



Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY'S

# *JOHN WESLEY*

*AND THE EARLY METHODIST REVIVAL*



A Kingswood Course



# The Three Rises of Methodism:

Oxford, Savannah, and London



A Kingswood Course

“On Monday, May 1, [1738,] our little society began in **London**. But it may be observed, the first rise of Methodism (so-called) was in November 1729, when four of us met together at **Oxford**: the second was at **Savannah**, in April 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my house: the last, was at London, on this day, when forty or fifty of us agreed to meet together every Wednesday evening, in order to a free conversation, begun and ended with singing and prayer. In all our steps we were greatly assisted by the advice and exhortations of Peter Böhler, an excellent young man, belonging to the society commonly called Moravians.

— John Wesley, “A Short History of the People Called Methodists,” ¶9, (1781)



# John Wesley's Career at Oxford University

- Arrives from Charterhouse School in June of 1720 at the age of 17.
- Graduates with a Bachelor of Arts from Christ Church in 1724.
- By 1725, Wesley was captivated by the call to live a holy life. He was influenced by reading writers in the holy living tradition, such as Thomas à Kempis (*The Imitation of Christ*) and Jeremy Taylor (*Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*). He set out on a quest to gain an inward purity of intention in everything he did and a sense of assurance of salvation through personal holiness.
- Ordained as a deacon on September 25, 1725.
- Elected as a fellow of Lincoln College on March 17, 1726.
- Receives the Master of Arts degree on February 14, 1727.
- Ordained as a presbyter (priest) on September 22, 1738.
- Served as his father Samuel's curate at Epwort and Wroot from 1727 to 1729.

# John Wesley's Career at Oxford University

- During John's time in Epworth younger brother Charles (a student at Oxford) writes to John indicating that he wants to take his religious life more seriously. John visits in the summer of 1729 and meets with a small group of men including Charles, William Morgan, and Bob Kirkham.
- Wesley returns to Oxford permanently in November 1729. A small group of men begin meeting regularly together. By 1731, their manner of organization and regular activities have attracted the attention of the larger university community. They start receiving epithets such as, "Methodists," "Holy Club," "Sacramentarians," "Godly Club," and "Bible-Moths."



“The Holy  
Club in  
Session”

By Marshall  
Claxton

# Characteristic Activities of Oxford Methodism (1729-1735)

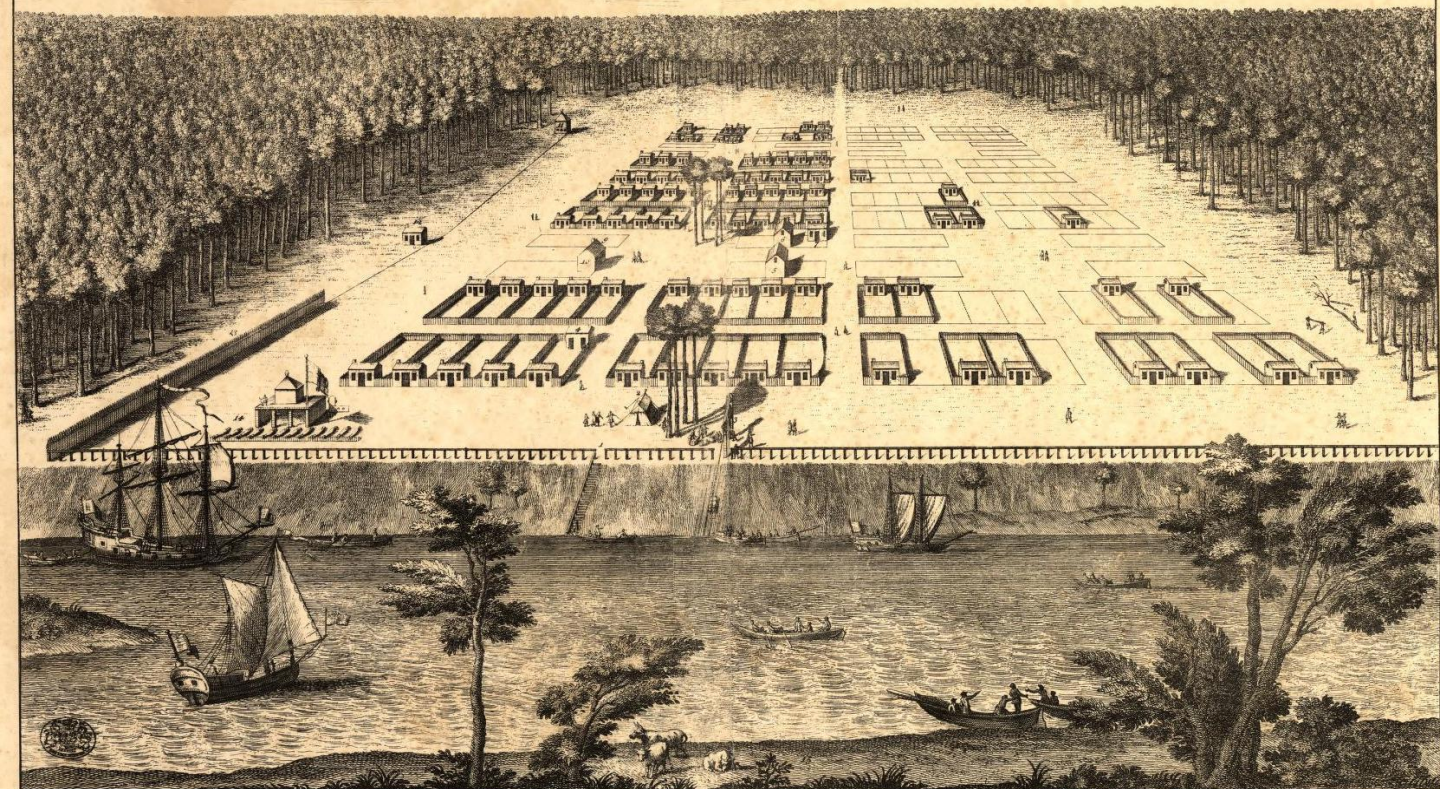
- Patterning daily life as influenced by the holy living tradition (Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law)
- “Meditative piety” involving meeting together for religious conversation, the study of the Bible, fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, receiving the Lord’s Supper weekly, and keeping diaries to track spiritual progress.
- Visiting prisoners at the Castle Prison and the Bocardo City Jail.
- Teaching orphans and caring for the poor and elderly.
- John Wesley was the primary influence, but others played a shaping role as well (Charles Wesley, William Morgan, John Clayton, Bob Kirkham, Benjamin Ingham, and George Whitefield)
- Groups were only 5 or 6 people in size, but under John Clayton’s influence the idea of subsidiary groups formed. There were perhaps 40 Oxford Methodists between 1730 and 1735.

# The Georgia Mission: 1735 to 1738

- Sailed from England in the winter of 1735 on the *HMS Simmonds* and arrived in Georgia on February 6, 1736.
- Wesley's desire was to preach the gospel to the Indians in the Georgia colony, but went to serve as the parish priest to Savannah.
- A religious society had already been started before Wesley arrived and he sought to build on it.
- Wesley's insistence on rule following and general rigidity caused problems.
- The "Sophy Hopkey affair" ended Wesley's time in Georgia and he left in December 1737.



*View of Savannah as it stood the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1734.*



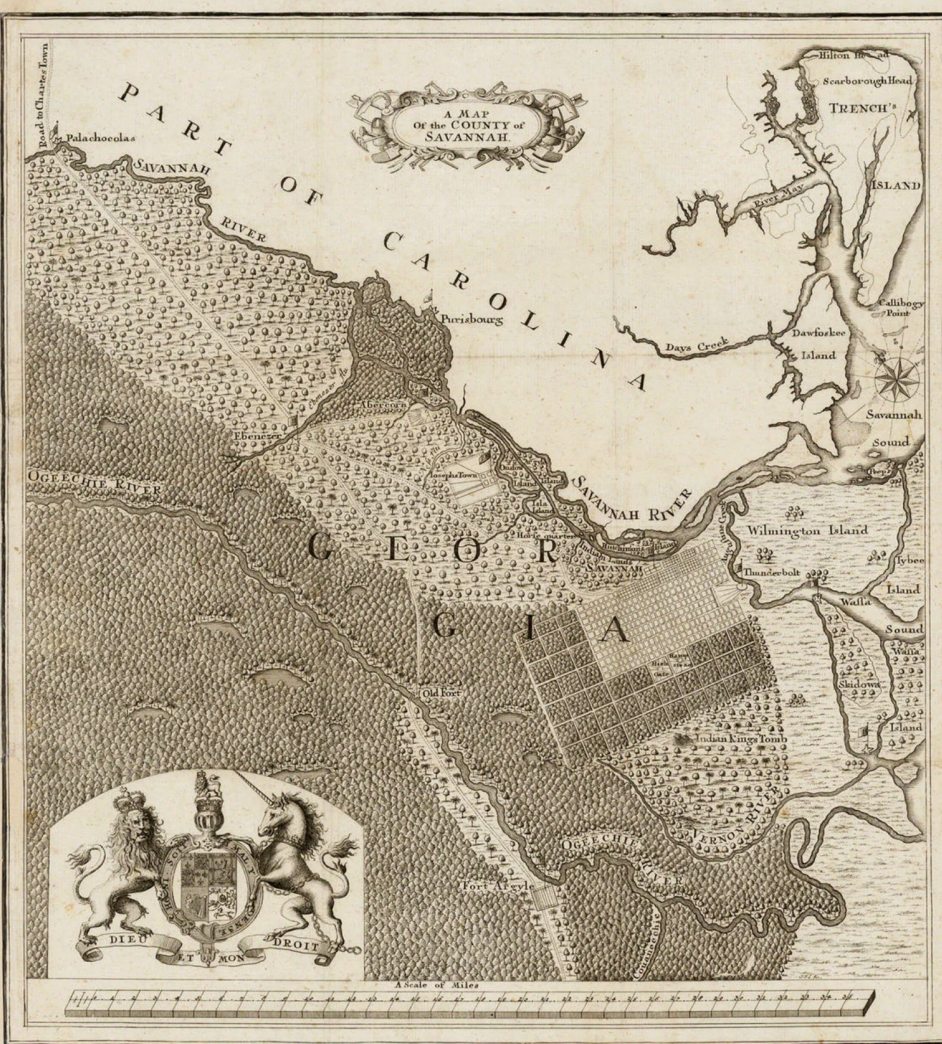
1. The Steers going up.
2. M<sup>r</sup>. Oglethorpes Tent.
3. The Crane & Bell.
4. The Tobacco and Storehouse.
5. The publick Mill.
6. The House for Strangers.
7. The publick Oven.
8. The Iron Well.

*To the Hon.<sup>ble</sup> the Trustees for establishing the Colony of Georgia in America  
This View of the Town of Savannah is humbly dedicated by their Honours  
Obliged and most Obedient Servant  
vve. de Savannah dans la Georgie. Peter Gordon.*

9. The Lott for the Church.
10. The publick Store.
11. The Fort.
12. The Prisoners House.
13. The Millstones.
14. The Guard House and Battery of Cannon.
15. Hutchinsons Island.

# Map of Savannah in March 1734

The Georgia colony was founded in 1732 under Governor James Oglethorpe.



Map of the County of Savannah in 1735 or 1740

# The Sophy Hopkey Affair

- Wesley arrived in Georgia as a 32-year old single man with an intention to remain single and celibate as a way to devote himself fully to God and the ministry of the church.
- Sophy Hopkey was an 18-year old niece of Thomas Causton, the chief magistrate of Savannah.
- Wesley served as her spiritual mentor and French tutor, and by the summer and fall of 1736 it appeared that certain people (including Governor Oglethorpe) were attempting to create a match between the two.
- Sophy served as Wesley's nurse during an illness in August of 1736, which appears to have led to his romantic feelings towards her.

# The Sophy Hopkey Affair

- Background of Wesley's insistence on self-imposed rules and guidelines to prove his faith:
  - Singleness to reflect his single-minded devotion to God
  - Desire to minister to the Indian population near Savannah
  - Complete lack of awareness in romantic matters and general emotional immaturity
- Relationship with Sophy Hopkey was part of a larger pattern in Savannah of rule-based behavior that appeared bizarre to people of the colony (One colonist "complained that his sermons were 'satires on particular persons,' and that the people 'can't tell what religion you are of. They never heard of such a religion before'" [Collins, A Real Christian, p.43]).
- Climax was the denial of Holy Communion to Sophy on August 7, 1737.
- Consequence of Wesley's approach to life and ministry was alienated some people and eventually led to his decision to leave for England.

# Significant aspects of Wesley's ongoing pastoral & spiritual formation while in the Georgia colony:

- Influence of the Moravians both on the HMS Simmonds and during the stay in Savannah (e.g., August Spangenberg).
- Experience with forming a religious society in the context of a parish ministry (as opposed to just the university context of Oxford).
- Encounter with (and abhorrence at) the institution of slavery and the effects of the slave trade.

# August Spangenberg and John Wesley

- Spangenberg: Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?
- Wesley: [no answer]
- Spangenberg: Do you know Jesus Christ?
- Wesley: I know he is the Saviour of the world.
- Spangenberg: True, but do you know he has saved you?
- Wesley: I hope he has died to save me.
- Spangenberg: Do you know yourself?
- Wesley: I do.
- Wesley [later in his journal]: I fear these were vain words.

Wesley's verdict on his time in America:

“I went to America to convert the Indians; but Oh! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near: but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, “To die is gain!””

(Journal for January 24, 1738).

“[Wesley] was still trying to do his best in all things, trusting his own sincerity to be the basis for his assurance.”

– Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, pp.58-59



# The Year 1738: Milestones and Continuing Journey

- Wesley arrives back in London from his missionary experience in Savannah.
- Tutelage of Peter Böhler, the young Moravian missionary and preacher.
- Formation of the Fetter Lane Society in London on May 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Aldersgate experience in London on May 24<sup>th</sup>.
- Preaches the sermon, “Salvation by Faith,” at the University Church in Oxford on June 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Trip to Herrnhut in Saxony in late summer/early fall.
- Studies the Book of Homilies in November, particularly on the topics of salvation, faith, and good works.



Peter Böhler  
(1712-1775)



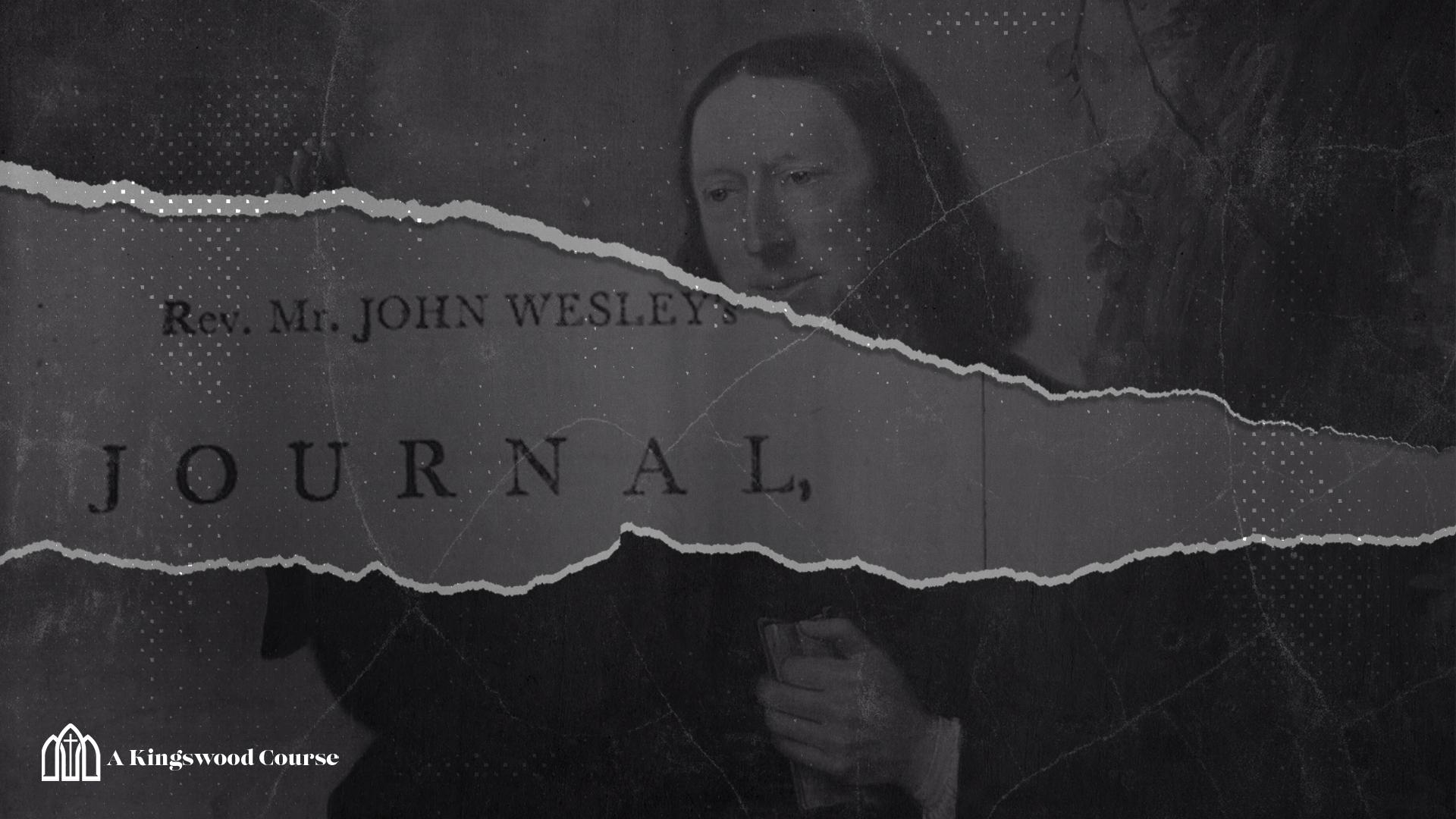
Count Nicolaus von  
Zinzendorf (1700-1760)

# John Wesley and Peter Böhler

- Wesley met the Moravian leader Peter Böhler shortly after his return to England on February 7, 1738.
- Böhler's advice to Wesley in the midst of his crisis of confidence: "Preach faith *till* you have it, and then, *because* you have it you *will* preach faith" (March 5, 1738).

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

—John Wesley (May 24, 1738)



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