

John Austin Dolan, Methodist Lay Sectarianism: The Independent Methodists 1796-1927, Ph.D. thesis (University of Manchester, 2004)

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METHODIST LAY SECTARIANISM

The Independent Methodists 1796-1927

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Abstract

In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, a loose alliance known as the Independent Methodist or Free Gospel Churches was formed through common bonds of poverty, powerlessness and simplicity. Over a hundred year period this alliance was transformed into a cohesive body which set itself similar priorities to the other Free Churches in terms of structure, education, corporate facilities and social empowerment. In its early days, it could be accurately described as Methodist, lay and sectarian; by 1927 it was an organised denomination which differed from other Free Churches primarily by its unusual and distinctive views of ministry. This thesis aims to examine and analyse the processes which shaped Independent Methodism on its journey from sect to denomination.

The analysis will entail examination of social and political as well as theological factors which influenced the process of transition. As it nears the end of the period under consideration, it will indicate why Independent Methodism finally stood aside from the processes of Methodist reunion. It will also evaluate the Independent Methodist view of ministry and draw conclusions which indicate its strengths and weaknesses.

The thesis examines only those groups which either became part of the Independent Methodist movement or had links with it. For this reason, other denominations such as the Bible Christians, who were also initially Methodist, lay and sectarian but who had no contact with the Independent Methodists, are not included.

Declaration

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