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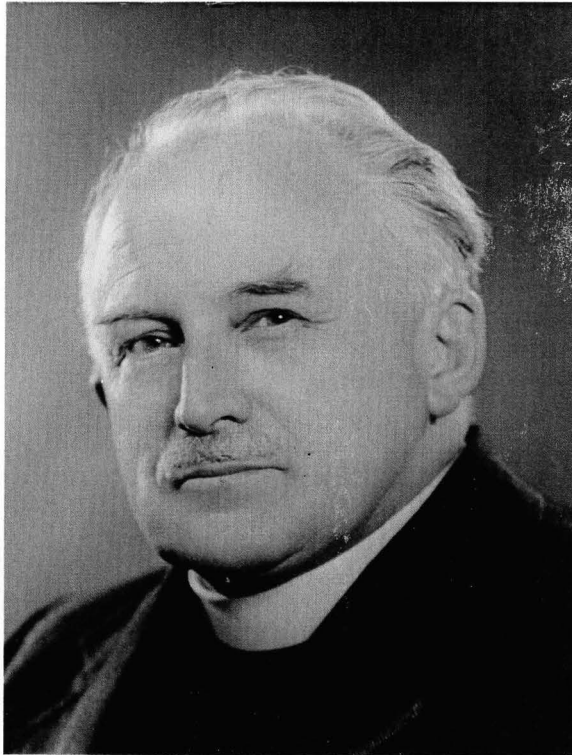
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# **NORMAN HENRY SNAITH**

**(1898-1982)**

**Biblical Scholar and Methodist Preacher**



**Margaret Ruxton**

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**Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire)  
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## PREFACE

This little biographical booklet about my father, Rev. Dr. Norman H. Snaith, was written at the request of the Secretary of the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire), D. Colin Dews, who felt that there was a gap in the annals of Methodist history. Thanks are due to him for his persistence in encouraging me to go back into family history and for editing this work, particularly by providing explanatory footnotes and a bibliography.

My father, coming from a Primitive Methodist background, was a remarkable man who rose to become a renowned international Bible scholar; was awarded an Oxford D.D. in 1948; became Principal of Wesley College, Headingley, Leeds, in 1953; President of the Old Testament Society in 1957 and in 1958 was elected President of the Methodist Conference. Though renowned as a scholar, he remained at heart a Methodist Minister, devoted to preaching the Gospel, and as well as teaching a generation of students about the Old Testament, he wrote a number of books and articles explaining both Biblical and Christian theology for intelligent lay readers, particularly in the books published by the SCM Press and articles in the Methodist Recorder. He was intensely interested in people, a family man and a popular preacher who was well known in the War for his '10 to 8' radio broadcasts, a number of which have been published.

He was also a humble and very private man and did not leave behind any personal papers. However, he was a prolific writer. When asked in later life about his views he would say 'It's in my books'. And it is there that we find him: in his books and numerous articles, which form the basis of this presentation of his life and work. Use has also been made of a number of articles about him written at various times and references are made to these. We are indebted to the late Marjorie Brogden for her collection of cuttings about her brother's travels during his Presidential Year and articles written later after his retirement in Norfolk. More could be said about my father's contribution to Biblical scholarship: it is hoped that this work will encourage others to write about that aspect of his life.

**Margaret Ruxton (née Snaith)**

## 1. FAMILY BACKGROUND

Norman Henry Snaith was born on 21 April 1898 at Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. His father, John Allen Snaith,<sup>1</sup> was a Primitive Methodist minister, as was his father before him. Norman's grandfather, John Snaith,<sup>2</sup> was an interesting man. He was born in Little Broughton in Cumbria in 1836 and brought up in the ancient Baptist Chapel where the Snaith family were heavily involved. Little is known about John's early life and education. There was a Free School at nearby Great Broughton, but family legend has it that John was sent 'down the mines' at the age of eight, probably to assist another older member of the family as was the custom of the times. However, it is not known how long he worked down the pit. He must somehow have had an education as we are told in a fulsome (but not entirely accurate) article in the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* (1893)<sup>3</sup> that in his teens he was well acquainted with the Bible and interested in philosophy. It could have been that he was influenced by the minister, the Rev. J. P. Collins, who came in 1835 and revived the old Baptist Chapel.

John was baptised when he was eleven and we are told that John and his friend, William Graham,<sup>4</sup> who later itinerated, were 'enlightened' at a Camp Meeting held by Primitive Methodists from nearby Dearham.<sup>5</sup> [Camp Meetings, or 'Days of Prayer', were a feature of early Primitive Methodism]. John Snaith was 'gathered into membership' with his friend at a cottage meeting and later became an exhorter-on-trial in 1858. He was sent to the Berwick-on-Tweed Circuit on the Scottish Border in 1859 and in the autumn, visiting the struggling society in the fishing village of Eyemouth, gave his initial speech as a 'travelling preacher'. John was much excited and plunged into what he had to say with little less than fury.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. John Allen Snaith (1869-1945: em1893)

<sup>2</sup> Rev. John Snaith (1836-1923: em1859)

<sup>3</sup> *Primitive Methodist Magazine* [hence PMMag] (1893) pp.193-4.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. William Graham (1835-1886: em1859)

<sup>5</sup> John Wiffen, 'Joseph Jopling: a Wigton Revivalist' *in Wesley Historical Society Cumbria Branch Journal* 41 (Spring 1998) includes references to John Snaith

<sup>6</sup> W.M. Patterson, *Men on Fire and consecrated women also* (London, Dalton, 1911) p.125. An account of this revival is also to be found in *Souvenir Booklet of Eyemouth Methodist Church: centenary celebrations, 1834-1934* (Berwick-on-Tweed, 1934) p.19.

Patterson in writing about this event continues:

Full of the Holy Ghost and of fire, John Snaith could preach about the possibility of an immediate change of heart, and a conscious knowledge of the indwelling of the Spirit in the human breast. And he did, with all the zeal of his young spirit.

On this first occasion, we are told that a few of the men approached him saying they were anxious to see some souls saved and beseeching him to preach as well as he could. Apparently for a moment he felt a little nonplussed at this novel request, for he did not know which way to take it. He answered at last:

God helping me, I will preach as well as I can; but you also must pray as well as you can; for we need to pray as well as preach.

They did and the resulting revival in the village was remarkable. This recognition of the need for prayer as well as preaching was a big feature in the early Primitive Methodist Revivals.

John moved to the Hexham Circuit in 1861, staying until 1864, and seems to have been involved in revivals wherever he went. The Primitives were apparently the only Methodists working in the Tyne valley and the area was ripe for revival. There are several brief glimpses of John's ministry noted by Patterson.<sup>7</sup> There is an account of his being involved in the building of a chapel in Haydon Bridge in the early sixties, and also in a famous revival in Weardale in 1875. It has been said that John Snaith's memories contributed to the writing of Patterson's book. He seems to have been very highly regarded in the area. Both chapel membership and finances improved wherever he went. He had a great interest in the young and gained prominence in the Connexion through his fearless and fervid advocacy of catechumenism.

John married Ann Tiffin from Dearham in 1864 and she became a much-respected minister's wife. They moved about a good deal, as was the practice in those early days, particularly at the beginning of their ministry, mainly at first in the Tyne valley and North of England but later elsewhere including Nottingham, where eventually they would retire in 1902. They had seven children. Primitive Methodists had a great enthusiasm for education and sacrifices were made for this. Of John and Ann's seven

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<sup>7</sup> W.M. Patterson, *History of Northern Methodism: a record of the rise and progress of the circuits in the old Sunderland District* (London, Dalton, 1909); see especially ch. xi, pp.154-170, on 'The Glorious Dales' and ch. xiii, pp.184-203 on 'The Heart of All England' .

children, all except one went to College, both girls and boys. John seems to have had a very keen mind and a wide variety of interests, with philosophy as a special hobby. From the article already noted in the *Magazine*<sup>8</sup> we learn more about his interest in philosophy, which dated from an early age. This, we are told, ran alongside his interest in the Bible. It seems that his energy ran out in mid-life and though continuing in the ministry he turned to study, concentrating his interest in philosophy on Hegel,<sup>9</sup> learning German and collecting all his works. He frequently visited and corresponded with the then well-known authority on Hegel, Professor Stirling in Edinburgh. John published a book on Hegel in 1914<sup>10</sup> just before he emigrated to Canada with most of his family. He died there in 1923. He left behind two sons who were Primitive Methodist ministers, John Allen Snaith and his brother Herbert.<sup>11</sup> An obituary notice was published in the *Aldersgate Magazine* (1923) giving an account of John's Ministry.<sup>12</sup>

Norman's father, John Allen Snaith, was the only child of John and Ann who did not go to college, and was a pupil teacher when he entered the ministry in 1893. The Primitive Methodists had founded a ministerial training institute at Sunderland in 1868, subsequently replaced by that opened in Manchester in 1881, and where the young Oxford don A.S. Peake would be recruited to the staff in 1892. Initially the Manchester Institute was small and only a few hopeful applicants could be accepted. John Allen Snaith was not one of them. Training for Primitive Methodist ministers seems to have only become the norm when the Manchester Institute was expanded and became known as Hartley College in 1906 and then a three-year training course was established.

John Allen was first stationed as a probationer at Thetford, Norfolk, where he met his future wife, Mary Ann Bunn. She was well connected, the male members of the family being in Burrell's, the steam traction company; her maternal grandfather was a foreman and director there, and her father also a foreman.<sup>13</sup> This meant that Mary Ann had some private means, always very

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<sup>8</sup> *PMMag* (1893) pp.3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), German philosopher, at Jena, Bamberg, Nuremberg, Hiedleberg and Berlin Universities.

<sup>10</sup> John Snaith, *Philosophy of the Spirit* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1914)

<sup>11</sup> Rev. Herbert W. Snaith (1874-1926: em1897).

<sup>12</sup> An obituary notice in the *Aldersgate PMMag* (1923) p.731 gives an account of John's ministry.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Burrell & Sons of Thetford built their first steam engine in 1848, became a limited liability company in 1884, reached its peak in 1913 but ceased to exist as an independent company in 1919.



useful in the family of a Primitive Methodist minister and these proved useful when Norman had a prolonged spell in hospital in his teens. After two years John moved on to nearby Brandon and then spent a year in Monmouth, being ordained and married in 1897. The Bunn family were not too happy about John's first posting to Chipping Norton, being known to be a poor Circuit, but the wedding went ahead and Mary Bunn became a good minister's wife. We are told that it was a very happy household. John Allen Snaith was a quiet, studious man who became known as a good Circuit minister and was honoured by being sent twice to Conference as a delegate. In contrast to his father he did not 'do' camp meetings.

Norman was born in Chipping Norton in 1898. The family then moved to Brinkworth Circuit in Wiltshire, where Norman's sister Gladys arrived; then to Ossett in Yorkshire in 1901, followed by Froghall in the Cheadle Circuit in 1903. In 1906 they moved to North Walsham in Norfolk where they stayed for four years and here Norman's 'baby sister' Marjorie was born.

## II. EARLY LIFE

Sometimes NHS, (as we later call him) used to talk about his early memories; how he waved a flag at the parade to mark the relief of Mafeking and how he saw his first car - he swore that a man walked in front of it with a flag! <sup>1</sup> He spoke of Blériot crossing the Channel.<sup>2</sup> He also told of what were seen as snubs suffered by his father John Allen Snaith by Anglican priests in villages. There was resentment because many of the youngsters from the Chapel were taken into the Church youth groups and lost to the chapels. This resentment led to an anti-Establishment prejudice from an early age.

There must have been a wide interest in the world in the Snaith household, as much later a newspaper was found in the attic at Leeds with its front page splashed with the news of the finding of Scott's tent in the Antarctic in 1912. It was something of a surprise to find among sister Marjorie's possessions when she died a book about the Druze <sup>3</sup> group in the Middle East, which had been given to her as a prize by her father. This interest in national and international affairs continued throughout Norman's life.

When the family were at North Walsham, Norman attended the Paston Grammar School, which had a claim to fame having also been attended by Lord Nelson. In 1910 the family moved to Seahouses on the Northumberland coast, from where Norman travelled by train to the Duke's school in Alnwick. It seems that most of the children of itinerant ministers had a favourite place and Norman's was undoubtedly Seahouses. He began what was to be a lifelong interest in the annual migration of the herring down the East Coast. Later family holidays taken at Scarborough and Great Yarmouth always included a trip to the harbour to see where the fishing boats came from. One of his favourite stories (and there were many) was of Grace Darling rowing out in the lifeboat on a stormy night to rescue some shipwrecked sailors. He introduced his own family to the tales of Hans Anderson and the Grimm Brothers. It seems as if somehow, while at

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<sup>1</sup> The Red Flag Act introduced in 1865 was repealed by the Highways Act, 1896. It would interesting to know the circumstances of his seeing a vehicle proceeded by a red flag

<sup>2</sup> Louis Blériot (1872-1936) in 1909 completed the first flight across a large body of water in a heavier-than-air craft, when he crossed the English Channel

<sup>3</sup> The Druze form a separate Jewish community in Israel with their own courts and with roots going back to the tenth century, their creed blending Islamic monotheism with Greek philosophy and Hindu influences.

Seahouses, he picked up stories with Northern connections.

Norman studied hard at the Duke's School and read extensively in Latin and Greek classics; but the classics master left who had inspired him. The headmaster spotted a 'high flier' and suggested that Norman should go to Manchester Grammar School. He gained a number of prizes at Alnwick and in the end left with a complete leather bound set of volumes of Scott's novels. While he was at Seahouses, Norman contracted a serious attack of poliomyelitis and spent some time in Newcastle Infirmary in an iron lung. This left him with a disability with which he struggled all his life. He had been very keen on football, now alas he could not play again and found this very hard to accept, but he kept up his interest in that and also in cricket.

Norman went to Manchester Grammar School in 1913, but the Great War prevented the family move. They eventually moved over the Pennines in 1916 to Littleborough near Rochdale. In Manchester, Norman lodged in the home of Jack Brazier Green, who went away to the War. They became lifelong friends. In a tribute written in 1958 when Norman became President of the Methodist Conference, Jack Brazier Green wrote:

when I was in the Navy during the 1914 -18 war, he [NHS] assumed the vacant place in my home. Whenever I went back to my ship from leave he would come with me at midnight to the station, and then, disregarding his lameness would trudge home for miles during the night.<sup>4</sup>

In this article Brazier Green mentions their great respect for J.L. Paton,<sup>5</sup> High Master of the Grammar School, whom they thought the greatest Christian outside the New Testament. He was personally familiar with the names, homes and family background of every one of his twelve hundred boys and:

unerringly discerned a potential leader when he saw one. Thus he selected a pale, fair-haired square-shouldered lad to be Captain of School, and affectionately called him 'Father Snaith', for he was a man before his time.

The article goes on to say:

A severe attack of poliomyelitis had cut short his [NHS's] schoolboy

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<sup>4</sup> Rev. J. Brazier Green MA, BD (1899 – 1965: em1921), writing in the *Methodist Recorder* (10 July 1958); he came from a Wesleyan Methodist background.

<sup>5</sup> John Lewis Paton (1863-1946), High Master, Manchester Grammar School, 1902-1924.

love of sport, but it gave him a singular intellectual and spiritual maturity. He dominated the Prefect's Room with the same serene dignity, whimsical humour, and strength of character which he brings, forty years later, to the Chair of the Methodist Conference. J. L. Paton's insight in those days has been vindicated again and again through succeeding years, for wherever Norman Snaith has gone, he has inevitably risen to the top, and always by natural gifts, never by self-assertion.

A small photo of J.L. Paton always occupied a prominent place on Norman's desk.



'Norman and his mother,  
Mary Ann Snaith (nee Bunn)'

Norman's disability did mean that he could not go to the War. He spoke of how his schoolmates at Manchester faked their ages and enlisted with patriotic fervour: and then of the horror of the casualty lists of 1915 and 1916. This experience made him a pacifist, but like many others he changed his mind in 1939. Norman had studied Classics at Alnwick, but it seems that at Manchester the Classics Master had to go away to the War, so Norman turned to mathematics and won an Open Scholarship to Oxford in 1916, going to Corpus Christi College in 1917.

The family moved to Wisbech in 1919, then over to Shropshire and Staffordshire, and then Cheshire. By now it was usual to spend up to three or four years in a circuit; the early days of constant 'travelling' were over. John Allen and Mary Ann retired to Macclesfield in 1934. John died in 1945, but Mary Ann lived until 1963. Norman always kept in close touch with his family, writing to his mother every week.

### III. OXFORD AND WOOLWICH

In 1917 Norman went up to Oxford to Corpus Christi College to read mathematics and found it a strange experience, as there were so few students. Towards the end of the War there was a 'sweep' of the Colleges for manpower and he was drafted to Woolwich Arsenal as a Temporary Research Assistant in the Ballistics Department where he did some work locating Big Bertha, the gun which was shelling Paris. He and his colleagues plotted trajectories and found that it was being run along railway lines. He was out of College for nearly a year, but still took his degree in 1920 and then went back to Woolwich to earn some money to enable him to go back to Oxford later. (The job at Woolwich had a good Civil Service salary.)

It was at Woolwich that Norman met his future wife Winifred Howson Graham, daughter of the Rev. Thomas Graham,<sup>1</sup> Primitive Methodist minister, then at Plumstead. It is not known whether this was on the first occasion Norman was in the circuit or the second, but probably the latter since Thomas Graham was in the Plumstead Circuit from 1919 to 1924. Norman took an active part in the life of the Robert Street Chapel, singing in the choir and being involved with the Boys' Brigade (Winifred and her friends were officers in the Girls' Brigade). Presumably he preached, though there is no record of this. His sister Marjorie thought he began preaching in Manchester in about 1917.

While at Woolwich, Norman offered for the ministry in 1921. When he went for interview, one of the interviewing panel asked Norman if he had a young lady and if she knew what the calling entailed. Of course she did, coming from a family which went back almost to the beginnings of Primitive Methodism. Her paternal great grandparents were John Hirst<sup>2</sup> and Ann Howson, whose romance and marriage is written up in Connexional history.<sup>3</sup> John's father, James Hirst, was an early adherent to Primitive Methodism at Barwick-in-Elmet, visited by William Clowes<sup>4</sup> in 1819.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas Graham (1868-1959: em1890)

<sup>2</sup> Rev. John Hirst (1803-1898: em1826)

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism* (London Dalton, 1909) pp.155-157; see also: H.B. Kendall, *The Origin & History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, vol.II (London, Dalton 1905) p.519.

<sup>4</sup> William Clowes (1780-1851). It was the coming together of two revivalists groups, the Clowesites and the Camp Meeting Methodists led by Hugh Bourne (1772-1852) that led to the formation of the Primitive Methodist Connexion in 1812.

John had become an exhorter in 1822 and an itinerant minister in 1826 being stationed in the vast Hull Circuit. Ann was from a respectable Quaker family in Darlington. At some stage she heard John preach in the street (probably at York) and was much attracted by this experience. The details of their courtship are vague; at one time John might have been stationed briefly in Darlington. (As an itinerant preacher he seems to have moved every three months.) Family legend has it that the couple met at the house of an aunt in York, but they seem to have corresponded also. Ann liked the warmth of the Primitive Methodists and said she could not 'centre down into nothingness' as a Quaker. She used to attend the local chapel in Darlington, much to the annoyance of her family who did their utmost to prevent her, eventually confining her to the house. John and Ann had an arrangement whereby that if things got intolerable she was to go to John, so she escaped through a cellar grate, and at age twenty-one, travelled to Leeds by stage coach where John was at the Quarterly Meeting at Quarry Hill Chapel. The brethren had a 'whipround' and John and Ann were married in the medieval Parish Church in Leeds in 1831. John was reprimanded as he had been appointed to the circuit as a single man.<sup>6</sup>

John and Ann were sent up to Nenthead at the head of Weardale. Ann started to preach when one day she stepped in for John who was delayed by a storm; she subsequently became a local preacher. They were there when Hugh Bourne made his walk across the Pennines in the autumn of 1831, and thus they knew both founding fathers. They moved about the large Hull circuit, often every year, as was the custom in the early days, before moving south to the Nottingham District in 1836. They had thirteen children, of whom eight survived. Two grandsons became Primitive Methodist Ministers, the Rev. J.H. Hirst<sup>7</sup> who was for five years Africa Secretary at the Mission house, and the Rev. Thomas Graham, Winifred's father. By some strange coincidence it was Rev. J.H. Hirst who asked Norman the question about his 'young lady' at the interview and who of course knew the Graham family well. He befriended Norman, who was later ordained in 'Cousin Harry's' Church in Haringay.<sup>8</sup>

Having been accepted for the Primitive Methodist ministry, in 1922 Norman went to Mansfield College, Oxford to train. Being an Oxford graduate, it is natural that he wanted to go there rather than the \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>5</sup> William Beckworth, *A Book of Remembrance, being records of Leeds Primitive Methodism* (London, Hammond, 1910) p.58

<sup>6</sup> Beckworth, *op cit*, p.59.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. John Henry Hirst (d1929, aet58: em1891), General Missionary Secretary, 1923-1928.

<sup>8</sup> Haringay, Mattison Road. This was attended by many of the leading ministerial Connexional officials.

ministerial training college in Manchester. Mansfield was a College within the University set up by the Congregationalists in 1889 after the University accepted Nonconformists. Mansfield seems to have been the leader in ministerial training, replacing what had originated in the Dissenting Academies. It was open to all Nonconformists who had the required educational standard; basically it was for 'high-flyers'. Jack Brazier Green<sup>9</sup> relates that:

another Mancunian, Dr. W.B. Selbie,<sup>10</sup> reigned as Principal among such scholastic giants as J. V. Bartlet,<sup>11</sup> G. F. Buchanan Gray,<sup>12</sup> C.H. Dodd<sup>13</sup> and Nathaniel Micklem.<sup>14</sup>

In the only paper he wrote about his achievements, Norman said that he went to Mansfield because he wanted to study under Dr. Selbie and Dr. Dodd. He also wanted to study under Dr. Buchanan Gray, who unfortunately died during Norman's first term. However, he did have a lasting influence on him. Norman was at Mansfield at the same time as Leslie Peake,<sup>15</sup> the son of the great Primitive Methodist biblical scholar A.S. Peake,<sup>16</sup> who had lectured at Mansfield before moving on to teach at Hartley in 1892.

Norman said that he at first wanted to take an Oxford BD but then decided to go for what he called 'higher game', the Junior and Senior Kennicott Hebrew prizes. (We are told that he had learned some Hebrew before he went to College). They were both post-graduate prizes. He gained the Junior Prize in 1924 and the Senior in 1925. Several people have gained both prizes, but no one else had, at that time, gained them in two consecutive years. It seems there was a time limit involved and Norman had to do it that way or not at all, having spent time away from Oxford at Woolwich. Norman's paper states that the Junior Kennicott Prize involved knowledge of the whole text of the Hebrew Bible, and there was a paper on cognate languages, Syriac, Aramaic, Arabic and Ethiopic. He describes the Senior Kennicott as being much more demanding, being then awarded on a

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<sup>9</sup> Methodist Recorder 10 July 1958

<sup>10</sup> Rev. William Boothby Selbie (1862-1944).

<sup>11</sup> Rev. J(ohn) Vernon Bartlet (1863-1940).

<sup>12</sup> Dr. George Buchanan Grey (d1922).

<sup>13</sup> Rev. Charles Harold Dodd (1884-1973).

<sup>14</sup> Rev. Nathaniel Micklem (1888-1976), Principal, Mansfield College (1933-53), Chairman of the Congregational Union (1944), Chairman of the Liberal Party (1957-58).

<sup>15</sup> Rev. Leslie Sillman. Peake (1900-1984: em1922).

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Arthur Samuel Peake (1865-1929).

thesis on some original subject. He did his on Psalms XCIII- XCIX and later published part of it in his book *Studies in the Psalter*.

Norman seems to have been popular at Mansfield, being Senior Student in his last year. While there, he shared a student pastorate at Hungerford with fellow student J.S Whale (later famous for his book *Christian Doctrine*).<sup>17</sup> This again was a strange coincidence, as Hungerford was Winifred's mother's birthplace. Her family, the Phelps, were involved in the Ride-Russell<sup>18</sup> Primitive Methodist revival in Berkshire around 1830. Winifred's grandfather, G.T. Phelps<sup>19</sup> was a local preacher and used to preach in the streets and from a dray in the market place, being much in demand as he had a loud voice!!

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<sup>17</sup> Rev. Dr. John Seddon Whale (1896-1997), President, Chesunt College, Cambridge (1933—44) and Headmaster, Mill Hill School (1944-51); *Christian Doctrine: eight lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge to undergraduates of all Faculties* (Cambridge University Press, 1941).

<sup>18</sup> Rev. Thomas Russell (1806-1889: em1829); Rev. John Ride (1790-1862: em1822) who later itinerated in Australia; see: *Autobiography of Thomas Russell, one of the pioneers of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (rev.ed., London, Knapp, nd)

<sup>19</sup> Kendall, *op cit*, vol II, p. 336.



## IV. MARRIAGE AND CIRCUIT LIFE

After three years at Mansfield, Norman was ordained at Haringay in 1925 and Dr. Selbie came from Mansfield to take part in the event. Norman and Winifred were married in Hampstead in June 1925, where Thomas Graham



Norman Snaith  
as a young man

was stationed at that time in the Kentish Town Circuit; Jack Brazier Green was Best Man. Norman's first circuit was at Fulham, in south-west London. Not much is known about this placement, except that Margaret was born there, but there is a rather sad story. Norman used to enjoy watching the local football team play on Saturdays and had a friend who watched with him on the terraces. This man pestered Norman repeatedly about what his job was: when eventually he was told, he disappeared and never

came back. Norman was extremely upset. He rarely wore a 'dog-collar' except on official occasions, particularly when travelling about later on trains; he liked talking to people and found it better to travel *incognito*.

The next move was to Felling in Gateshead on the southern bank of the Tyne in 1927 and the family stayed there five years, which was unusual. Joan was born here. It was a long stint in the tough time of the Depression. The Chapel at Felling was however a joyful place with lovingly polished pews. An extension was built during this period, with people contributing bricks on which their name was inscribed. It was as if the people were continually looking forward to a wonderful Kingdom to come in contrast to the misery around in the streets. Jesus was very real to them. There is a story about Norman that during a pastoral visit an old lady said she did not want this 'intellectual stuff' but wanted a 'dying faith'. One gathers that he took the point!

During this time, Norman continued his studies (rising early in the morning to do so), and also began doing his education work (what we might now call 'adult education'), doing some extension lecturing at Armstrong College, Newcastle and going off in the summer lecturing to summer schools. These were particularly popular with teachers who wanted more knowledge than could be given in the preaching in the chapels. It became a major part of his life's work to explain both Bible and theology to interested laymen and women. In an article written in 1958 on the occasion

of Norman becoming President at the Newcastle Conference, the Rev. T.W. Bevan wrote:

The people there will remember Dr. Snaith's ministry in the North-East - a ministry that probed people's minds and stirred their imagination; that had to do with how Christians looked at things as well as how they felt about them: a human ministry as well and a dedicated and scholarly one.

What a tribute!

The next move was to Durham in 1932, where John was born. This was a much more pleasant environment; there were actually trees, which had been missing in the rather harsh surroundings on the ridge to the south of the Tyne. The house was in a better area, but on four floors, which did not go down too well with Winifred. She vowed that she would never go to a manse again that she had not seen first! <sup>1</sup>

NHS (as we will now call him) must have been busy in his study as usual; the first book *Studies in the Psalter* based on his Senior Kennicott Prize thesis, was published in 1934. Professor Dr. G.W. Anderson, of Edinburgh University, writing an article in 1986 on Norman's scholastic works tells us that this:

subjected to a critical examination Sigmund Mowinckel's hypothesis of a festival of the enthronement of Yahweh to which the psalms of the Kingship of Yahweh belonged. Like many others before him, Snaith argued that these psalms reflected the influence of Deutero-Isaiah and were post-exilic. He further argued that they were Sabbath psalms. The book also dealt with a range of other questions; the dating of sections of the Psalter, the alleged evidence in certain psalms concerning conflict within the Temple staff, the development of the Sabbath liturgy, and the place of some psalms in it. Snaith had a lasting interest in the Psalter and in Israelite and Jewish worship.<sup>2</sup>

Out of this interest came numerous subsequent publications in learned journals, launching many original ideas.

His second book *Have Faith in God* was published in 1935 after the move

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<sup>1</sup> The manse was at 45 Western Hill, Durham

<sup>2</sup> Rev Dr. George Wishart Anderson 1913-2002: em1936), 'Ministerial Training: Norman Henry Snaith' in *The Epworth Review* 13(1) (January 1986), pp.14-18.

down to Luton in 1934. This was the first of the more popular books arising out of studies in the Psalms and leading to the conclusion, elaborated in later works, that the basis of the Christian faith should be seen as coming from the Hebraic tradition and not the Greek.

His move to Luton came about because NHS had been given the task of preparing a new edition of the Hebrew Old Testament for the British & Foreign Bible Society and needed access to London libraries. He used to travel up to the British Museum Reading Room every Friday. He worked hard at this, and a copy was ready for the printer by 1938 and the first proofs were read before the outbreak of war in 1939 but problems after the War delayed the new edition, which eventually appeared in 1958.

He also published a little booklet: *Modern Discoveries and the Bible* (1936), put out by the Epworth Press as one of the series of Little Books of the Kindly Light. This explained the light shed on Biblical history by archaeological discoveries, a theme which was frequently taken up later in numerous articles in the *Methodist Recorder*. NHS was also reading up on Comparative Religion and ploughing through Frazer's *Golden Bough*. He was very interested in the search for God among peoples in so-called 'primitive' religions, preparing a book about this which had to be put aside when he received an appointment as Tutor in Old Testament Language & Literature at Wesley College, Headingley, Leeds, to start in September 1936. There had been talk of an appointment to Hartley in 1935 but the post had not materialized. However NHS was appointed to fill the next vacancy when Dr. Lightley<sup>3</sup> retired from Headingley in 1936.

It should be mentioned that all this scholastic work while at Luton was done while NHS had charge of five Chapels, two in Luton town (Chapel Street and Parktown) and three out in the country. At some stage, probably beginning at Luton, he got involved in the Christian Commando Campaigns: he was said to have been evangelical without being fundamentalist. One wonders how one man could achieve so much, but there may be some explanation in that, in Primitive Methodist chapels a great deal of work was done by laymen, much more than seems to have been the tradition in Wesleyan circles, where the minister had more authority as leader. Although Primitive Methodism ceased with Methodist Union in 1932, locally there was little change in Durham up to 1934 and in Luton up till 1936.

Another Snaith activity at Luton was to help the local Liberals at the time of an election campaign, by being taken round the villages in a car, starting

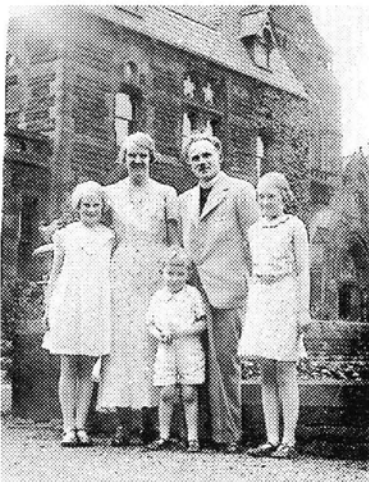
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<sup>3</sup> Rev. Dr. John William Lightley (1867-1948: em1892), President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, 1928.

meetings, and then going on to the next when the candidate arrived. This was part of the philosophy that being a Christian meant being involved in the world. NHS would keep up on world news by means of radio and the *News Chronicle*, and the *Children's Newspaper* was also taken to educate the children.

## V. WESLEY COLLEGE, HEADINGLEY, LEEDS (1936-44)

In August 1936 the family moved to Headingley, Leeds where NHS took up his teaching appointment. This involved a great change in life-style; living in a former Wesleyan College, in a large well-appointed house, and with the family attending the local ex-Wesleyan Church at Headingley. NHS was now able to devote his time to study and teaching, though he also travelled round the country a good deal at weekends, becoming known as a popular preacher. A more spacious house and settled environment meant that in the years before the War the family had visitors; Jack Brazier Green came for the cricket at the Headingley Cricket Ground and various members of the Canadian Snaith family came over for visits. Norman, who was a great family man, kept in close touch with them over the years.



Norman and Winifred Snaith with (left to right) Joan, John and Margaret, outside Headingley College, Leeds, c 1937

NHS was happy to have as colleagues Dr. Vincent Taylor,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Howard Watkin-Jones<sup>2</sup> and Dr. Harold Roberts<sup>3</sup> Together they published the Headingley Lectures on the *Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* in 1937, each Tutor

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. Vincent Taylor (1887-1968: em1909, appointed Principal in 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Dr. Howard Watkin-Jones (1888-1953: em1912), Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council (1934) and President of the Conference (1951) was appointed the Principal in 1953 but died soon after.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Dr. Harold Roberts (1896-1982: em1919), President of the Methodist Conference (1957).

dealing with his own special subject. NHS wrote the about the Spirit in the Old Testament; about “*Ruach adonai*”, the Spirit of the Lord, which he described as the life-giving, energy creating power of God, working in the minds of men. In spite of different ideas of conducting worship, the tutors all got on together with a great deal of mutual respect, though the ‘establishment’ tried to get NHS to change his views on baptism. Anderson recalled:

It is paradoxical that Snaith should have had such an intense interest in the details of Israelite and Jewish worship, though he himself cared little for liturgical correctness and conducted public worship with homely informality. This characteristic was particular evident in the Chapel at Wesley College, where a degree of liturgical correctness prevailed.<sup>4</sup>

He added that the homely informality was a feature of the Snaith preaching and part of its strength.



Wesley College, Headingley, Leeds

NHS adopted his own distinctive style of teaching Hebrew using an exercise book which became known as the ‘Penny Grammar’. His students regarded him with great affection and after his death many wrote with appreciation about how they had been introduced to the Old Testament and inspired by his teaching. There were lots of ‘Norman’ stories, for their tutor was a very unusual man. The students apparently referred to him among themselves as Norman, which seems to imply how human and

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<sup>4</sup>G.W. Anderson, ‘Ministerial Training: Norman Henry Snaith’ in *The Epworth Review* 13(1) (January 1986), pp.14-18.

approachable he was. He also taught Homiletics, including practical matters, for we are told that he taught the students how to hold a baby when Christening!! In addition he used to teach to students at Leeds University, studying for the London External BD.

In 1942 the Wesley College closed and was taken over temporarily by the WRNS. NHS stayed on as Chaplain and to look after the College, presumably because he was the only Tutor to have children at school in Leeds. He was careful as ever to choose good schools for the children. Margaret and Joan were sent to Leeds Girls' High School, just down the road, a Direct Grant School. John at first went to Leeds Grammar School at Woodhouse Moor, but later moved to Kingswood, the Methodist School in Bath, which had higher academic standards. John went on to Pembroke College, Oxford, where he took Classical Languages for 'Mods' and then moved on to Oriental languages. He did well scholastically and then went on to Richmond College where he took a London BD. He entered the ministry and eventually became a lecturer at Cambridge University in the Department of Oriental studies, teaching Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac, publishing commentaries on Ecclesiasticus and the Song of Songs.<sup>5</sup>

During the War, NHS did not travel around at weekends preaching, as he had done previously, but got involved in broadcasting. His talks at 10 to 8 in the morning became very popular and many of them were published as popular booklets, such as *The Jigsaw Family*, *Talking with you* and *What's Your Idea*. This was the time of the popularity of the Radio Doctor, and NHS was often known as the Radio Padre. This was an unusual ministry; he enjoyed this work and was involved in a lot of correspondence with enquirers. He had two local pastorates during this time (one after the other); the Mint, Holbeck in the Leeds Mission Circuit, and Woodhouse Moor and Victoria Road in the Leeds (Headingley) Circuit.

NHS's main work in this period, apart from contributions to various scholastic journals, was finalising his ideas on the Old Testament in what became his major work, published as the Fernley-Hartley Lecture in 1944 entitled *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*. This was an exposition of the central ideas of the Old Testament, of their vital connection with New Testament teaching and of the essential difference between them and 'the ideas of any other religion whatever'. In the last chapter of the book NHS makes clear his objections to the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament which was widely used in the early Church), which surface in various places in his works. He maintains that the translation of various

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<sup>5</sup> John G. Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus, or the wisdom of Jesus son of Sirach* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1974); *The Song of Songs, based on the Revised Standard Version* (London, Marshall Pickering, nd [c1993])

Hebrew words into Greek had led to misunderstandings of meaning; misunderstandings which were not corrected until the Old Testament was translated directly from Hebrew at the time of the Reformation. He asserted that the theological heritage of Christianity is Hebraic and not Hellenic. The ideas that he investigated were holiness, righteousness, salvation, covenant-love, election-love and spirit. Anderson<sup>6</sup> has argued that this was a contribution to Old Testament theology of tremendous importance, showing how the author was not afraid to produce fresh ideas and break new ground. It was interesting to discover how these ideas had been revolving in his head for a long time for apparently he had discussed them with local preachers back in Durham days. It was this ability to break new ground and argue his point of view in meetings of the Old Testament Society, which distinguished him as a scholar.

During this time, too, NHS also worked on publishing notes on various Hebrew texts. These were mainly textbooks for students devoted to portions of the Hebrew Scriptures set for the BD examinations at London University. They were submitted to Oxford along with his *Distinctive Ideas* and NHS was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1948, which he rightly regarded as a great honour from his former University.

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<sup>6</sup> Anderson, *op cit*, pp.14-18.



## VI. LEEDS (1944-58)

After the publication of the *Distinctive Ideas* in 1944, the Snaith output of books and papers increased. There was what Anderson describes as a 'brilliantly original book', *The Jewish New Year Festival: its origins and development* (1947), which re-examined the sequence of festivals in ancient Israel and the history of the calendar. Other books followed which produced material for educated lay people. They included *The Jews from Cyrus to Herod* (1949), a very useful account of the history of that time in religious context. There were also books attempting to explain Christian theology in simple language: a book on the Nicene Creed *I Believe In...* (1949); then *New Men in Christ Jesus* (1951) which according to the notes inside the cover, contained seven addresses, six of which were broadcasts. The second was entitled *The Holy Spirit and Personal Life* and NHS says how much he was influenced by R.J. Campbell's book *The Life of Christ*. He quotes:

The title of the first chapter is 'The Story told by the first Christian preachers'. Dr. Campbell started with Pentecost. Of course he did. That is where to start, because that was the time when they were all convinced into action.....they were filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>1</sup>

All the Addresses are concerned with the necessity of personal experience, and include four New Year addresses, which stressed the need of inward change, and also addresses on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. There were also *Hymns of the Temple* (1951) on the Psalms and *Mercy and Sacrifice* (1953) on Hosea.

Around 1946 a group of scholars came together to produce a new translation of the Bible, to be known as the New English Bible. This was a combined effort of the Church of England and the Free Churches. Three separate panels of translators were named, one for the New Testament, one for the Old Testament and one for the Apocrypha. In addition there was a fourth panel of scholars whose speciality was the English language. NHS was appointed to the Old Testament Panel and given the task of preparing the first draft of the Book of Ruth, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and

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<sup>1</sup>R.J. Campbell, *The life of Christ* (London, Benn, 1927) p.23. The Rev. Reginald John Campbell (1867-1956), Congregationalist minister from 1903 at the City Temple, London, took Anglican ordination in 1916. In 1906 he attracted widespread attention by his vigorous propagation of what was called the 'New Theology' a restatement of Christian beliefs to harmonize with modern critical views and beliefs.

Genesis. The drafts were first circulated to other members of the Panel and then discussed sentence by sentence until a translation was reached which commanded the approval of the Panel as a whole. This was then submitted to the Literary Panel who made their suggested amendments and then sent it back to the Translating Panel. The jointly approved draft was then more widely available for comment and eventually a final version was authorised. As might be imagined this was an ongoing work and necessitated both numerous trips to Oxford and demanding work for the translators. The new Bible was eventually published in 1970.

In June 1954 the *Times* Newspaper published a 32 page 'extra' on the Bible, covering both Old and New Testaments with contributions from the leading Bible scholars of the day. The NHS contribution was on 'The World of the Old Testament' and describes the period from 2000 BC in the Early Bronze Age, with special mention of the greatness of Ugarit in the early 14th century BC, right up to the time of Roman rule which began in earnest in 63 BC.

NHS regarded it as a great honour to be invited to deliver the first A.S. Peake Memorial Lecture in 1956, published by Epworth Press in as *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, especially because of Peake's Primitive Methodist background. Peake had lectured for a short while at Mansfield College before being recruited by the Connexion's benefactor, William Hartley,<sup>2</sup> to the staff of Hartley College, Manchester, in 1892. Peake remained there until his death in 1929 declaring that the purpose of his curriculum of biblical studies was:

not to produce showy men, but plain, hard-working men and good ministers....'cultured evangelists'.

Though remaining a layman, he played a vital part in enabling Primitive Methodist ministers and others to accept critical biblical scholarship without losing their faith.<sup>3</sup>

He was rare in that he was expert in both Old and New Testament fields and is best known for the editing of *Commentary on the Bible* (1919) and Hartley saw that every Primitive Methodist minister received a copy in 1919.

In the Preface to his published Peake Memorial Lecture, NHS wrote:

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<sup>2</sup> Sir William Pickles Hartley (1846-1922), jam manufacturer and President of the Primitive Methodist Conference (1909).

<sup>3</sup> See article about A. S. Peake in Methodist Directory

I must first express my appreciation of the honour the Committee have done me in inviting me to deliver the first Peake Memorial Lecture. Arthur Samuel Peake was great biblical scholar; there was no greater scholar in his generation. He combined rare judgement in matters of scholarship with a deep and sincere piety, and it was this combination which enabled him to do a very great work in helping many people to appreciate the methods and results of modern biblical scholarship. No man could doubt his sincerity and his devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, with the result that many were prepared to trust him where they could not understand. Primitive Methodism in particular, and Methodism and the whole Church in general, owe him a debt that no one can estimate and none can ever repay.

The subject of the lecture 'The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible' was chosen because 'no subject was dearer to the heart of Dr. Peake and no subject could more fittingly pay tribute to his memory'. The work of Dr. Peake in popularising modern study and knowledge of the Bible was continued.

In addition to work on these books was the constant proof reading of the *Hebrew Bible* for the British & Foreign Bible Society, eventually published in 1958; articles on Leviticus and Numbers for the *New Century Bible*, contributions to the revised Peake's *Commentary* (1962) and the *Theological Word Book of the Bible* and a commentary on *Amos, Hosea and Micah* (1956) for the Epworth Preacher's Commentary series.

The book *Distinctive Ideas* was widely welcomed, particularly by Biblical Colleges in the United States. It was reprinted several times and was translated into a number of languages, including Japanese! NHS thus became a renowned scholar internationally and his international correspondents were most helpful in sending interesting postage stamps!! In the summer of 1949 NHS lectured in Dallas, Texas - commenting that he found it very hot!! He was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Divinity in 1952 by the University of Glasgow and in 1953, on the sudden death of Dr. Howard Watkin-Jones, he became Principal of Headingley College, an appointment confirmed by Conference in 1954. He began to travel abroad, sometimes alone, sometimes with his wife. There were trips to Geneva, Lake Junalaska (in the States) and Germany.

NHS was honoured by being elected President of the Old Testament Society in 1957. In January he presided at the Winter Meeting of the Society of Old Testament Studies, presenting his address, 'Sacrifices in the

Old Testament'.<sup>4</sup> As one would expect, this is a scholarly paper, speaking about three types of sacrifice and the meaning of various Hebrew words. It is interesting that he refers to a posthumous paper on the subject published by his old Mansfield Tutor, Dr. Buchanan Gray, and discusses those ideas in the light of more recent scholarship. NHS also presided at a Summer Meeting held in July.

In May 1957 NHS, by now well known in Methodism, wrote an authoritative article for the *Methodist Recorder*<sup>5</sup> in commemoration of the first Primitive Methodist Camp Meeting at Mow Cop on 29 May 1807. In this article he gives a glimpse of the Primitive Methodist life in his boyhood in Norfolk: of the Annual Camp Meeting and the procession with its singing, and the open air meeting in the field with its preaching. The point he was making was that what was missing was the background of praying, which was a main feature of the early Camp Meeting and which he claimed was the reason for the success of the Revival movement. It is interesting to recall that this need for prayer as well as preaching was stressed by his grandfather John Snaith on the occasion of his remarkable first sermon at Eyemouth in 1859. NHS also mentions in this article the preaching from the huge farm wagons, like "the ones on which we ambled down to Bacton for the Sunday School treat." He then goes on to explain why Primitive Methodists were so called, arising from a speech made at Chester by John Wesley in 1790. This theme was taken up again in his Presidential Address to the Ministerial session Conference.

At the Annual Conference of 1957, NHS was elected President-Designate of the Methodist Conference to serve from the following year. Before taking up that office, Norman and Winifred spent six months in India, where NHS was Visiting Professor at the United Theological College in Bangalore. Most of the time was spent in Bangalore but they travelled about on various engagements. They were received everywhere as honoured guests, and experienced at first hand the Church of South India at work. It was obviously an eye-opening visit. Among other references to this period, NHS wrote about it in his November Presidential article in the *Methodist Recorder*.<sup>6</sup> He described what he had seen as an appalling need for the spread of the Christian Gospel and the need for stout-hearted devoted Christian men to go out there and also the need for money. Norman and Winifred enjoyed their travelling about, and wanted to see as much of India as they could. They took advantage of a visit up north and went even further north to Darjeeling to see the Himalayas. Though failing to see Everest, they had a view of the great mountain Kanchenjunga from their

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<sup>4</sup> Published in the journal *Vetus Testamentum* 7 (1957) pp 308 - 317.

<sup>5</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (30 May 1957)

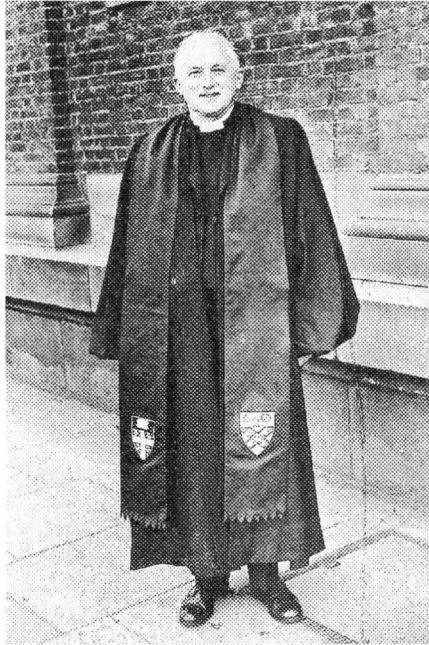
<sup>6</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (13 November 1958)

bedroom, which was an inspiring sight.

On the way back they visited Israel. NHS describes his experience there in his Presidential Address to the Conference in Newcastle. He said that he had looked forward for forty years to seeing something of the Holy Land. He had wanted to make the Bible real. Though obviously many things had changed since the time of Jesus, they felt that the hills round Nazareth and the Lake of Galilee seemed just the same. However, they both had an amazing experience, for as they broke bread early on their last morning by Lake Galilee they became aware of the Living Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The visit did make the Bible come to life and gave new insight and vividness to many incidents, as well as also showing him more clearly what many Hebrew words meant, even if NHS said that as it turned out this was only a minor result. The main result was that it made the Lord Jesus Christ real to him, not so much as a figure of history, but as a Living Person here and now. His Address to Conference attempts to give an explanation of this remarkable experience. After this trip to India and Israel came the preparations for the July Conference at Newcastle.

## V1. PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE (1958-59)

At the Conference in 1957 NHS was elected President-Designate for the 1958 Conference. In between he spent six months in India and returned to be installed as President at Newcastle in July 1958. By this time NHS was highly renowned as Professor Dr. Norman Snaith, one of the foremost Old Testament scholars of his time.



President of the Methodist Conference 1958 - 1959

Dr. G.W. Anderson comments that:

1958 was the high point in a life in which scholarship, teaching and preaching were united in the vocation of a Methodist Minister.

The Hebrew Bible on which he had worked for so long was finally launched in December 1958. The President was at meetings in Edinburgh, but insisted on leaving them to go to Glasgow to speak on the radio about the new Bible, in his view not a chance to be missed. He regarded this radio witness to the wide world as very important.

In the Conference Handbook for 1958, the Rev. T.W. Bevan <sup>1</sup> wrote about the new President, recalling the good work he did in the area back in the days when he was stationed at Durham (1927-1932) and paying tribute to the new President's scholarship, yet describing him as one of the most unprofessorial professors that anyone could meet! He writes as so many others have done of the President and of his leadership qualities.

Perhaps his greatest tribute is in these words:

In Dr. Snaith can be found a union of the simple trust of the believer and the wisdom of the scholar.

There was also a tribute by lifelong friend Rev. Jack Brazier Green, in the *Methodist Recorder*, <sup>2</sup> giving something of the NHS life history.

At Newcastle NHS took over Wesley's Field Bible from Dr. Harold Roberts, a former colleague at Headingley. Later, in his 'New Year Message' to the Methodist people in the *Methodist Recorder* <sup>3</sup> he proclaimed that he would dedicate his Presidential year to a renewal in Methodism and in accordance with this intention the new President gave two scholarly Addresses to the Conference. As was to be expected they were based on the Bible and were deeply theological. They contain quite a lot of personal anecdotes.

The Address to the Representative Session started off with an attempt to explain the remarkable experience the President had with his wife when breaking bread by Galilee, an experience of the Living Christ, which took them both by surprise. "How can a man have this experience now of someone who lived nearly 2,000 years ago?" he asks. He gives his own explanation by describing three kinds of time - clock time, circular time, and God's time. Clock time, which has to do with the calendar with its succession of events, is time as it were in a straight line, thinking in terms of history and tradition. Then there is circular time, the time of the succession of seasons, year after year. This is a religious kind of time, the time of ecclesiastical calendars and liturgies. These ensure that everything is prayed about that should be prayed about and that everything is preached that should be preached about. This has its place, but is in danger of going round and round. Then there is the third kind of time, God's time, very different from the former two. God's time is NOW: with Him there is 'no yesterday, no today, no tomorrow': NOW is the time of salvation. All three kinds of time are important, but the REAL time is God's time, which

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Thomas William Bevan (1893-1976: em1917).

<sup>2</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (10 July 1958)

<sup>3</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (4 September 1958)

enables a man to be as near to Christ now as any man long ago by Lake Galilee.

The Address to the Ministerial Session was about the 'People of God', described as the 'people saved by the Lord'. In the first place, they were the descendants of Jacob whom God rescued out of slavery in Egypt. In the second, they were the people whom God brought back from Exile in Babylonia. In the third place, they are the people whom God has saved in Christ in His precious blood. This saving work of God comes from his amazing love for his people, freely offered by grace. On man's side, the condition is 'faith', that is 'trust and obey'. The Address goes on to talk about the difference between the old rite of circumcision and the new way of baptism, though he does not see this as a condition of entry into the Church. It needs to be confirmed by the individual desiring entrance. He maintains that entry into the People of God comes about only through personal trust in Christ, a trust in Christ alone for salvation. The President went on to discuss how a man can continue in that holy fellowship, for even those who have been baptised can be lost if they lose the personal trust in Christ. He then explains what Scriptural Holiness means. He maintains that the People of God are people saved by God: they are a holy people who know that following Him means more than sound ethical conduct; it means 'going the second mile' and being witnesses, seeking to save that which is lost, being His 'Salvation to the end of the earth'.

The President concluded the Address by talking about his roots and saying that he was originally a Primitive Methodist, and still was, but with a difference; the difference being that he was now a primitive Methodist with a small 'p'. He quotes a speech made by John Wesley not long before his death (in 1790) when he said:

Fellow labourers, wherever there is an open door, enter in and preach the Gospel; go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind; and after you have done this you will still have to say like the servant in the Gospel, 'Lord it is done as Thou hast commanded and yet there is room'.

The President continued:

Then he lifted up his slender hands and the tears flowed down his venerable face and he exclaimed 'And yet there is room. And yet there is room.' And that is the way the primitive Methodists did.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> see: W.E. Fardale, *The Secret of Mow Cop* [Wesley Historical Society Lectures no.16] (London Epworth Press, 1950) pp 43-4.



He continued to explain that it is arising from this speech of Wesley's that his forebears came to call themselves 'Primitive Methodists' when they found themselves having to form their own Connexion in 1812. Indeed the Primitive Methodists often called themselves 'primitives' with a small 'p', referring back beyond Wesley to the Apostles of the Early Church spreading the Gospel as Wesley said particularly to the poor and needy. This theme is taken up in the excellent book by Geoffrey Milburn on Primitive Methodism<sup>5</sup>. The President went on to say that he wonders how closely Methodists today fit that description by the old man with the venerable face. Clearly this is how he saw that this should be their calling as a 'People of God'.

The Annual Address of the Conference from Newcastle, signed by Dr. Snaith as President and Dr. Eric Baker<sup>6</sup> as Conference Secretary, in sending affectionate greeting to Methodists all over the world, speaks of Newcastle as an historic strategic centre, being for so long the headquarters from which John Wesley directed his campaign for Christ in the north of England and Scotland, and referring back to the same problems and opportunities as those to which John Wesley addressed himself at the Orphan House in Newcastle with such amazing success. It went on to note with regret a declining membership in Methodism and decrease in number of scholars in the Sunday schools. It commended the local preachers, with the decline in their numbers now arrested, and goes on to talk about the challenges of new ways of communication, recommending investigation of the ways in which sound broadcasting and television could be better used for evangelism. The report describes the actions taken by the Conference in various fields and ends with a call to prayer, to imaginative endeavour, and to devoted service, praying that the Methodist people may know throughout the coming year, as the Founder did, that 'the best of all is, God is with us'.

Dr. Snaith's 'New Year Message' to the Church, launched in the *Methodist Recorder*<sup>7</sup> proclaimed that he would dedicate his year to a renewal in Methodism, and, mindful presumably of his responsibility in holding Wesley's Bible, he proceeded to speak and write about the Wesleys (in a less scholarly and more popular way than in his formal Addresses!) on his travels throughout the year, using mainly Charles Wesley's hymns and preaching a message of salvation by faith alone, through grace alone, and emphasizing the importance of prayer. He did comment that he had had a

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<sup>5</sup> See the 'Introduction' in Geoffrey Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough, Methodist Publishing House, 2002)

<sup>6</sup> Rev. Dr. Eric Wilfred Baker (1899-1973: em1922), President of the Conference, (1959)

<sup>7</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (4 September 1958)

surfeit of the tune 'Blaenwern'!! He praised the circuit system in spite of some weaknesses, emphasized that Methodists should 'be themselves' and called for the revival of new-type class meetings. He also emphasized how much Methodism valued its lay leaders and called for more of them.

During this year, NHS undertook the usual journeying to every District, as far apart as the Channel Islands and the Shetlands, to the Welsh Assembly and Irish Conference and also over to the troops in Germany. In an article in the *Methodist Recorder*,<sup>8</sup> looking back over an eventful year, he said that he had travelled just under 30,000 miles by rail, road, air and sea and had made 359 talks and speeches, apart from such as short welcome addresses. He did make a point that too much was demanded of a President and he should be able to get home more often, if only to deal with the mail!! He added that he would have an abiding memory of full churches all over the country. One gathers that he enjoyed being out and about more than he enjoyed the London Committees, but he soldiered on faithfully. It is interesting to note that he wore his Ministerial 'dog collar' all the time when he was President, as well as the more formal dress required on occasions by the office.

In July 1959 NHS handed John Wesley's Bible over to his successor the Rev. Dr. Eric Baker. However, NHS was involved in the discussions in Conference over the Conversations with the Anglicans, having been appointed one of the delegates. There was a good-humoured debate about the continuation of these during which Dr. Gordon Rupp<sup>9</sup> said he "respected the conscience of Dr. Barrett,<sup>10</sup> admired Dr. Snaith's stubborn tenacity, and bowed before the stormy eloquence of Mr. Foot Nash's<sup>11</sup> inhibitions". The ex-President spoke up and said he was against sectarianism and:

the difficulty with the Church of England was that we were dealing with a partly Protestant sect. The Church of England was a sect because it had set up barriers which could not be warranted from Scripture - indeed he thought Scripture was against the historic episcopacy and that the Anglicans were wrong.

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<sup>8</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (9 July 1959)

<sup>9</sup> Rev. Dr. Gordon Rupp (1910-1986: em1934), first Professor of Ecclesiastical History, University of Manchester (1956-67), President of the Conference (1968).

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Dr. Charles Kingsley Barrett (b.1917: em 1934)

<sup>11</sup> David Foot Nash (1902-1972), Vice President of the Conference (1963); initially he strongly opposed the Anglican Methodist Conversations but then changed his mind.

He added that he was glad to have been part of the discussions because he had found no group of men among whom there was more friendship and affection than in those Conversations. Amid laughter, he said that he loved the Anglicans as much as he loved some of the Conference and that there had been a fellowship of the Gospel in these Conversations and he hoped that they would be permitted to continue for a long time. The headline to the report in the *Methodist Recorder*<sup>12</sup> was “‘The Conversations will go on’... ‘We end in unanimity’ says the President at the close of the debate’: and the subheading was, ‘Dr. Snaith to the rescue’” This would seem to illustrate the NHS capacity to resolve a potentially difficult situation with humour.

When the Report on the Conversations was published in 1963, NHS was one of the four who produced a dissentient Minority Report.<sup>13</sup> Their chief objection was to argue that the main body of the report did not adequately recognize the pre-eminent and normative place of Scripture or set out satisfactorily its relations to tradition. The dissidents said that tradition represents the worldliness of the Church, while scripture points to its supernatural origin and basis. They also objected to the view taken by the report on historic episcopacy, challenging its scriptural basis and thus objecting to the expectation that in a united church Methodists would take on this system. Arising out of this came an objection to the necessity of ‘hands being laid’ on Methodist ministers to bring them into the new Church; a phrase generally interpreted as meaning re-ordination. They emphasized that the Methodist Church holds the Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers. A stipulation made by the Methodists before the talks was that it should be free to preserve the relations and fellowship with other non-Episcopal Churches which they enjoyed. However, it was clear that it was improbable that this would continue when the proposed Stage II was reached, and Methodism was in the new Church. Nevertheless in spite of these objections, the Minority Group concluded that the talks had been useful in clarifying many issues and had shown a genuine readiness to re-think old positions.

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<sup>12</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (23 July 1959)

<sup>13</sup> The other dissentients who signed the Minority Report were the Rev. Thomas D. Meadley (1909-1989: em1933), who also came from a Primitive Methodist background, the Rev. Dr. C. Kingsley Barrett and Dr. Thomas Edward Jessop (1896-1980) appointed in 1928 to the Ferens Chair of Philosophy & Psychology (later Philosophy only) at Hull University and Vice President of the Conference (1955), these latter two having a United Methodist background. Norman Snaith’s close friend, the Rev. J. Brazier Green, from a Wesleyan background, was also an opponent of the scheme.

After the Presidential year NHS, with his wife Winifred, went on an extended lecture tour in the United States and Canada. He was very happy to be able to visit members of the Snaith family and their descendents in Canada with whom a correspondence had been kept up through all the years since 1914.

## VIII. RETIREMENT (1961-1982)

By 1961 NHS, having 'done' his forty years in the ministry, twenty-five of which had been at the Wesley College in Headingley, decided to retire to Thetford, his mother's home town. There were many celebrations in his honour when he left Leeds. It has been mentioned that he had taught students at Leeds University during all the time he was at Wesley College and he gave to the library a good number of books, named as the 'Snaith' collection. The University honoured him by awarding an Honorary Degree of Letters (DLitt.). Dr. K.S. Reid, Professor of Theology, presented him to the Princess Royal as a Churchman honoured with the highest position the Methodist Church had to bestow and as a theologian of international repute.

At the College preparations for a celebration had been in hand for some time and letters sent all over the world to friends of the College. The response was so great that a marquee was hired for the occasion. A portrait, subscribed for by students, past students and friends, was presented by the College. There were eleven speakers at the ceremony, including Dr. G.W. Anderson who had come down from Edinburgh to speak about the scholastic side of NHS work. A tribute written beforehand by colleague the Rev. Raymond George<sup>1</sup> (who also spoke at the College ceremony) said, as have many others, that he [NHS] always remembered that the chief task of a Methodist Minister is to preach. He continued:

His expositions of the truth of the Gospel, especially of salvation by faith, simple and profound, biblical and illuminated by homely illustration, have often been heard on the wireless and have been welcomed throughout the land by congregations whom he has often served at the cost of arduous journeys.

Past and present students paid tributes. As one speaker said, an era in Headingley's history was ended.

Raymond George also spoke in the Conference in July 1961 and said how much they in the College would miss him; and the President added his tribute on behalf of the Conference, saying that Professor Snaith was the least pedantic of scholars, so human, unconventional and friendly. That was why he had endeared himself to them all.

Celebrations over, it was off to Thetford, where Norman and Winifred

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. A. Raymond George (1912-1998: em1936), President of the Conference (1975).

lived in a bungalow with a garden, tended by Winifred with loving care: it was a riot of colour in the summer. Norman seems to have looked after the vegetables, as he did in early days in Leeds. The bungalow was just outside the old town overlooking the flood plain of the River Thet, close by the ancient monument Castle Hill. NHS much appreciated the view from his study, as he continued his early rising, a lifetime habit. He wrote a memorable article in the *Methodist Recorder*<sup>2</sup> entitled 'Came the dawn and a new baptism'. This referred to the stars he could first see before dawn and then described the change of colours as the sun rose. He pondered on why there was so much beauty in the world, referring back to scenes seen on his travels; the pink dawn on Kanchenjunga, the afterglow in Vancouver, and many other wonders. He wrote about how he appreciated the wide horizons in Norfolk. He goes on:

Every dawn talks to me about the Grace of God, about the extra that he put into the world when he need not have done it.

and continues :

They say that no-one ought to be baptized more than once. Maybe that is true if it is baptism by water. I know that a man can be baptized with the Holy Spirit every dawn. Read Bishop Ken's morning hymn: 'Awake my soul and with the sun...'

On first retiring, NHS was obviously tired after his tough Presidential year. Various letters and tributes tell us that people had from time to time told him that he could not do both the scholastic work and the popular writing and preaching. Somehow he did and tributes speak of his incredible energy. Now he confessed to friends that his disability had caught up with him; he spent quite a lot of time at first resting and watching cricket on the television. Nevertheless he kept up with his studies, continuing to rise early in the morning. He visited Oxford to finish off his work for the Old Testament Panel of the New English Bible and was appointed to do the Speaker's Lectures there from 1961 to 1964. Arising out of these came the *The Book of Job; its origins and purpose* (1968), which apparently broke new ground. According to Anderson, the book maintained that the primary concern of the author (of Job) was not the problem of suffering but that of the transcendent God and his apparent inaccessibility. NHS also worked again on the book he had originally started long ago in Luton about primitive peoples looking for a 'High God' and was published as *The God that never was* (1971) which provided interesting, if controversial reading.

He also continued to write scholastic papers, carrying on with his studies of

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<sup>2</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (18 September 1969)

sacrifice in Old Testament times and producing a scholarly version of the notions of 'Time', which he had mentioned in his Presidential address. He became very interested in the use of Hebrew accents. Popular articles were written for the *Methodist Recorder* (including some on archaeological finds in the Bible lands, which unfortunately have not survived). This was a help to preachers who found their faith challenged by these discoveries. He reviewed Old Testament books for the *Methodist Recorder*, a task that later passed on to his son John, which pleased him very much.

In 1970 the New English Bible was finally published; a work which had taken over twenty-four years of co-operation. The full story about the edition was given in the *Methodist Recorder*<sup>3</sup> along with an assessment by Professor Dr. G.W. Anderson of Edinburgh University, explaining that this was a completely new translation, not just a new edition. There was also an article by NHS explaining what had been the aims of the translators and also a picture of the Old Testament Panel at work with the formidable Professor Godfrey Driver<sup>4</sup> at the head of the table. It has been said that the contribution of NHS was valuable because he was the only person who could stand up to Dr. Driver!! - but that of course is just an opinion. NHS had worked on Ruth, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Genesis.

In spite of the continuing scholastic activity, there was now time for hobbies. The famous cactus collection had a sunny home in the greenhouse and there was time to attend to the plants; there was time to sort out his stamp collection; read his favourite books. Scott and Dickens came high on the list (he always read *Pickwick Papers* every Christmas), he liked the stories of Mark Twain about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn and enjoyed 'Westerns'. In mentioning books, one must not forget the greatest favourites of all, quoted on many occasions, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. He was a well-known visitor to the local library where people seemed quite proud of their local professor. He enjoyed being part of the life of the Tanner Street Church. There was time to watch sport, and take an interest in the local paper, in particular accounts of the fishing fleet's annual progress down the East Coast. The local paper took an interest in him too, when he wrote to them about a particularly good fishing catch. They thought it was remarkable that someone outside the fishing industry took an interest in these things.

The local paper also produced what might be called a 'Norman story' in 1964. It was when the *Distinctive Ideas* had been translated into Japanese. The translation was taken from the ninth English edition, which came out

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<sup>3</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (19 March 1970)

<sup>4</sup> Dr Godfrey Rolles Driver (1892 - 1975), English Orientalist noted for his studies of Semitic languages and Assyriology.

two years before. The reporter wrote:

Dr. Snaith tells me a Japanese edition has been published. This time he will not be able to read the new translation, as he doesn't speak a word of Japanese. But there is a way round this. His wife has a cousin at present living in Canada who spent all her married life in Japan. Dr. Snaith is getting a copy sent over there for her to 'see if it is all right'.

It must have been, because no more has been heard about it!!

Finally, but certainly not least, NHS took a great interest in archaeological researches locally to find the camp of Boadicea, Queen of the Iceni, and followed speculation about the history of the Castle Hill. He wrote later from Ipswich saying that the site of Boadicea's military camp had been found. He did some local Latin coaching. He was always pleased to see old students who dropped in if they were in the area. While enjoying the peace and quiet of the rural scene, there were times when he regretted that he had not retired to Oxford where he could have kept more in touch with his scholastic interests.

NHS preached around the Thetford Circuit until he could not manage any more. Life was a great deal easier after 1971 when his sister Marjorie retired to Thetford with sister Gladys and could take him about in her car. Although he often preached (always without notes) about Old Testament characters, particularly as he got older, contrary to general opinion, he did not neglect the New Testament.

All his life he followed the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had been a boyhood hero, and brought up his family to do the same. His views on Baptism in the Spirit are well known. In his heyday he wrote frequently about St. Paul, discussing the meaning of Greek words and expounding on his Doctrine of the Spirit. He did not forget Jesus as he got older, indeed he seemed to be looking towards Him. We are told how latterly he took round the country chapels the hymn:

Jesus, these eyes have never seen  
That radiant form of Thine<sup>5</sup>

And he used this in a memorable service he took later in the retirement home at Ipswich. For all his scholastic studies in the Old Testament, he was all his life at heart a teacher and a preacher of the Gospel, a follower of the

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<sup>5</sup> Ray Palmer (1808-1887)



Lord Jesus Christ, who had inspired him as a boy.

The Snaiths' Golden Wedding was celebrated in 1975, but by 1980 the house and garden at Thetford became too much for them. Norman and Winifred moved to the Methodist Home in Ipswich in July of that year and received greatly appreciated loving care. Winifred was happy to meet up in Ipswich with an old friend from Lincoln days and enjoyed walking in the nearby gardens with their Memorial to the Protestant Martyrs. She enjoyed a rest from housekeeping! She was a devout Christian, seeing it as her duty to support her husband in whatever he did; a real 'helpmeet'. She read her Bible daily and on a Sunday afternoon would get out her writing case to write to absent family members and her friends. In Leeds she had been a class leader at Headingley Church. In writing about NHS, one must not forget to pay tribute to the devoted wife by his side.

Winifred died first in July 1981, followed by Norman on 4 March 1982. It had been a long and happy partnership. One of the topics NHS wrote about in his popular writings was the recipe for a happy marriage; all about trust. His favourite message at weddings was 'Stand by the firm'. This was all part of the legacy left by his spoken and written Ministry: about the necessity of doing right and putting faith and trust in Almighty God.

There were many tributes paid to the great man on his passing: an article in the *Methodist Recorder* in 1982 by Rev. Leslie Holdsworth;<sup>6</sup> a tribute in the *Bulletin of the Society for Old Testament Studies* by Dr. N. Porteous<sup>7</sup> also a tribute by Dr. G. W. Anderson in the *Journal of Semitic Studies*.<sup>8</sup> There were a great many letters; here are extracts from those from two former students, which seem to sum it all up.

- Rev. Owen Evans:

I had a profound respect for him as a scholar and theologian, and a tremendous affection for him as a person - he was so natural, so friendly and warm-hearted, and always himself\_(never feigning to be anything else)

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<sup>6</sup> *Methodist Recorder* (18 March 1982)

<sup>7</sup> Dr. N. Porteous in the *Bulletin of the Society for Old Testament Studies Bulletin* (1983).

<sup>8</sup> G. W. Anderson, 'Ministerial Training: Norman Henry Snaith' in *Epworth Review* 13(1) (January 1986) pp.14-18.

- Rev. Geoffrey Ferguson:

The 'Doc' was the most human of men, but he had a great way of unlocking doors to the mystery of the nature of God

What greater tributes can there be than that to a man who devoted his life to God?

There was yet more to come, because in 1984, two years after his death, a new edition of his *Distinctive Ideas*<sup>9</sup> was published and in an article in the *Expository Times* (June 1984)<sup>10</sup> Professor Dr. R.E. Clements of Kings' College, London wrote a long article taking a fresh look at the book in the light of scholarship at that time. The fact that the book was re-published after forty years shows how great was NHS's contribution to Old Testament studies. These are in addition to that on ministerial training by Anderson in the *Epworth Review* (1986),<sup>11</sup> assessing Dr. Snaith's scholastic achievements.

The work of Norman Snaith even now is not forgotten for his work lives on. There is a great deal of information on the Internet; many sites taking up various topics from his *Distinctive Ideas*, information about availability of books, and also references to articles in various journals. The *Distinctive Ideas* still seems to be popular in Bible schools in the United States. It certainly had a tremendous influence in teaching what the Old Testament is all about.

The Rev. Dr. Norman Henry Snaith still lives in his writings and these remain his testimony.

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<sup>9</sup> N.H. Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London, Epworth Press, 1983)

<sup>10</sup> Professor Dr. R.E. Clements in the *Expository Times* (June 1984) pp. 273 – 276.

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, *op cit* pp.14-18.

## APPENDIX 1

### SUMMARY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE METHODIST CONFERENCE, JULY 1958

The President began by saying that he was not going to talk about present ills, of the Church, or of the Country or of the World or all three, but he was going to keep to the Book which he had studied for many years - and proposed to speak about the Bible and Time. He went on:

#### **The Living Christ**

Let me tell you how I came to decide on this subject. As you know, Mrs. Snaith and I spent most of this last Connexional year in South India. On the way home we spent two days in Galilee. There we were impressed by three things in particular. First, the hills above Nazareth, calm and peaceful; the towns have changed, the roads have grown up, but the hills are just the same. Second, the lake itself just after dawn on a Sabbath morning. We both independently looked out of our window onto the lake and we both thought of that line, 'O Sabbath rest by Galilee'.

Whoever criticised that hymn and tune doubtless knows more than I do about poetry and music, but he does not know what I know about a Sabbath by Galilee. We had to leave Tiberias before breakfast, and so two of the nurses overnight gave us some bread and butter and cheese. They thought of everything except one thing, a knife. So I took up the heel of the loaf in both hands and broke it. And as I broke it, I chanced to look up and there was Mrs. Snaith watching. It was plain that we were both thinking the same thing; we were breaking bread by Galilee.

You doubtless say; we remembered that this was where Jesus lived. These were the hills he trod, this is how he broke bread by the Lake - but you are wrong. I, for my part, did not think of Him being there long ago. I had a curious sense of his presence at that very moment. It was not a case of there and then; it was here and now. I had looked forward for forty years to seeing something of the Holy Land. I had said to myself: it will make the Bible more real to me. It did work that way, of course, and there are many incidents which now have a new vividness. I know more clearly what many Hebrew

words mean. But, as it turned out, it was a minor result. The main result is; it has made the Lord Jesus Christ more real to me, not so much as a figure of history, but as a Living Person here and now.

This curious experience of the Presence of the Living Christ may have been largely subjective, and doubtless many dabblers in psychology will say it was all in my own thoughts and that is all there is to it.... But you remember the disciples and the Resurrection. They were not expecting it. Nothing was further from their thoughts, yet that is how it was. I was not expecting this, either. My mind was tuned in - forty years of tuning and most of the earlier years fortified with Glover's 'Jesus of History' - tuned in to look for a Christ who lived in Galilee nineteen hundred years ago. I was not expecting to be made strangely conscious of a Christ living here and now. Yet that is how it was.

Now, my explanation. How is it possible to be conscious of the living Christ here and now?

### **Three Kinds of Time**

The President continued:

There are three kinds of time. The true Christian understanding and use of time consists of all three, but as soon as you give undue prominence to any one of them, you get a heresy.

First, there is clock time, the time of civilised man. This has to do with the continued succession of events, one thing after another. It is the time of the calendar with its seconds and minutes and hours and days and years. It is time as a continuous straight line, time's ever rolling stream. It is the time of Psalm 90. Here it is that you think in terms of history and tradition..... You may ultimately come to think of the Church as an institution founded on such and such an occasion long years ago, founded by Christ with His power and authority continued in that institution, transmitted in this way or that way in a continuous line down the years. This is 'clock time', which I call 'horizontal history': tradition. The more you adhere to this way of thinking about time, the more you will emphasize this particular type of historical succession - clock time succession - with its visible transmission of authority.

Second, there is circular time- that is natural time, religious time, the time of this circling world. This is the year with its succession of seasons, spring, summer and autumn and winter, round and round

again, as long as the earth endures. 'While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease (Genesis 8. 22).'

The President goes on to say that this is a religious kind of time, the time of ecclesiastical calendars, the time of religious institutions. It has become ecclesiastical time. Every year you commemorate the festival, you do the things you did the year before.

He continues:

This is obviously a custom which has a lot to be said for it. At the best, it ensures that everything is remembered that ought to be remembered; that everything is prayed about that ought to be prayed about; and that everything is preached that ought to be preached about. I think too that a lectionary is a good thing, that is, if it is not composed of miscellaneous passages taken from here, there and everywhere.

The President said that this has its dangers. Because the ecclesiastical calendar is interwoven with the seasons of the year it can encourage Christmas to be kept as a time of friendliness and goodwill rather than as a religious festival; it can add to the confusions of Easter with Springtime festivals. But worst of all, he recounts a time when he was asked to give a series of four talks; when asked what he wanted to talk about he replied 'The Cross' - only to be told 'You can't talk about the Cross now, it isn't Holy Week!' He goes on to describe circular time as going round and round; at its worst round and round in smaller circles which get smaller and smaller and smaller.

### **The Time is at Hand**

Then he says:

Third, there is God's time, which is very different from clock time and very different from ecclesiastical time. There are no clocks in Heaven .....God's time is now. With Him there is no yesterday, no today, no tomorrow. It is all caught up in the eternal now.

The President asks:

Have you noticed how often in the Bible you get a triple time element? For instance there is Revelation 1.8 'which is and which was and which is to be'.

He continues:

What you find in the Bible is this. You read of God the Saviour, the God who brought Israel out of Egypt way back in the long ago. But they never leave it like that. The whole reason for the writer saying that He is the God who saved Israel then and there, is so that he can immediately go on to say that He is the God who saves Israel here and now. I do not think the prophets ever referred to God as the Saviour long ago except when they were thinking of Him as Israel's Saviour now. ..... I tell my students, year in, year out, that if ever they have to write an account of the message of any prophet, Amos, Isaiah, Malachi, any of them, the first paragraph should always be 'The time is at hand'. Prophecy is short range prophecy. 'Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation' (2 Corinthians 6.2). The first words the Lord Jesus used when He began His preaching in Galilee were 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe in the gospel' (Mark 1. 15). He is talking about kairos not chronos. That is what I am talking about; kairos, instant time, not 'this year, next year, sometime' (which is chronos) but now.'

The President illustrated this with a little Hebrew.

Hebrew as a language is supposed to be short on tenses, but it has one which is unique. It has been called the 'prophetic perfect' because it was used by the prophets of a future event so certain that they used the perfect tense, the tense of perfected actions: e.g. 'the Lord hath redeemed Zion', when as yet He had done nothing of the sort, but He had promised, and all God's promises are certain and sure..... Nowadays we do not call this a perfect tense at all. It is a tense you use when you want to say three things at once. He has done this, He is doing it now, He will always be doing it. This is why Hebrew is the language of Heaven - at any rate, this much is absolutely certain, you will never get there unless you know that God is your Saviour here and now, and that the only kind of time that matters is the kind of time that Jesus talked about in Galilee: Kairos, God's time.

### **The Grace that brings us to God**

The President goes on to talk about 'prevenient grace'. This he says is different from 'general grace' which is God's general providence in history - this belongs to 'clock-time'. 'Prevenient grace' is the grace that brings us to God - it is the grace of salvation which God offers now. 'Prevenient'

means 'comes first' - it is the answer before the question: Isaiah 65.42: 'Before they call, I will answer and while they are yet speaking, I will hear'. It does not belong to the thought-world of the historical successions of events. It belongs to the world of the instant, immediate present of God the Saviour.

It means this: you cannot say that the apostles were nearer to Christ because they lived close to Him in time, that is, in clock-time. Every man whom God calls is equally near to Him, because God the Saviour has only one sort of time, and that is now. You check the content of your present witness and your present experience of God by the general witness of Christians all down the years, but you do not receive the Holy Spirit through them. You receive the Holy Spirit straight and clear, direct from God, here and now. And unless each separate individual man receives that witness in his heart, here and now, there is no Church. The Church is not something which began at such and such a time, and is carried on in horizontal fashion through the years. It is something that is born again moment by moment, always by the immediate, transforming, invigorating action of God the Holy Spirit.

The succession lies in the continuing witness of the Spirit, moment by moment. That is why we Methodists are part of the Holy Catholic Church and not for any other reason. That is why, as soon as we depend on anything else than the ever-present help of God our Saviour, on the transforming, enabling power of Holy Spirit here and now, we cease to be a living Church, and we become Judaisers; we become a sect, which Heaven forbid.

He goes on to say that some people think of the Church as a wide strong river flowing through the ages, a river that come from lots of rain way back in time and distance. But rivers are apt to run dry. He maintains that it is raining now, 'showers of blessing' a continuous rain, which is the rain of the Spirit. He refers to the monsoon rain in India: that it is like the rain of the Spirit, lots of it, plenty of it. To quote again:

All the rain in the world is tumbling just where you are. You need to be in the rain to know what the Holy Spirit is like. It is now, now, and there is no other time for salvation, no other time for eternal life, except now.

## Summary

He concludes:

Where does history come in? Where does tradition come in? They come in so far as they demonstrate to you the continuously repeated action of the Holy Spirit. You will notice I said 'continuously repeated action' not 'continued action', but continuously repeated action. The difference is of the utmost importance.

Where does circular time come in? It comes in because we need continuously to be reminded of these things. It comes in because of the rhythm of this world, the rhythm of human life, the rhythm of all life. Circular time gives birth to liturgies, which can be man's greatest help and also his greatest peril. The liturgies can bring to your mind the fact that 'God is a very present help in time of trouble'; they can bring to your mind God's great salvation, and they do. All the services of the Church can do this, whatever their form, and there is no form of church service which has any prior rights over any other form. There is one test only of any form. Does it make men see and know that God is here and that He is an ever present Saviour? As soon as anything else intervenes, that form is of the Devil. It is getting in between a man and God. And the easiest thing in the world is for men to think that there is salvation in the continuous or regular repetition of this form or that.

We need a proper mixture of all three kinds of time; clock-time, with its line of continued witness down the ages; circular time, with its regular reminder of the mighty deeds of God; and God's time, the now. The only real time is God's time and as soon as clock-time and circular time interfere to the least extent with the ever present now of God's saving work, then out they both must go.

Fathers and Brethren, Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. If so be you are at this moment in a state of grace, you yourself are as near to Christ as any man was long ago by the Lake of Galilee, or as anybody has ever been at any time or in any place during all the nineteen hundred years that lie between.



## APPENDIX II

### SUMMARY OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE MINISTERIAL SESSION ON THE 'PEOPLE OF GOD'

The President begins by saying that;

The People of God' is not the main theme of the Bible as a whole. The main theme is: 'The Mighty Deeds of God the Saviour.' But it is the secondary theme, because those Mighty Deeds of the Lord brought the People of God into being... "Who are the People of God?" ..... The answer is they are the 'people saved by the Lord'.

To quote:

In the first place, the People of God were the descendants of Jacob whom God rescued out of Egypt. He saw them helpless in their affliction; He heard their cry, and he came down to deliver them (Exod. 3: 7,8). He Himself made a way for Moses to bring the people forth. He Himself guided them through the Red Sea..... It was always 'He Himself'..... And all the time, it is not because of what they have done, but mostly in spite of what they have done, and always because of His free grace.

In the second place, the People of God were the people whom God brought back from exile in Babylonia. Just as in the former days He rescued a race of slaves from Egypt, so now in the latter days He rescued a faithful, though helpless remnant from Babylonia. Once more the People of God are a people saved by God, chosen and rescued, and once again it is not because of what they have done, but mostly in spite of what they have done, and always because of his free grace.

In the third place, the People of God are the people whom God has saved in Christ by his precious blood. They are the people who have been saved from another captivity, from the bondage of the Law and from the bondage of sin. They are the people who are saved again in every generation, always from the bondage of sin and every now and again also from the bondage of the Law. And all the time, it is not because of what they have done, but mostly in spite of what they have done, and always because of His free grace.....All chains fall off, whether they are the chains that shackle men in sin, or the

chains that shackle the grace of God. Henceforth there are no barriers artificially raised by the Law, of which in ancient times circumcision was the sign. Further there are no barriers artificially raised by the Temple.

The President goes on to talk about the barriers raised in the Temple against Gentiles, against Women, restrictions on the Court of the Priests and the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest was allowed and where we are told the veil was 'rent in twain' at the time Jesus died. To quote:

All barriers are gone now that Christ has died..... all are one in Christ Jesus, and there is no qualification for entrance apart from repentance and faith, because repentance marks the release from the bondage of sin, and faith marks the release from the bondage of trusting in anything else than the grace of God.

Now the People of God can speak not only of the release from captivity in Egypt and in Babylonia, but also of that great salvation which is offered to all men in Christ..... And still, all the time, it is not because of what they have done, but mostly in spite of what they have done, and always because of His free grace. The basis is God's amazing love which is wholly independent of us and what we have done. On our side, the condition is Faith, that is 'trust and obey', and indeed as the old hymn has it: 'Trust and obey, for there's no other way'..... There are different ways in which this entrance into the People of God is declared amongst men, and different communions have different ways, but all are equally valid provided that they issue in the fruit of the Spirit, and equally not one is valid that does not issue in the fruit of the Spirit.

.....There have been and there still are different ways in which admission into the company of the People of God is recognised and declared. Before the time of Christ, the sign was circumcision. It was good for the Jew that there should be such a sign of his admission into the company of the People of God.

The Address goes on to say that there is a critical point where the Law which was good can become a bondage: if it is thought that the rite itself is effective, or that unless this particular rite is followed, then the man is not of the community. Paul hit these two things hard in Romans and Galatians.

There was another problem too, in that it meant that the People of God were men only: whereas nowadays women lay preachers are granted the same status as men lay preachers. The rite of circumcision was the declaration of God's free salvation offered to a race of helpless slaves.

The President continues:

Since the time of Christ the sign has been baptism. No, not right at first, at first it was 'sealed with the Holy Spirit' (Eph. 1:13), but I pass on to the first believer's baptism. Quickly, very quickly I imagine, it was brought forward, like circumcision, to babyhood .....and it may have been brought forward to the eighth day of birth. Now about baptism: I have learned something in India about infant baptism. Nobody can see a whole family being baptised without realising how infant baptism developed and how it is right...at least how it can be right. There is nobody more helpless than a small baby, can't walk, can't talk, can't think...quite helpless and completely dependent. God's grace is for the helpless, for those who have no strength, no power of their own. You do not have to do anything to deserve it. You cannot do anything to deserve it. You are as helpless as a baby. To this extent, infant baptism is sound. It is a fit and proper sign of the new covenant in Christ Jesus where all is of grace and where there is no middle wall of partition as there came to be in the old covenant. And further, you do not have to be a baby boy in order to be baptised. Girls can be baptised just as easily as boys. And that is important. Where baptism can go wrong is where circumcision went wrong. This is when men say that unless this particular rite is performed, you cannot belong to the People of God. I do not regard baptism as being the effective entrance. It is a declaration of the offer of full salvation to helpless sinners, but it needs to be confirmed afterwards and consciously confirmed. And incidentally it is the individual who must do the confirming. Baptism is the flinging wide open of the door. But every man must walk in ON HIS OWN FEET. I will have nothing at all to do with any theory of baptismal regeneration, nor with anything that looks the least like it. Baptism is, as Paul says (1. Cor.10), like the passing through the Red Sea.....they did not all enter the Promised Land..... You begin by grace in faith, you continue by grace in faith, and if you arrive safely at home at last, then that also will be by grace in faith. You yourself must 'trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation'. Without that personal trust in Christ, without that faith in Christ, any baptised person, every baptised person, can be lost, just as certainly as the Israelites were lost in the desert. Nothing else on your part other than faith in Christ can make you one of the People of God."

Having spoken about the conditions of entrance into the People of God, the President turns to discussing how a man continues in that holy fellowship. The People of God must be a holy people. So what is meant by 'holy'? Quoting again:

Here we must turn to the Scriptures, because the only kind of Holiness we are interested in is Scriptural Holiness, and our business 'here below' as Methodists is to 'spread Scriptural Holiness throughout the land.'.....There is a strong tradition that 'holiness' means 'ethical purity'.....To deny that elements of both are to be found in the Bible would be both foolish and wrong. But I am interested in Scriptural Holiness, that is not the idea as it is also in other religions, but the Holiness that is distinctly scriptural. As I read the Bible, I find that 'holy' means 'belonging to God'. Whatever is God's is holy. The Sabbath is holy because it is God's: the commandments, the Law, prophet, priest, nation, everything. Holy is what God is, and that, as we Christians know, is why Holiness means more than ethical purity." It includes Transcendence, sometimes Immanence with an 'a' and always Imminence with an 'i', that is near in space and time. To quote again: "We do not take our God from Aristotle's Absolute, nor do we take him from Plato's Idea of Ideas. Our God is the God of the Old Testament, the living Saviour; the God of the New Testament, who so loved the world that he gave his only- begotten Son, the God who was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.....

Who are the People of God? They are a people saved by God, not because of what they have done, but mostly in spite of what they have not done, and always because of his free grace. They are a holy people, because they are His people. They are a people called to be imitators of Him, who know that Scriptural Holiness involves sound ethical conduct, but it involves more than sound ethical conduct.....going the second mile and so on; but most of all it means being His witnesses, seeking to save that which is lost, being His ' Salvation to the end of the earth'.

The President ends his Address by talking about his Primitive Methodist roots and explaining how the name came into being. He says:

I was originally a Primitive Methodist. I trust I still am, but with a difference. The difference is a small 'p' instead of a big 'P'. I am now, I trust, a primitive Methodist with a small 'p'. It is reported that not long before his death, John Wesley was speaking to his preachers at Chester [it was in 1790] and he said: 'Fellow labourers, wherever there is an open door, enter in and preach the Gospel; if it be two or three under a hedge or tree, preach the Gospel; go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind; and after you have done this you

will still have to say like the servant in the Gospel, ‘Lord, it is done as Thou has commanded, and yet there is room’ . Then he lifted up his slender hands and the tears flowed down his venerable face and he exclaimed ‘And yet there is room. And yet there is room’. And this was the way the primitive Methodists did.

That, fathers and brethren, is how my forebears came to call themselves Primitive Methodists. That is why some of us are rather proud to have been Primitive Methodists with a big ‘P’ and a big ‘M’. It is why, I trust, by the grace of God, we shall all insist on being primitive Methodists with a small ‘p’ and a big ‘M’.....As soon as we cease to be that kind of Methodist, I hope we cease to exist. We are the people of God. It is for us to make our calling and election sure. And this we shall do by:

What we have felt and seen  
With confidence we tell,  
And publish to the sons of men  
The signs infallible.

## APPENDIX III

### ABOUT PRIMITIVE METHODISM

#### The small 'p' and the big 'P'

No doubt the worthy Fathers and Brethren in 1958 might have understood Dr. Snaith's reference in his Address to the Ministerial Session of Conference about wanting to be a Primitive Methodist with a small 'p'. Nowadays this would seem to need an explanation. Dr. Snaith quoted in his Address from the famous speech made by the ageing John Wesley at Chester in 1790, as recorded by W. E. Farndale in his *Wesley Historical Lecture* (1950).<sup>1</sup> This quotes the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and calls for a return to going back to what the primitive Methodists did. This seems to be generally taken as meaning going back to the field preaching in the days of the early Wesleyan revival. Anyway, following Wesley's 1790 speech a number of localised revivalist groups sprang up in the spirit of what Wesley called 'primitives' (with a small 'p'), saying that they were doing what Wesley told them to do. But where did the large 'P' come in?

In 1807 some of the groups, in particular those led by Bourne and Clowes, decided to hold a 'Day of Prayer' at Mow Cop, on a ridge on the Cheshire/Staffordshire border. This came to be called a Camp Meeting, though it was not in the same tradition as that which Lorenzo Dow<sup>2</sup> brought from the United States at that time. The Wesleyans did not like this and although the venture was highly successful, for a variety of reasons the Wesleyan Connexion expelled the primitives. They then realised that they had to go it alone and started making plans to form their own Connexion.<sup>3</sup> It seems to be generally regarded that the first Mow Cop camp meeting in 1807 is the beginning of Primitive Methodism, although the name 'Primitive Methodists' was not mooted until 1810 or 1811 and only formally adopted at the first Conference in 1812.

There is more to it than that. Where did Wesley get the term 'primitive'?

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. William Edward Farndale (1881-1966: em1904), President of the Conference (1947); *The Secret of Mow Cop* [Wesley Historical Lectures no. 16] (London, Epworth Press, 1950) pp 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834), American revivalist, visited Ireland and the Isle of Man (1799-1801) and Britain (1805).

<sup>3</sup> The story of these years is given in detail in H.B. Kendall's *The Origin and History of Primitive Methodism*, 2 vols (London, Dalton 1905)- 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2006)

from? In the Introduction to his excellent book Geoffrey Milburn<sup>4</sup> says;

the adjective 'primitive' has long been a cause of misunderstanding with regard to the reputation of the branch of Methodism which bore that name.

He continues by saying that the name Primitive Methodists was quite deliberately accepted by the founders and had a clear purpose and meaning. He explains this by referring to Hugh Bourne's Journal and Farndale's quote from Wesley in Chester, which was used by Norman Snaith in his Presidential address. Hugh Bourne sensed a rediscovery of early Christianity in the renewal movement from which Primitive Methodism came. Indeed it would seem that Wesley himself must have had this in mind when he quoted from St. Luke's Gospel.<sup>5</sup>

It is also of interest that in the Shorter Oxford Dictionary one definition of the word 'primitive' refers back to the Christians in the Early Church. There was certainly a tradition among Primitive Methodists that they regarded themselves as being direct descendants of the Apostles of the early church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Many of them did not accept the Anglican view of the Apostolic Succession as being handed on by laying on of hands by a Bishop. Hence the reluctance of some Methodists to agree to formal Union with the Anglicans.

Primitive Methodists joined with the Wesleyan and United Methodists in the Union of 1932, although it took some time for the administrative merger to fully take place. Indeed in the circuits already mentioned, neither Durham up to 1934 nor Luton up to 1936 had lost their Primitive Methodist characteristics. Primitive Methodism started as an evangelical movement, mainly among the working class, with a revival of field preaching and organisation of Camp Meetings in the early days. Lay leadership was important and women preachers were encouraged. There was great emphasis on the need for prayer and Bible study and also education. But above all there was what has been called Primitive Methodist 'Holiness', a distinctive kind of spirituality. All these characteristics could be regarded as being part of being a Primitive Methodist with a small 'p'.

It seems reasonably clear that in his Address to the Ministerial Session of Conference the President wanted to bring back into the Methodism of the day some of the characteristics of Primitive Methodism and he did this by quoting Wesley's 1790 speech and identifying himself with it.

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<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Milburn *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough, Epworth Press, 2002)

<sup>5</sup> Luke 14 (21-24)

## APPENDIX IV

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<sup>1</sup> This bibliography is based on Stephen Hatcher, *A Primitive Methodist Bibliography* (Glasgow, 1980) and copies of most of these books are to be found in the Library at the Englesea Brook Chapel & Museum of Primitive Methodism, Cheshire.



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