

"YOU GIVE THEM SOMETHING TO EAT": GUARDING THE HOLY FIRE OF REVIVAL, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



David Hull

AFTER MORE THAN TEN YEARS IN OFFICE, AND TWENTY YEARS ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, DAVID HULL LOOKS TO THE FUTURE AS HE ENTERS HIS FINAL YEAR AS CHAIR.

*Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.*

Charles Wesley

The number was greatly debated: how many people around the world watched as the congregation sang those words, the final hymn of the late Queen's funeral in Westminster Abbey? Did it run into the millions or the billions? We will never know, but it was certainly enormous - an audience far larger than the almost unimaginable crowds that were reported to have gathered to join in the hymns and hear the preaching of the Wesley brothers and their friend George Whitefield all those years ago.

The hymn was wonderfully fitted to the occasion. Shortly afterwards, the late Queen's body would be taken to Windsor and, in the chapel there, her earthly crown would be laid before the Lord, returned to the altar from whence it came.

The words, inspired by the music of Henry Purcell, sometime organist of Westminster Abbey, were written by Charles Wesley in the white-hot days of revival. They captured perfectly the message of that revival, which had the reformation of nation and church at its heart, in pursuit of scriptural holiness. Those swept into Christian faith through that revival sought great salvation, perfect restoration, recognising that their conversion to faith in Christ was to be followed by a life-long process of conversion to the likeness of Christ as they grew in grace and holiness. They longed, and even expected, to be 'changed from glory into glory' here and now - something that would happen, not after death, but continually, until 'in heaven we take our place'.

The singing of the words at such a significant national event, chosen by the late Queen herself for that moment, gives a glimpse of the often ignored and forgotten influence that the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century has had upon our national life. The influence continues to this day, seen not only on great state occasions, but also in daily life in so many ways.

As I shared in our Fresh Focus consultation video message last year, I have been increasingly gripped by the fact that (depending on precisely how it is dated!), the 300th anniversary of the beginning of the Evangelical Revival is approaching in 15 years' time. What an opportunity this offers us to remind the nation of its impact and legacy, to show people that this revival brought about so much of what we take for granted in our daily life, all rooted in living faith in Jesus Christ. That influence can be traced flowing on through local democracy, social reform, education and health care, to name only some

of the most prominent aspects of national life. What an opportunity to proclaim the gospel!

REVIVAL PEOPLE

What an opportunity it also presents – and one we must take before we seek to remind the nation – to remind ourselves that we are revival people. This is our heritage! It continues to be our raison d'être, and we are called ever to remember that, in the words of John Wesley, we were raised up in the providence of God 'to reform the nation, in particular the church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land'.

It was a revival that was known, at times and in places, to wane even in the days of the Wesley brothers, and there is no doubt that it has waned since. The flame seems to burn low and with great fragility. The pending tricentenary comes to us as a rallying call, to pray with fresh zeal for a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a spiritual awakening in our own day – for a rekindling of the flame, in this the motherland of Methodism. None of us knows where we will be in fifteen years' time, but as we trust the Lord, we can be certain that, even if we are not here on earth, we will be praying in our Lord's nearer presence for the glorifying of his name, the extension of his kingdom, and the prevailing of his will on earth, just as we experience it in heaven.

LOOKING FORWARD

As I have looked forward in coming to the end of my final term of office as Chair of MET, I have also looked back. I have particularly remembered the day I went to a Ministries Day in Oxford, to find out more about becoming a Methodist Minister. Donald English preached during the opening worship, not long before he died. He spoke about the feeding of the five thousand: of how the Lord takes the little we offer him, of how – as he holds us in his hands – there are times of brokenness, but also of blessing, and of how – as the Lord gathers us into his mission and ministry – we will find that the resources are more than enough, abundantly overflowing. It is a message that has remained in my heart and mind throughout ministry.

Re-reading the passage in the light of that day, I have been powerfully struck by another aspect. The disciples began to be concerned for the welfare of the crowds, and they urged Jesus, 'Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food'. Jesus responded, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat' (Matthew 14:15-16).

He entrusted them with a vocation to meet the needs of the present context. It seems to me, as the flame burns low and with great fragility, that the ministry of MET, and the predecessors we represent, is needed more than ever. There are people who need to be fed – and we need to be fed too! In the hands of our Lord, though broken at times, we will know his blessing and find we have abundantly more than we need to share in his mission, in the places to which he has led us.

MOVING FORWARD WITH A FRESH FOCUS

There was very much a sense of looking to the future at last year's AGM, as we gathered in May, both online and in person at Cliff College. Along with the appointment of the next Chair, the Revd Chris Briggs (to which I will return at the end of this article), the main business was to reach a common mind over MET's Fresh Focus for the coming years.

As I have often written, MET – like Headway before us – is a river that runs with the water of three streams: a conservative evangelical emphasis on the authority of the Bible, inherited from Conservative Evangelicals in Methodism; an openness to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, inherited from Dunamis magazine; and a commitment to prayer for revival, inherited from the Methodist Revival Fellowship. The river, fed by its three streams, will continue to flow into the future and those defining characteristics will remain. Over the years, to meet the present needs of the varying contexts, they have been emphasised in different ways, sometimes more and at other times less prominently. As we have prayerfully sought the Lord for his call in the present season, we have emerged with a Fresh Focus, placing prayer for revival 'front and centre' in our work again, as explained in the video message we circulated last year.

We were greatly helped by the feedback to the video and delighted with the conversations which followed at the AGM. Thank you to everyone who shared their comments! Three insights from the AGM have shaped our developing work on the Fresh Focus. Firstly, we were asked to take another look at the proposed name change, to see if a way could be found to retain the acronym MET along with our Fresh Focus, Revive. Secondly, with that commitment from the executive committee, the Fresh Focus was unanimously adopted by standing vote. Thirdly, founding member of the Methodist Revival Fellowship, Ron Abbott, spoke very movingly of his endorsement of the Fresh Focus and its continuation of the vision that was at the heart of the founding of the MRF, and subsequently entrusted to Headway and then to MET.

INTRODUCING MET:REVIVE

Having been asked to consider ways in which the acronym MET could be combined with our Fresh Focus of Revive, the executive committee enjoyed some hours of conversation and deliberation. You will, no doubt, be astonished to read that we managed to find just the way to do it. We have adopted the new name, to be launched at this year's AGM, of MET:Revive!

That wasn't, however, the only thing we achieved in our hours of conversation. We clarified our core purposes to shape our activities with three areas of focus:

- Biblical Revelation
- Biblical Renewal
- Biblical Revival

Since then, we have been working on updating the website and the magazine to reflect these changes and to refresh their appearance. Look out in the next edition of MET Connexion and come along to the AGM for further news!



DIRECTOR OF MINISTRY

Work has also continued since the AGM in other aspects. At the meeting in May, we gave an update on the recruitment process for a Director of Ministry. After the interviews we were able to make an offer of employment. As the subsequent conversations continued within the wider church, however, the candidate concluded that it would be necessary to withdraw from the process and decline the offer, expressing gratitude to us for the experience, and we too were grateful to the candidate for exploring the possibilities.

We have since updated the role description in the light of the initial recruitment round and readvertised. We did not, though, receive any applicants this time.

As I write, the trustees will shortly meet to identify the way forward. We remain very hopeful that we will be able to discern the best way in which to further our ministry and support our members. We are very grateful indeed to all those who have given so generously to support this role. Please do not stop giving, if you are able to continue! – We remain dependent upon raising the resources for ministry and are sure we will be able to put the funds to good use as they continue to grow. We will continue to hold everything that has been given specifically for the Director of Ministry post in a designated fund and, in due course, we will contact directly those who have given these gifts to share our specific plans and to make any necessary request to reallocate their restricted giving. We should be able to update everyone before the AGM.

In the meantime, I am sure our members will be very keen to join me in expressing our very grateful thanks and appreciation to Marian Izzard, who has carried a heavier load of responsibilities in the absence of a Director of Ministry, and to John Hogarth who served on a short-term contract as our Interim Development Worker.

MET LOCAL

It has been a great delight to be able to begin to travel around the Connexion to lead a series of MET Local events, sharing the vision behind our Fresh Focus: preparing for, pursuing, and praying for revival. We begin with a time of praise and prayer, and end with an opportunity to receive anointing with oil as we pray for the Lord to fill us afresh with his Holy Spirit. It has been wonderful to reconnect with people, and I have been greatly encouraged by the number of people who have travelled to be with us. Whilst the focus has been vision-sharing, people have also joined MET to join with us in pursuing revival.

So far, these events have taken me to Bedfordshire, Derbyshire, Sussex and twice to Devon. At the time of writing, I am shortly to go to Cornwall. Dates for Mid-Glamorgan, Yorkshire and Northumberland are in the diary for the coming months, and other plans are being finalised. Please go to www.methodistevangelicals.org.uk/met-local for further details, as they become available. It would be wonderful to see you at one of the venues, if you live in the area.

It's not too late to arrange a MET Local event at your church or circuit – there's no charge, we simply ask for an offering. Please contact Marian Izzard for more information and she will be able to pass your enquiry on: admin@methodistevangelicals.org.uk / 01983 642024.

DEVELOPING AWE

As was the case for my predecessors, the work of MET has continually developed throughout the time I have had the privilege of serving as Chair. Along with the emerging Fresh Focus, one of the recent developments I have found most fulfilling and inspiring has been the development of the fledgling Association of Wesleyan Evangelicals (AWE). This has brought us together with national leaders of the Free Methodist Church, the Independent Methodist Connexion, and the Wesleyan Reform Union. When possible, we have also been joined by the Wesleyan Holiness Church.

The work has developed with an initial focus on building relationships, and these have grown wonderfully as we have met to pray and worship together, and to share vision and concerns. We are united in our desire to seek a rekindling of the Wesleyan flame in the motherland of Methodism.

We have recently committed to working more formally together, in sharing vision with people on the ground across our networks. Conversations have begun around sharing resources in theological training and education, and some initial study days are already being planned. We have also explored possibilities of an annual gathering across the Wesleyan evangelical family and the further sharing of resources.

We are all very grateful that this work has been able to begin within MET, catalysing the vision and facilitating the initial meetings. The idea, from the beginning, has been to work towards enabling AWE to develop its own, independent structures as it grows, in which MET will be a founding partner alongside the other groups. Please do pray for this developing initiative!



PASSING ON THE BATON

It has been said that the most vulnerable parts of a relay race, indeed when races are won or lost, are in those moments when one runner passes the baton to the next. As you will know from previous AGMs, we have been working hard for a number of years to ensure a smooth transition from one Chair to the next as I come to the end of my final term of office later this year.

I am delighted that the Revd Chris Briggs was elected as the Chair-designate during our AGM last year. As we have shared in executive committee and trustee meetings since then, I already have a reassuring sense of things moving on. It has been inspiring to hear Chris begin to share aspects of vision which are forming within him.

By the time you read this, the trustees will have met to finalise the transition plans. Please do keep us in your prayers as we continue through this process. Further details will be circulated with the AGM papers in the next mailing of MET Connexion.

As we go into this year of transition, to borrow further words of Charles Wesley, I pray that the Lord will continue to kindle and fan into fulness his flame in our hearts, to his glory and fame: 'Still let me guard the holy fire, and still stir up thy gifts in me'.

The Revd Dr David A. Hull is Chair of Methodist Evangelicals Together. A minister in full connexion with the Methodist Church, he serves within the Free Methodist Church as Lead Pastor of Freedom Church Bristol.



LORD FOR THE YEARS

Timothy Dudley-Smith

(b. 1926)

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise.

Lord, for our land in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,-
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.



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SAVE THE DATE!

DIGGING FOR TREASURE PREACHING CONFERENCE

Saturday 12 October 9.30am - 1.00pm

A hybrid event: at Plymouth Methodist Central Hall and also on Zoom

For further details visit: methodistevangelicals.org.uk

