into the bands John West notes. The active promoter of societies was now promoting Bohler and the Moravians.

It was not until 1 May, nearly two months later, that Bohler, with James Hutton's help, took the initiative to form a further society, Hutton's third, and the second in his home. After Easter Bohler records in his memoir that interest from the English 'grew and grew'. 'Indeed their passionate insistence went so far, that I allowed myself to be introduced into different societies...and talked there as well as I could in English.'²⁷ On 24 April he decided 'he should attempt to form those who had come under his influence into a band.'²⁸

On the evening of 1 May Bohler invited a select group to gather at Hutton's, and after discussion of the Moravian principles of fellowship, they agreed to form a band. John Wesley was present only by chance; having been called back to London because of his brother's illness, he had arrived at Hutton's (because Charles was staying there) only that evening. The founding of this band was an event of the utmost significance, for it was soon to grow into the

²⁴ Podmore, 31.

²⁵ Podmore, 32.

²⁶ Podmore, 37. Herrnhut was the founding community for the Moravians.

²⁷ Podmore, 38.

²⁸ Podmore, 38.

Fetter Lane Society – the main seed-bed from which the English Evangelical Revival would spring...This society was in fact Moravian in foundation and character, even if initially Anglican in membership. It was founded 'by the Advice of Peter Boehler;' Wesley may have influenced the rules' form, but their spirit was Boehler's.²⁹

'Rather than a commitment to pursue holiness, the unwritten requirement was admission to one-self that one was a sinner and could not achieve holiness by personal effort or through religious exercises.'³⁰ Boehler 'was pleased to discover that this could now be said of Wesley too. Willingness to adopt Moravian practice was not enough; acceptance of Moravian teachings about salvation was an essential prerequisite for membership of this group – another mark of Moravian society.'³¹

In May then, there were three societies that, while not strictly Moravian societies, were headed in that direction in addition to the Zinzendorf 1737 group led by Richter and his three German companions that was Moravian. This German group was growing rapidly, presumably by recruiting new members from the network of German Pietists in London. John Wesley belonged to the Fetter Lane Society, which he called 'our little society.'³² When he was not present he reported to the meetings through James Hutton. Boehler left for Georgia three days after it was formed. Hutton soon became one of the key leaders. Boehler's diary notes on the day he left that he had become displeased with Wesley's preaching (which he now understood in English), and that 'it was not as it should be,' whereas on May 6 and 9, he wrote that he was overjoyed 'how he (Hutton) had made a breakthrough with the Saviour.'³³ From a Moravian point of view these fundamental tensions were to play themselves out over the next two and a half years. Hutton was now in Boehler's camp, and not Wesley's.

Richter continued to care for the German society and its bands after his companions left with Boehler for Georgia on 4 May. Wesley does not refer to this group in his *Journal*, neither do the *Memoirs* of James Hutton. Yet here was a group both Wesley and Hutton

²⁹ Podmore, 39, 40.

³⁰ Podmore, 41.

³¹ Podmore, 40.

³² *Journal & Diaries I*: 236.

³³ Sandra Gehrlach, 'John Wesley, "Inquirer Seeking Grace": The Moravian View,' *Methodist History* 45:4 (July 2007): 226.

knew existed and it is highly likely they would have known some of its members. Where did it meet? As has been noted, Boehler began to meet regularly with Hutton from 10 March about the time the German group 'had started to come around' and was organized into bands. Two weeks later on 24 March as the group grew, 'daily meetings were being held; band meetings on three evenings, and prayer meetings on the others.'³⁴ It seems entirely possible that Boehler talked over with Hutton, the 'active promoter' of societies where the society and the bands could meet. Other than his home, the other place Hutton had access to in which a society or band could meet was Aldersgate Street. It is highly likely that in addition to Hutton's society this other German society met here also.

Gerlach, writing from a Moravian perspective, presumes that Wesley in his *Journal* 'made sure that Aldersgate, his public testimony of assurance, took place at Hutton's society, which was not exclusively Moravian at the time.'³⁵ It was still an Anglican society with Moravian leanings. Martin Luther's *Epistle to the Romans* would have been read in English. What if it was not Hutton's society but a band or group of this German society that Wesley attended on the night of 24 May 1738? Such a group had a good reason to be reading Luther's *Epistle to the Romans*. It was an iconic German reading for Pietists and Moravians. It would be read from a Luther German New Testament or Bible that was the common text used by Pietists and Moravians. All present were able to read and understand German.

³⁴ Podmore, 31. There is little evidence as to the numbers attending by the end of May, but clearly a significant number of separate meetings were under way each week. As yet no records of these meetings and their locations are available. The German Diary of Abraham Richter is a further resource that needs to be checked for any comments about Wesley. If he had commented directly it would have been already noted in the literature.

³⁵ Gerlach, 230. Gerlach is arguing that according to Boehler's *Diary*, Wesley on the night of 23 April 1738 admitted that faith was instantaneous, and received Boehler's direction that he preach faith until he had it. Wesley reports this but Boehler's *Diary* goes on to say that Wesley, alone with him, tearfully pulled back from a spiritual highpoint because he was unwilling to admit his unbelief and did not seek 'to learn to believe' further from Boehler. Indeed Wesley in his *Journal* for that night says, 'Here ended my disputing. I could now only cry out, 'Lord, help thou my unbelief.' *Journal & Diaries* 1:234. Gerlach sees the Aldersgate account as Wesley wanting to distance himself from the Moravian faith and define his own moment of belief in a more Anglican setting at Hutton's Aldersgate society. If it actually happened in the German society meeting at Aldersgate Street he would have to distance himself to an even greater extent.

Identifying the Reader

If the reader could be identified it could indicate which language was used to read the *Preface* that night. In a footnote to the account on 24 May, Ward and Heitzenrater summarise what has been generally accepted about the identity of the reader.

The reader is thought to be William Holland (died 1761) a devout Anglican who now introduced the Wesley brothers to Luther's commentaries on Galatians and Romans. He was a founding member of the Fetter Lane Society, and on its division in 1740 threw in his lot with the Moravians.³⁶

The Fetter Lane society at this stage still met at Hutton's before moving to Fetter Lane later in mid-October 1738.³⁷ Holland was not a member of the society at Aldersgate Street. Curnock provides more detail, commenting in a footnote, 'It has been suggested that William Holland was the 'one' who 'was reading Luther's Preface' on May 24.'³⁸ After a fuller description of his involvement with the Moravians, Holland's account of his discovery of faith in the presence of Charles Wesley is presented. It is a longer account of what Charles Wesley chronicles in his Journal for 17 May 1738.³⁹ Curnock quotes from Holland's manuscript account of what happened, before making his own comments.

Shortly before Peter Boehler's departure for Georgia, he and Mr Wesley began a band. I was gone at that time for a few days into the country. After my return, in speaking with one of our society on the doctrine of Christ, as preached by him, and reading the eighth chapter of Romans, I was conscious that I was not in the state there described. I became very uneasy, made a diligent search for books treating of faith in Christ, and was providentially directed to Martin Luther's *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*. I carried it round to Mr. Charles Wesley, who was sick at Mr. Bray's, as a very precious treasure that I had found, and we three sat down together, Mr. Charles Wesley reading the Preface aloud. At the words, 'What, have we then nothing to do? No, nothing! But only accept of Him who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption,' there came such a power over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an

³⁶ *Journal & Diaries* I: 249, note 75, line 5.

³⁷ Podmore, 44.

³⁸ Curnock, I: 475, note 1.

³⁹ Kimbrough and Newport, 103.

instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. I almost thought I saw our Saviour! My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon.⁴⁰

Holland writes that he was 'providentially directed' to this commentary. Charles Wesley puts it slightly differently. He had 'accidentally lit upon' the commentary.⁴¹ Then Curnock links Holland to the night of 24 May 1738.

It is extremely probable that this was the reader under whom John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed. If so, we have the singular coincidence that Charles read to him, and he read to John. But what was read? The text of the Journal, as it has reached us, says distinctly: *Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. One can scarcely be surprised that a doubt has arisen with reference to this statement. Is 'Romans' a misprint, or error of association, for 'Galatians'? The discovery of a missing diary would set the question at rest.⁴²

A word of explanation is needed here. Wesley wrote his *Journals* from the coded diaries that he kept for almost every day of his adult life. The Aldersgate night is described in Journal extract No 2 which covers the period from 1 February to 14 August 1738.⁴³ Unfortunately the only diary still extant from this period is for April, the month prior to the key event. Thus, there is no separate diary account for Aldersgate. Because Wesley was a disciplined diary writer it is generally presumed that these particular diaries were written but later lost or destroyed.

Curnock believes that if Wesley's missing diary were to be found the diary would state that what was read that 24 May night when his heart was strangely warmed was not *Luther's Preface to the Epistle of Romans*, but *Luther's Commentary on the Galatians*. If Curnock is right then it makes sense that Holland, on fire with his discovery of faith from *Luther's Commentary on Galatians*, would take every opportunity to share this reading that had changed his life with the brethren in the network of societies he knew. If Curnock is wrong, and Wesley heard *Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* read, then there is no evidence linking Holland with John Wesley on

⁴⁰ Curnock, I: 476, note 2.

⁴¹ Kimbrough and Newport, 103.

⁴² Curnock, I: 476, note 2.

⁴³ Journals number 2-4 cover the period from February 1 prior to Aldersgate to October 1740, when Journal 2 was published.

the night of 24 May 1738. In fact Wesley published his Journal account of 24 May as a tract three times after 1740, and distributed it widely throughout England. It is certain that it was Luther's *Preface to the Epistle of the Romans* that he heard.

It has to be underlined that it is only on the basis of this supposed misprint that it can be said that it is 'extremely probable' that William Holland was the reader. At the heart of the received tradition, summed up by Curnock and continued in Ward and Heitzenrater's footnote, there is no evidence that Holland 'introduced the Wesley brothers to Luther's commentaries on Galatians and Romans.'⁴⁴

Yes, Holland's discovery of Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* was instrumental in Charles Wesley's discovery of faith on Pentecost Sunday 21 May 1738, only three days before John's experience at Aldersgate. He introduced Charles Wesley to Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, and indirectly John as well, but not John or Charles to Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. Holland's manuscript does not go on to say that he then searched for Luther's copy of the *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*. There is no evidence from Holland that he read an English version of Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* to a society in Aldersgate Street on 24 May 1738.

The Availability of English Translations of Luther

Were these two English translations of Luther readily available in England at this time? *The English Short Title Catalogue* (ESTC) lists over 460,000 items published between 1473 and 1800 in the British Isles and North America, predominantly in English, in the British Library and over 2,000 other libraries. It provides an opportunity to gauge the relative availability of Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, and *Commentary on the Galatians* in and about 1738.

There were eleven printings by six different publishers of Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* translated from the Latin into English in the years between 1575 and 1734.⁴⁵ There are many copies of each of these editions still widely distributed in libraries throughout the British Isles. These early printings were at a time when the Puritan and Dissenting groups were gaining the influence and power that culminated in the English Civil War and the Puritan

⁴⁴ Journal and Diaries 1: 249, footnote 75.

⁴⁵ These are 1575, 1577, 1580, 1581, 1588, 1602, 1616, 1635, 1642, 1644, and 1734.

Commonwealth (1643-1659). There were no further printings after the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 until four years prior to Aldersgate in 1734. Perhaps this last printing is an indication of greater interest in German Pietism during the reign of the Hanovers (George I and II). It is then not unlikely or surprising that William Holland in his search for books upon faith, 'had accidentally lit upon' the *Commentary on Galatians* three weeks before Aldersgate that was instrumental first in his own conversion and then soon after the conversion of Charles Wesley.

The *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* is much rarer. Both the 1594 edition and the 1632 edition were published during the Puritan Dissenting era, but none after the Restoration. According to the *English Short Title Catalogue* there are a total of four known copies of the 1594 edition, and two copies of the 1632 edition presently in libraries in Britain and North America.⁴⁶ What is clear is that at that time the book had been out of print for more than a hundred years. In 1738 it would have been far easier to have 'accidentally lit upon' a copy of the *Commentary on Galatians* than the *Preface to the Epistle of the Romans*.

MacNeill, in his 1939 article 'Luther at Aldersgate,' summarized the situation at that time.⁴⁷ He noted ten editions of the *Commentary on Galatians* translated from the Latin, (the eleventh in 1734 has come to light since) and the two editions of the *Preface to the Romans*. He cites the comments of Didymus referring to the WW version of the *Preface to the Romans* in 1838, 'This book has long been extremely scarce, so that I have never been able to get a

⁴⁶ The WW 1594 edition was already 144 years old in 1738. There is a copy at the Oxford University Bodleian Library and at Oxford University's Exeter College (neither of which allows general borrowing), and there is a copy at the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the British Library (not formed until 1753) - four in all. The WW 1632 edition was already 106 years old in 1738. There is still a copy of at the Folger Shakespeare Library, and a record at the British Library indicating that a 1632 paper copy had been destroyed. The Folger obtained the 1594 and 1632 editions from the collector, Sir Robert Leicester Harmsworth (1870-1937). The 1632 printing has a pencil note in the fly leaf that it was owned by the bibliophile Richard Heber (1773-1833). A note listing the provenance has 'Richard Heber (1773-1833): Britwell Court copy [no date], with MS. shelf-mark and Miller arms and initials on the front and back covers. Miller (1789-1848) at Britwell Court was seen as the successor to Heber having bought much of Heber's collection. So it is possible that there was at least one 1594 copy and a 1632 copy somewhere in the London region in 1738 probably in the hands of a private collector.

⁴⁷ John T. McNeil, 'Luther at Aldersgate,' *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review* vol. 164 (April 1939): 200-217.

copy.⁴⁸ In spite of this he concludes, 'The probabilities highly favour the use of W.W.'s English translation of this work, which existed in editions of 1594 and 1632.'⁴⁹ One of his key reasons is stated in the form of a double negative. 'There is no probability that the English version would be unavailable in London a little more than a century after its second printing - especially to members of a circle in which James Hutton, bookseller, was a recognized leader.'⁵⁰ He underlines that John would most likely have been shown or been told of the *Commentary on Galatians* by Charles both before and after Charles' conversion. Nevertheless he holds that John Wesley definitely heard the *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* read that night at Aldersgate.

McNeill considers the possibility that Luther's *Preface* was read in German. He notes the comments of Melle who asserts that...

[T]he English societies contained 'many German Herrnhutters who understood little English' and thinks it quite possible that German was the language of the book, the reading being accompanied by oral translation. We may not exclude the possibility of such a procedure. Yet it seems to me highly improbable.⁵¹

McNeill is right to reject the idea that English societies contained German Herrnhutters. Fifty-nine years later Podmore has clearly shown that the first real base for the Moravians turned out to be Fetter Lane and only after the Methodists left in 1740. And his doubts that the many societies in the network of that time were 'thronged by Germans' have been borne out.⁵² Moravian records, however, do clearly identify the existence of the Zinzendorf German group whom Richter brought around to the Moravian position by 10 March 1738 and formed into a growing society with bands and prayer meetings.

McNeill believed that Wesley's words ruled out that a double process of translation occurred. As a result he was left with the conclusion that James Hutton the bookseller was the probable source for whoever brought the book to the society in Aldersgate Street. Yet the *Memoirs of James Hutton* make no mention of him

⁴⁸ McNeill, 209.

⁴⁹ McNeill, 217

⁵⁰ McNeill, 214.

⁵¹ McNeil, 212, note 1, citing F. H. Otto Melle, *Das Welten Gottes in Deutschen Methodismus* (1924), 24.

⁵² McNeill, *ibid.* p. 214

supplying the WW version of the *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* to the society where Wesley's warmed heart occurred. Given Wesley was the one who first 'awakened' him, and then was opposed to him in 1740, it would be strange if as a 'bookseller' he did not make this vital connection, if he was involved.

If, as McNeill considered briefly, there was another ready source of *Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* amongst the German community in London, then it is clear that the accepted version of events would have to be reassessed.

Hanoverian England

There was a significant German presence in London before the reign of George I and even more so during the reign of George I and George II. The Hanoverian kings brought German-speaking people to England to work with king and parliament. Records from London show there were two German-speaking congregations present in the Savoy buildings about a kilometre from Aldersgate Street.⁵³ England had long been the destination or the jumping off point to the New World for Protestants who had suffered Roman Catholic persecution on the Continent. In 1709 there were more than 20,000 German refugees living in camps on the outskirts of London, many of whom stayed on in England.

Luther's Writings among the Pietists

In the last half of the seventeenth century Philipp Jakob Spener inspired a Protestant evangelical awakening that gave rise to the Pietist movement. Later, August Hermann Francke made the University of Halle a key training centre for Pietist ministers and leaders and a major educational and printing centre for Pietists throughout Europe. Religious persecution at this time forced many to look for other places to live. Count Zinzendorf in 1721 started the Moravians as a Pietist refugee group. They separated from the other Pietists after a profound revival galvanized their Herrnhut community in 1727. This led to a far more focused group life and a particular understanding of what faith meant.

⁵³ *Journal & Diaries I*: 239, note 12. Wesley's *Journal* indicates that ten days before Aldersgate he preached free salvation by faith in the blood of Christ at the Savoy Chapel on May 14. That morning he had preached at St Ann's and noted that as in other places 'I am to preach no more.' The Savoy Chapel however, did not bar him from its pulpit.

The expulsion of all 20,000 Protestants from Salzburg in the winter of 1731 (with only eight days notice) made headlines throughout Protestant Countries, with articles containing ‘illustrations of the Salzburger turning their back on their mountain homeland for the sake of the Gospel, a fat baby under one arm and the Luther Bible under the other.’⁵⁴

Francke’s decision to send Anton Wilhelm Bohm to England in 1701 was to have enormous ramifications. By 1709 he was a very active member of the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). He served as court chaplain for George I until his death in 1722. He was the bridge between the English religious scene and Halle, keeping people up to date with the Pietist movement. George I then replaced him with ‘a chaplain from the same Hallesian stable who became a still more firmly established figure in...the English scene, Friedrich Michael Ziegenhagen, who held office 1722-1776.’⁵⁵

‘The great moment for both Ziegenhagen and the SPCK came with the Protestant crisis in Salzburg over the winter of 1731-32.’⁵⁶ Wesley, a member of the SPCK, was directly involved with this Halle supported initiative. ‘The English...got a first installment of 200 who were settled by the Georgia Trustees near Savannah with two ministers sent from Halle, and put under the general spiritual oversight of the Wesley brothers.’⁵⁷ As it turned out John Wesley spent most of his time with the Moravians, visiting other Pietists only once.

The Luther Bible, which usually included Luther’s *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, was at the heart of the Pietist movement. At the turn of the 1700s Francke, the leader of the German Pietist movement, was both emphasising the importance of each person carrying their own copy of the Luther Bible, and searching for a way to make the scriptures available to the poor. In 1710 Baron Karl Hildebrand von Canstein proposed that the ‘poor should be provided with Bibles at very low prices’⁵⁸ and founded the first modern Bible Society at Halle, printing and distributing the Bible for twelve cents and the New Testament for four cents by means of his

⁵⁴ W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 105.

⁵⁵ Ward, 306.

⁵⁶ Ward, 308.

⁵⁷ Ward, 104.

⁵⁸ S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1963), 1: 340.

invention of a cheaper method of printing. 'To make it cheap, the aids to comprehension which had been provided in the glosses and prefaces of Luther and others were omitted.'⁵⁹ By 1776, more than a million Luther New Testaments had been printed, nearly all in German (more than four million Luther Bibles).⁶⁰ 'Since the total demand could scarcely be met, the operation was not in competition with ordinary printers.'⁶¹ New Bible Societies emerged, and other religious book publishers produced Luther New Testaments and Luther Bibles for this growing new market among the educated as well as resourcing the religious enlightenment of the peasants who previously had been dismissed as non-educable.

The particular edition of the Luther New Testament purchased by the Bridwell Library was printed in Hamburg in 1720 by Christian Trausold.⁶² Hamburg was the port of departure for most who sailed to England or the New World. Ordinary printers were still printing the Luther New Testament with the prefaces and making them available in forms that helped people carry their copy of the scriptures with them. The fact that within a decade specialized markets had emerged as indicated by the selling of pocketbook or purse-sized Luther New Testaments adds to the number of ways that people were carrying the scriptures with them. With the strong Hallesian presence in England there were Luther New Testaments with a *Preface to the Book of Romans* in German carried in German pockets in London particularly among Pietists and Moravians. It is far more likely that it was this version of Luther's *Preface* that was available in England in 1738.

Wesley's Facility with German

Wesley understood German, and translated German hymns into English. But more than that, most of the time he spent in Georgia was immersed in the Moravian movement. On the trip across to Georgia, Wesley notes in his *Journal* that on the first day 'I began to learn German, in order to converse with the Moravians, six and twenty of whom we had on board.'⁶³ For the first five weeks and the last six weeks of the sixteen week journey his diary indicates he

⁵⁹ Greenslade, 1: 341.

⁶⁰ Greenslade, 1: 341.

⁶¹ Greenslade, 1: 341.

⁶² See footnote number 1 for details of the purchase

⁶³ *Journals and Diaries* I: 137.

studied German for a total of at least ninety hours, and during the voyage spent more than 120 hours with 'the Germans.'

Within three weeks of arriving in Georgia, Wesley took up lodging with the Moravians in Savannah until a house was provided there for him. His diary indicates that for sixteen of the twenty months in Georgia (while he was at his base in Savannah), he worshipped with them nearly every day, and sometimes twice a day. This was often followed by conversations with 'the Germans.' In all, his diary shows at least 220 hours spent this way. Most days in Savannah he set aside time to learn German, sometimes read grammars, and spent time translating into German and from German. His diary shows at least a further 210 hours in this task in the first year. He read the Bible with the Germans and since they were Moravians it is most likely the Bible was the Luther Bible. He provided a public service for a few Germans in Fredericksburg and in a village near Savannah. 'We first sung a German hymn, then read a chapter in the New Testament, which I explained as well as my little skill in the tongue would allow, and then after a second hymn and the Lord's Prayer, I concluded with a Blessing.'⁶⁴

The diaries show that Wesley immersed himself in the Moravian community, German grammars, and conversations. The voyage from England and the time in Georgia was for Wesley a language laboratory for learning German, conversing, worshipping and praying formally and informally with Germans.

After Aldersgate he travelled to Herrnhut. He met Count Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravians, at Marienborn and notes in the Journal that he stayed with a member and 'usually spent the day, chiefly in conversing with those who could speak either Latin or English: not being able (for want of more practice) to speak German readily.'⁶⁵ Wesley's comment makes it plain that he needed practice in speaking but did not lack understanding. And then at Herrnhut he transcribed the conversations with those who shared their experience of conversion with him including lectures by Christian David. 'Most of his words I understood well: if at any time I did not, one of the brethren who went with me explained them in Latin.'⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Journals & Diaries* I: 432.

⁶⁵ *Journals & Diaries* I: 260.

⁶⁶ *Journal & Diaries* I: 273.

A New Reading of 24 May, 1738

It is time to look again at the way Wesley reports the evening of 24 May, 1738.

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. At a quarter past nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.

I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitely used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, 'This cannot be faith; for where is the joy?' Then was I taught *that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation; but that as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsels of his own will.*⁶⁷

The society most likely to be reading Martin Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* was a society which valued the *Preface* and had it available to them, namely those who were Pietists or Moravians. If this was a predominantly German group, it could explain why Wesley 'went very unwillingly.' It is three weeks since his meeting with Peter Boehler and the three witnesses who convinced him that he was without faith. Those who knew Boehler would know that Wesley was still searching for the faith he did not yet have. Wesley would have to face those who knew he did not have faith, sitting among them without any role to perform, feeling out of place on the edge of the group.

So much falls into place once James Hutton is seen as the one who made available the rooms in Nettleton Court, Aldersgate Street for one or both bands of this German society started by Zinzendorf, and now the first group in England to come around to the Moravian view. It makes sense of a little recognized feature of Wesley's account of what he experienced at Aldersgate. His comments are generally attributable to what he heard read from Luther's *Preface*.

⁶⁷ *Journal & Diaries* I: 249. Italics in original.

But as Podmore points out Wesley had 'already accepted the Moravian understanding of salvation.'⁶⁸ He was not a Moravian, but his experience was informed by that understanding.

He felt his heart 'strangely warmed' (Zinzendorf's was a *Herzensreligion*⁶⁹); he trusted 'in Christ, in Christ alone for salvation' (and he did not strive to achieve it by self discipline and attendance at worship); he was given an 'assurance' (he *felt* that he was justified); his sins, the burden under which the Holy Club members and their friends had labored, had been 'taken away'; he had been saved 'from the law of sin and death' (the Pauline phrase 'under the law' was precisely how the Moravians described those who did not accept their approach.⁷⁰

Gerlach points out that the Pietist elements involved included the reading of Luther's *Preface* and an account that 'took place at a specific hour as required by Halle Pietist conversion narrative tradition.'⁷¹ But then after prayers for others 'the enemy suggested. "This cannot be faith; for where is the joy?"'⁷² It was then that Wesley said that those present taught him that...

*[P]eace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation; but that as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsels of his own will.*⁷³

Wesley, perhaps intentionally, places in italics the disclaimer taught to him by those present, that the 'transports of joy' that accompany salvation may be given or withheld at God's discretion. It seems plain that 'those present' in this society knew what it was to be born again in the Pietist and Moravian way. This is counselling from a Moravian perspective. Who else would have been able to provide such a commentary in England other than those members of this first Moravian band? Charles Wesley's journal records 'Towards ten my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends and

⁶⁸ Podmore, 42.

⁶⁹ 'Religion of the heart'

⁷⁰ Podmore, 42.

⁷¹ Gerlach, 230.

⁷² *Journal & Diaries* I: 250.

⁷³ *Journal & Diaries* I: 250. Italics in original.

declared, 'I believe.'"⁷⁴ Note there are no names, but 'a troop of our friends' who brought him in triumph. John Wesley had experienced what they had in some measure also experienced. Two days later he went to his Moravian friend from Georgia, Toltschig, for advice. And three weeks later on 13 June, accompanied him and six members of Zinzendorf's original German society to Herrnhutt.

The circumstantial evidence is compelling that James Hutton made a room in Aldersgate Street available to Richter's society (or a band) of the German group that Zinzendorf had originally brought together. On this Wednesday 24 May, John had some hope that salvation was close when he opened his Bible twice in the morning and later in the afternoon heard the words of the anthem when he helped out at St Paul's. Now the day was almost over and nothing had happened. He had accepted an invitation to attend this society and may have already known that Martin Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans* was to be read in German. As Wesley went to this meeting, he was pushing up against the deepest issues of his failed ministry and a failed faith in a cross-cultural setting requiring greater mental effort and concentration. No wonder he went 'very unwillingly.' Wesley desperate to find faith, finding himself in a predominately German group, needing to concentrate to hear Luther's words in another language, hears and is blessed.⁷⁵ It is an encouragement in a multi-cultural world to know that one of the profoundly formative moments in Wesley's life, (and in Methodist theology) may well have been helped into being by the dynamics of Wesley finding himself in a meeting, clearly outside his comfort zone, with those who did not speak his native tongue.

⁷⁴ Kimbrough Jr. and Newport, eds., *Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley*, 1: 111.

⁷⁵ The question arises whether the prefaces are the same in actual content. The 1721 German version was translated into English and compared with the WW English translation from the Latin which was translated from the German. The German version in English is shorter, and some of the phraseology is different. But nothing stands out as being significant with regard to Wesley's comments at Aldersgate. It seems more likely that knowing German and the inclusion of the Preface in most Luther Bibles he had heard the preface before, if not often, while he was in Georgia. Rather than any difference in the German it is more likely his re-assessing of the preface in the light of his realization that he lacked belief after his conversations with Böhler. At Aldersgate he hears firsthand once more what Luther declares faith to be. And he heard.

The Critical Question

Why, then, is there no mention of this German context in John Wesley's *Journal*? Wesley's minimalist account of Aldersgate is consistent with the language used being either English or German. When an important event is excessively decontextualised, the suspicion is that the context may well be very important. This is editing by omission rather than alteration. And clearly Wesley as the editor of this account is deciding what is to be presented and what is not to be mentioned. What were the factors most impinging upon Wesley when he finalised this account in August and September of 1740?

There were in fact very good reasons why a German and Moravian connection might be minimised. From this *Journal* (and later *Journals*) we know Wesley is providing an account of one of the most turbulent times of his life. What is even more remarkable is that in the Preface to Journal Extract 2 written in late September 1740, he does not even mention Aldersgate in his overview of the decisive events from February 1738 to September 1740. This has puzzled many scholars, readers and subsequent generations who see Aldersgate as the decisive event of Wesley's ministry.

In 1740 Wesley was writing as the leader of a fledgling evangelical movement pushed out of the Fetter Lane society because of his refusal to accept the practices of the Moravian leaders of this group. He is differentiating the Methodist movement from the Moravians. The Preface to the *Journal* zeroes in on the 1738 visit to Herrnhut, the 1739 preaching in the fields, and the 1740 separation from the Fetter Lane society.⁷⁶ Wesley states it is not necessary to seek God in strange lands, 'When I went, the case was widely different. God had not then 'made bare his arm' before us as he hath now done, in a manner (I will be bold to say) which had not been known either in Holland or Germany at that time.'⁷⁷ 'In September 1738, when I returned from Germany, I exhorted all I could to follow after that great salvation which is through faith in the blood of Christ; waiting for it "in all the ordinances of God," and in "doing good, as they had opportunity, to all men."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Journal Extract 2 itself covers the period, from his arrival back in England in February 1738, meeting Peter Bohler, the Aldersgate experience, and ends with the July-August visit to Herrnhut. Journal Extract 3 records the preaching in the field, and Journal Extract 4 includes the separation from Fetter Lane.

⁷⁷ *Journal & Diaries* I: 219.

⁷⁸ *Journal & Diaries* I: 219.

Wesley gives the reasons why he opposed the Moravian leaders who a year later in September 1739 came troubling and subverting the believers at Fetter Lane teaching that a person may not use the ordinances of God until their experience of justifying faith has freed them from all doubt and fear.

In flat opposition to this I assert:

- (1) 'That a man may have a degree of justifying faith before he is wholly freed from all doubt and fear, and before he has (in the full, proper sense) a new, a clean heart.'
- (2) 'That a man may use the ordinances of God, the Lord's Supper in particular, before he has such a faith as excludes all doubt and fear, and implies a new, a clean heart.'⁷⁹

Wesley is no longer a Pietist or a Moravian. He is defining the basic doctrines of faith for the Methodists over and against the Moravians of late 1739 and 1740,⁸⁰ claiming in his own way to be true to the experience of many of the Moravians he interviewed at Herrnhut, while affirming elements of his own Anglican heritage, scripture and experience of field preaching. Podmore points out that 'as a rule Moravians did not preach in the fields' whereas for Wesley this was where 'God had made bare his arm.'⁸¹ At this critical time in 1740 the future of the movement was not at all clear. It would not be until 1746 that Wesley would hold the first embryonic 1746 Methodist Conference.

The publication of the *Journal* came at a crucial time. Wesley was sure of what God was doing through the amazing ministry in the fields and convinced that he had to face head-on the 'quietists' who in the name of faith called the Church and the 'means of grace' into question. It makes sense that John Wesley and his connections with the Moravians might be read out of the Aldersgate account.⁸² In so

⁷⁹ *Journal & Diaries* I: 220.

⁸⁰ Gerlach, 227. It is fascinating to read Charles Wesley's *Journal* for the period January to July 1740 and see the degree to which he fights against the 'stillness' doctrine of the Moravians, and affirms with his brother the 'means of grace'. In no way does Charles almost defect to the Moravians over this matter as Gerlach claims.

⁸¹ Podmore, 54.

⁸² No mention is made of the details of Charles Wesley's conversion experience. But then again Charles' discovery of faith was bound up with William Holland who had thrown in his lot with the Moravians at the split. Little of this would be known if it were not for Charles' *Journal* (which was not published in his lifetime).

doing, John Wesley was effectively insulating Aldersgate from any direct tie with the Moravians.

A Personal Experience

In his account of Aldersgate it is Wesley's own experience that is centre stage. His heart was strangely warmed; not through a Pietist penitential struggle, nor even a Moravian cleansed heart, but unexpectedly and strangely warmed. John's description of this critical moment in the evening is most intriguing. There is no talk here of justification, redemption or sanctification. Instead, while Luther was 'describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.' Then follows the key words, 'I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.' Wesley experienced what it is to feel forgiven. Since convicted of unbelief by Boehler, he had been praying for 'justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for *me*; a trust in him as *my* Christ, as *my* sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.'⁸³ This prayer was answered, but with the emphasis on 'the change which God works in the human heart through faith in Christ' –a simpler and a less explicit doctrinal framework that is more accessible to be understood by others.

Who can argue with Wesley when he reports what happened to him? He affirms that when he felt his heart strangely warmed he did trust in Christ and felt forgiven by Christ. And the description itself, his heart was 'strangely warmed,' holds together the divine and the human with God's 'strange' action, and his own experience of a 'warmed heart'. John Wesley then, as editor, in 1740 describes what happened at Aldersgate in terms of his own experience. By then he has seen many people discover faith. He can speak with the authority of one who has been there when God has 'bared his arm' in the lives of many people. His perspective is not so much that of an individual searching for faith, but a leader attempting to be true to the work that has unfolded.

⁸³ *Journal & Diaries I*: 248

Conclusion

It was in Wesley's best interests to lessen the German influence on his conversion and increase the focus on the experience of faith. For Wesley, the habits of a lifetime of carefully recording what happened hour by hour would not easily have been put aside. The only course really available to him was to focus on the important matters from his 1740 perspective and lessen what he considered to be the background details in his description of that night. It was a censoring of the data by omission rather than modification of the actual details.

The evidence for a German society meeting at Aldersgate Street, the availability of the Luther German New Testament including the *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, and Wesley's ability to understand German, provide a better understanding of Wesley's minimalist account of Aldersgate than the traditional view of a reading in an unknown society from the English WW edition. The ministry which Wesley received after his 'heart was strangely warmed' is entirely consistent with the counselling he received from this German society new to the Moravian perspective.

The Preface to Journal 2 is caught up with the explosive events of the previous two years. Events had moved beyond his personal struggle for faith which culminated at Aldersgate, to those of a leader wrestling with the future of the Methodist movement.