

JOHN WESLEY: 1703 - 1791

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IN COMMEMORATION OF JOHN WESLEY

Wesley died on the 2 March, 1791. Few have packed so much into a long life. Even the *Gentleman's Magazine* admitted that he had done good to the lower classes.

The 15th of 19 children from talented but isolated parents, he proved himself an industrious scholar and teacher at Oxford, first at Christ Church and then at Lincoln College. Not content with Oxford's minimal religious observance, he and a small group began meeting in 1729 to be 'Bible Christians'. They branched out into prison visiting and scandalised many observers by what seemed foolish religious enthusiasm.

Wesley refused his father's invitation to follow him at Epworth and in 1735 went to Georgia, where his ministry was a disaster. If the Church of England had a JPSAC, Wesley would have been hard to settle. His ministerial profile would not read well. Even friends would have had to admit that he was singleminded to the point of inflexibility. His preaching was solidly theological and still makes very demanding reading. He had no need for a course in assertiveness, for he was unhesitating in rebuking even those nearest him. Only a handful became intimate friends and he lacked judgement in his relationships with women. His marriage was a failure and he made little attempt to modify his life to mollify his wife's complaints.

Yet by his death he was greatly revered by Methodists, respected by the Establishment and was one of the most widely published men of the time. He was an 18th century gentleman, a Tory traditionalist and unbending High Churchman who moved right outside the boundaries that those labels suggested. A sharp mind, enormous energy, physical toughness, great personal presence, an enchanting voice and total personal discipline made him an unusually effective leader.

His personal spiritual agonies found no satisfaction, until his links with the Moravians and the Fetter Lane society provided the foundations for a fresh integration of theology and experience. As Henry Rack's *Reasonable enthusiast* makes clear, Wesley was a reasoning man. "I am rarely led by impressions, but generally by reason and Scripture".

He was part of the Evangelical Awakening which swept through much of England, Wales, Ireland and the American colonies, giving Christianity new credibility among ordinary people. Despite his conviction about his own rightness, he learnt from others and was very skilled at adapting their ideas and practices. His mother persuaded him that lay preaching could be a work of the Spirit. Editing brother Charles' hymns gave them even greater power. Adapting existing religious societies to provide a network of support to converts and followers was a vital part of his achievement.

Retention rates from revivals are usually low. Wesley's ability to persuade his followers to accept firm rules for accountability ensured a much lower fallout rate. He provided them with books, moral and medical advice, along with a new vision of discipleship within the Church of England, plus giving a fortune to the needy.

"We are no particular sect or party, we are friends to all,
we quarrel with none for their opinions or mode of
worship,
we love those of the church wherein we were brought up,
but we impose them upon none".

Those comments from 1786 about Methodists would not have been assented to by Wesley's critics. He was given many uncomplimentary titles, including 'apostate miscreant', especially by Calvinists, but Wesley was always an expert at ensuring that his critics received more than they gave. His letter to Thomas Maxfield in 1762 is a splendid example of faint praise and heavy demolition. The exhortation to read the letter calmly and impartially before the Lord in prayer did not persuade Maxfield. He left the fellowship in 1763.

Wesley believed that he was as spiritual a bishop as any man in England or Europe. His obedience to 'mitred infidels' was heavily qualified and ultimately led him in 1784 to ordain presbyters for the United States Methodists, who had neither Church nor King after their successful revolution. Yet he totally rejected separation from the Church of England in 1744 and 1758. Methodist services were held at times which did not clash with Matins and Evensong, even when there was no parish church within reasonable distance. Wesley did not want to be identified with Dissenters. It is no accident that the first Methodist place of worship was just called the New Room, rather than a chapel.

A superb popularizer, Wesley had a rich knowledge of the Christian heritage to make accessible to his followers. The Christian Library, his splendid translations of German hymns, his standard sermons all provided a foundation in Christian orthodoxy. He studied unremittently

to the end of his days. His preachers were expected to study for 4 to 5 hours a day. Even if they failed, Wesley was determined that they should not be left with an easy conscience over neglect of such obligations.

While not a great theologians' theologian, he had solid good sense about the foundations of the faith and about the union of rational truth with spiritual experience and love for others. Three themes recurred—repentance, faith and holiness. Wesley insisted that Christians were able to have assurance about their state in God. Few leaders have so successfully persuaded their followers to live the fundamentals of Christianity, leaving pettiness behind.

Wesley's organisational genius gave Methodism a flexibility in meeting spiritual needs that far exceeded that of the Church of England or Dissent. Conferences gave his movement a national identity and a way to continue his teaching through the legal hundred. While he rejected republicanism in state or church, Wesley gave thousands the spiritual base for new liberty and dignity. He unsparingly exposed social and personal sins and by the end of his life was an ardent opponent of slavery. He had no plan for changing society. His call was to preach the gospel and save souls. Yet in so doing, he and his people made major contributions to social change in Victorian Britain and its colonies like Victoria. We rightly honour him and learn from him.

Ian Breward

METHODISM'S MEANS OF GRACE

The Methodist Mixture

Methodism had the advantage, historically speaking, of being born late in time. It therefore draws on the experience of religious movements which went before it, yet, like other spiritual traditions, it bears the stamp of an individual mind, or, in Methodism's case, of the minds of two brothers, John and Charles Wesley. Methodism, indeed, cannot be understood without knowing both of them, with their common and their different emphases and spirits. But in the Uniting Church, we received Methodism after it left the Wesleys, and England, and after its journey through our colonial past. In 1977, Methodism was not quite Wesleyanism, but there was a common language, a familiar organization, a certain church sub-culture, which derived from its founders. In this essay, I want to go back to the origins, and to show how Methodism was at heart, an ecumenical spirituality.

The genealogy of the Wesley brothers crosses some of the greatest divides in English church history. Their grandfathers lost their parishes because they would not conform to the services of the Church of England in 1662. Their mother's father, Samuel Annesley, became a famous Dissenting preacher in London, and inherited the wonderful library of the great Puritan leader, Richard Baxter. Both their parents decided to become Anglicans (at a time when Dissent was sliding into heresy) and became "high Anglicans" in the fairly plain forms it took in the 18th Century - high in the sense of holding the church and her institutions in high regard, of not underestimating the importance of doctrinal standards, clergy discipline, and the influence of the faith in national life.

This means that John and Charles received a broad spectrum of influences as they grew up. The household stuck rigidly to Anglican forms for prayer. They were taught to read by reading the Bible and learning collects (brief prayers) off by heart from *The Book of Common Prayer* of 1662. The Wesley brothers, and less typically of the time, their sisters, were all educated in the ancient church fathers, Greek and Latin. They knew some of the classics of Roman Catholic devotion from Europe, including Thomas a Kempis *Imitation of Christ*.

But the Puritan strain was there too: in daily family prayers, in the organization of the household by Susanna, so that every child had some time with their mother to pray and discuss spiritual matters. Indeed, in later years, John drew strength from the fact that his time on Thursday evenings with his mother as a child was now the night when she prayed for him as an adult. Susanna taught her children to follow her practice of keeping a spiritual journal, often written in a secret shorthand, in which they recorded their spiritual problems and progress. They were all taught to adopt a Rule of life, a balanced ordering of their priorities - and indeed, this regularity was the basis for the later nickname of "Methodist".

The very first Rule of the Oxford Methodists borrowed from the great Anglican divine, Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667). It describes the balance of early Methodism very well. It has four parts :

1. To be regular in private devotions, including receiving Holy Communion as frequently as possible (which is here once a week.)
2. To attend carefully to ethical and religious conduct.
3. To meet from 6 pm to 9 pm every day, to read, study and discuss the Bible and religious questions.
4. To visit the town and university prisons once or twice a week.

Early Methodism was sacramental, biblical and evangelical, concerned with practical ethics and the love of the neighbour, especially the poor. Its spirituality was not only concerned with the soul. Later Methodism always attempted to keep this balance.

Later experiences broadened the scope of Methodist spirituality. The traumas of missionary life in the new American colony of Georgia opened the brothers' eyes to some truths about themselves. There they met some impressive members of the German Protestant group, the Moravians. Not only did this contact help John Wesley understand the link between faith and good works; he discovered the rudiments of the later Methodist small group networks, the classes and the bands; he heard their hymns, and eventually saw their community life first-hand in Germany.

Attempts to change the views of the Anglican hierarchy also drove Wesley into new actions. He was able, as his forebears were not, to use both the forms of public prayer of the Church of England, required of a priest, and to use free or extempore prayer as the occasion demanded.

Everything he encountered was drawn into his primary mission of "spreading scriptural holiness across the land".

When in a bold move, he accepted the ministry of lay preachers, including women, he realized that they needed to be equipped and sustained. He published a series of fifty volumes for them, *The Christian Library*, a Readers' Digest of spirituality, drawn from every tradition he had discovered, whether it was ancient or modern, Catholic, Anglican or Protestant, mediaeval or Puritan, an extraordinarily ecumenical collection. Long ago, St Benedict spoke of the *lectio divina*, the sacred reading, which is a central part of the religious life. Wesley knew how important wide reading was for the life of the spirit.

The Means of Grace

When setting forth further regulations for the life of the burgeoning Methodist societies, John Wesley wrote of the "means of grace". These were in two broad categories, the Instituted (that is, deriving from the scripture and Christian tradition), and the Prudential (that is, those arising from practical experience in the Methodist movement). To describe the latter would require a full treatment of the special organization and practices of Methodism which cannot be undertaken here. But it does raise the question as to whether the particular way in which the Uniting Church organizes itself, and the particular ministries which exists within it, may not develop their own distinctive forms of prayer, discipline and action.

Wesley's own way of describing the Instituted Means are worth quoting in full; I add my own comments after each paragraph.

(1) Prayer; private, family, public; consisting of deprecation [self-examination and confession], petition, intercession, and thanksgiving. Do you use each of these? Do you use private prayer every morning and evening? If you can, at five in the evening; and the hour before or after morning preaching? Do you forecast daily, wherever you are, how to secure these hours? Do you avow [advocate] it everywhere? Do you ask everywhere, "Have you family prayer?" Do you retire [to pray] at five o'clock?

The Methodist's prayer was not only personal prayer: it was part of a pattern involving family and congregation. Indeed, the liturgical life of the church flowed back into family and private prayer - so that prayer is measured by what Wesley called "the grand parts of public prayer" - confession, petition and intercession, thanksgiving. Personal prayer can be lopsided - all asking, or all praising. It is wise to have a checklist on the way we pray.

Again, private prayer is linked to public worship. Methodist prayer meetings often preceded their congregational services, and indeed in many villages, these were supplementary to the liturgy of the local Parish Church. People came into the church service having already "warmed their spirits".

Wesley also saw a value in private prayer being offered at a common time, even if people were by themselves. This is the strength of the "Daily Office" - originally a monastic form of prayer which could be said by the monks at their work in the fields, a long way from monastery or chapel.

(2) Searching the Scriptures by,

(i) Reading: Constantly, some part of every day; regularly, all the Bible in order; carefully, with the Notes [Wesley's Notes: a commentary on the Bible]; seriously, with prayer before and after; fruitfully, immediately practising what you learn there.

(ii) Meditating: At set time, by any rule.

(iii) Hearing: Every morning, carefully; with prayer before, at, after; immediately putting into practice. Have you a New Testament always about you?

Methodist spirituality, like most Protestant prayer, was biblical through and through: its language was drawn from the English Bible, usually the King James version; the Bible informed its topics and its methods. The daily prayer time included study - often the whole family gathered around a table with books and bibles open, wrestling with the text. But it never became narrowly academic: the study was undertaken in the context of prayer, and the practical implications were always pursued. Nevertheless, not a few Durham miners and Cornish fishermen taught themselves Greek the better to understand the New Testament.

Part (iii) speaks of meditation as a distinct exercise, a time of reflection and prayer arising out of the passage read. From his reading, Wesley knew that there was much wisdom in Christian history about this exercise. He often recommended following the instructions of Richard Baxter (1615-1691) and others. And amidst a tradition that was often a very noisy one (especially the hymn-singing) it is notable that there is a sacramental place for silence.

It is also interesting that he saw "hearing" as a means of grace. There were times to adopt the education mode, to open the book and the Notes, but there was value too in listening to the scriptures read out loud, both

at the table in a regular family prayers, and in church. There may well be a danger in the increasing practice of following the readings in church in a pew bible. A good reader can make a text come alive; a prayerful listener may be arrested by the Word in its living form.

(3) The Lord's Supper: Do you use this at every opportunity? with solemn prayer before; with earnest and deliberate self-devotion?

The early Methodists were as much attacked for their sacramental devotion as for their Protestant tendencies. John Wesley received holy communion on the average three or four times a week throughout his long life. Charles wrote some sublime hymns of eucharistic devotion. Nineteenth Century Methodism minimized this central aspect of the faith of the founding fathers, thereby distorting it. The Wesleys, though scholars and preachers, knew that the Word needed the Sacrament, the audible the visible word. It was also a simple matter obeying the command of the Lord, and following the custom of the early church.

(4) Fasting: How do you fast every Friday?

This probably comes as a surprise, since regular fasting had certainly died out in Methodism by the time of the Uniting Church. Again, it is a custom which Wesley used because the scriptures spoke of it. Prayer and fasting go together in the New Testament. His question is not "Do you fast?" but "How?!" Wesley actually recommended fasting, that is, abstaining from food all day, and drinking only water, on both Wednesdays and Fridays, on the analogy of the early church. He saw it as a discipline of the body, as a means of grace for the soul. He may not have understood the modern arguments for fasting in solidarity with hungry people or as a protest.

(5) Christian Conference: Are you convinced how important and how difficult it is to: "order your conversation aright?" - Would it not be well always to have a determinate end in view; and to pray before and after it?

There were many great conversationalists in Wesley's time - for example, his acquaintance and his sister's close friend Dr Samuel Johnson. Wesley annoyed Johnson because he (Wesley) would not sit down and have a conversation out to its natural conclusion. John Wesley tended to consult his watch. For Wesley, conversation was a means of grace, and not to be wasted or abused.

"Conference" first and foremost refers to the regular gatherings of the Methodist preachers and helpers with their leader. The topics for discussions and debates were set down in advance by Mr Wesley (and

often the minutes written up also!), because they were a company of Christians taking serious counsel together. In modern terms, this is "directed conversation", that is, conversation directed to a spiritual purpose, not wandering freely. Wesley would have found a great deal of the chatter of modern "fellowship" very frivolous indeed. We would perhaps do well to discipline ourselves in church meetings to have that kind of prayerful encounter which does not occur elsewhere in our society, and seldom in the public media.

A broad and deep stream

A great deal of the early Methodist spirituality bears the stamp of its time. It has the urgency of a new movement, the structures of a disciplined group, the seriousness of the Puritan mind. But its very strangeness is one of its most valuable contributions to us. To re-read Wesley's rules is to be challenged again: are we "conformed to the spirit of this passing age" or are we transforming it by the mind of Christ? Yet the scope of the Wesleys' work is very broad, remarkably so for its period, and this encourages Uniting Church members to seek for gold wherever it can be found. There is no one way of the Spirit, one style of prayer. After all, that openness to the movement of the Spirit beyond what is familiar to our history and our culture is one of the fundamental principles of the Basis of Union.

Robert Gribben

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JOHN WESLEY

Twice each year that much travelled man, John Wesley enters my world. He makes his appearance in both the Spirituality course, and Modern Church History. You should not be surprised at his being in church History and Spirituality at Catholic Theological College. For this man of diminutive size and giant standing embodies what any study of Church History and Spirituality must seek to tap: the very well springs of 'the faith'; the faith we all profess as being that of 'one, holy CATHOLIC and apostolical' Church:- The 'catholic faith'.

As far back as the 1950s, when I was being introduced to the study of theology, we were drilled in one basic attitude. We were constantly challenged to distinguish Catholic dogma from Catholic theology. Catholic dogma was what the Church formally and officially taught. That sounds like the very worst meaning of the term 'dogma' and perhaps conjures up images of an overly authoritarian system. But do not expend any sympathy on the grounds of my being imprisoned in an anti-intellectual system devoid of legitimate freedom. This dogmatic principle is what Vincent of Lerins would have meant by his famous dictum: what has been taught and held 'always, everywhere and by all'. But was also presented as something that is minimal: that is, that it should be interpreted strictly. Although it was never presented (so far as I can recall) as something that can be reformulated; it certainly contained the clear notion of growth and development. This sense of 'dogma' gave one a foundation, a clear core of belief and a focus of identity. At the same time it permitted a surprising amount of freedom. Catholic theology opened vast areas for speculation and development. Here one was free to follow one's own views. Dogma provided the firm hand and fixed point that enabled one to fly kites of many colours and catch surprising currents of thought. This distinction between Catholic dogma or doctrine on the one hand, and Catholic theology on the other touches that 'hierarchy of truths' recognised by Vatican II which should be given much more attention.¹

¹ 'Decree on Ecumenism' chapter II no. 11 in Austin Flannery OP *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville, 1975) p. 462.

One of the facets of the Catholic academic venture is to explore this interplay between Catholic authority and Catholic freedom. It is not a new phenomenon. In the last century the Oxford Movement people asserted that the Church of England was not merely the Church of the nation (they were not opposed to that) but was also part of the Church Catholic. They formulated the same attitude as the one to which I have referred. They accepted without question the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Surely they will always stand at the head of the hierarchy of truths. The Oxford Movement writers used the Vincentian canon time and again, and they sought to assert fundamental doctrines which they held to be Catholic in that sense. Baptism, they said, really 'regenerates' the one to whom the sacrament is rightly administered; and the Eucharist is a 'sacrifice' though in good Catholic tradition they left the precise meaning of the word 'sacrifice' open to a variety of interpretations. In short they spoke about the difference between basic truths and theological opinions. These writers published a series of broadsheets entitled *Tracts for the Times*. These were announced as being by 'Members of the University of Oxford'. The writers wished to speak 'the mind of the Church' itself, and not merely canvass their own opinions. This effort to touch the Catholic essentials as distinct from theological opinions was made clear by A. Buller in *Tract 61*, (dated May 1st 1835)²

the tolerance and comprehensiveness of the Church is shown in the fact, that she can afford to receive within her pale, varieties of opinion, imposing on its members, not agreement in minor matters, but a charitable forbearance and mutual sympathy. Hence she is accustomed to distinguish between Catholic Verities and Theological Opinions, the essentials and non-essentials of the Christian Faith.

Shortly before the Oxford Movement was seeking to assert this basic Catholicism, a strangely ecumenical figure appeared on the scene in Ireland. This interesting eccentric was a Roman Catholic, not an Anglican. Dr James Doyle was Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and was known as JKL from the style in which he signed his numerous letters and articles. JKL felt that one way towards peace in Ireland would be through a unity of the Churches. He was thinking of the Churches of Ireland (the established Church) and the Roman Catholic Church (the Church of the vast majority of the Irish). The old unity had been fractured by an act of parliament; it should be healed by an act of parliament. He was not so naive as to think that this unity was merely a

² A. Buller, *Tract 61*, 'The Catholic Church a Witness against Illiberality' p.2.

matter for some formal act of unity. He was perceptive enough to see that it had to be achieved with a wider social context. He wrote:

I do not know any measure which would prepare for a better feeling in Ireland than uniting children at an early age and bringing them up in the same school, leading them to commune with one another and to form those little intimacies and friendships which often subsist through life. Children thus united know and love each other as children brought up together always will and to separate them is, I think, to destroy some of the finest feelings in the hearts of men.³

However JKL was not one lightly to pass over differences between the Churches. When asked whether he thought there were no essential difference between Catholics and Anglicans he replied:

I think there is, but the articles or dogmas of faith about which we differ are few. They are chiefly matters of discipline and religious forms and usages which induce us to quarrel with each other.⁴

Here too is the distinction between doctrine and theology. He was willing to be even more explicit. He thought that 'Catholic and Protestant divines of learning and conciliatory character' should be 'summoned by the Crown to ascertain the points of agreement and difference between the Churches'. The list of matters for discussion could include:

...the Canon of the Sacred Scriptures, Faith, Justification, the Mass, the Sacraments, the Authority of Tradition, of Councils, of the Pope, the Celibacy of the Clergy, Languages of the Liturgy, Invocation of the Saints, Respect for Images, Prayers for the Dead.⁵

The bishop's list is an interesting one. In May 1735 John Wesley enumerated a similar catalogue when writing to a Catholic priest.⁶ It is clear that both JKL's list and that of John Wesley included matters of

³ W.J. Fitzpatrick, *Life, Times and Correspondence of Dr Doyle* Vol. i. (Dublin, 1880) p.10.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 344

⁵ JKL *Letter on Union* quoted in B. McNamée 'JKL's Letter on the Union of Churches' *Irish Theological Quarterly* 36 (1969) p. 59

⁶ Frank Baker (ed) *The Works of John Wesley* Volume 25 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980) p. 430.

varying moment and contention. Running through Bishop Doyle's argument is the conviction that there is a thing called 'Catholicism' that can be held (as the very word implies) by all, yet admit of great variety and diversity. It seems to suggest that there are some matters which can be reformulated or perhaps regarded as being so far down the hierarchy of truths that they need not be a source of contention.

Such thinking, it seems to me, also permeates the comments made by John Wesley when he spoke of 'The Catholic Spirit'. The temper of the age did not permit many opportunities for that wider social context that JKL thought so essential. Arguments were exchanged from a safe distance. Bishop Challoner, the Vicar Apostolic of the London District, and the most articulate Roman spokesman of the day, thought Methodist pastors were 'ministers of Satan', 'false prophets, and wolves in sheep's clothing'. Wesley, for his part thought the Roman Church neither 'scriptural, Catholic, one or holy'. 'The generality of its members are no holier than Turks or Heathens.'⁷ Such polemics produced more heat than light and can be easily understood in the context of eighteenth century England. But under the pressure of events Wesley turned to a more productive approach.

In his celebrated 'Letter to a Roman Catholic' he frankly admitted the futile nature of most contemporary polemics.

Looking on each others as monsters, gives way to anger, hatred, malice to every unkind affection. . . . can nothing be done, even allowing us on both sides to retain our own opinions. . . (to) check this flood of unkindness. . . ? Are you not fully convinced that malice, hatred, revenge, bitterness are an abomination to the Lord? . . .

I do not suppose that all bitterness is on your side. I know there is too much on our side also.⁸

Wesley's latest biographer Henry D. Rack, in his splendid study *Reasonable Enthusiast. John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, regards this small work ('A Letter to a Roman Catholic') as being not typical of Wesley's attitude towards Roman Catholics. Rack thinks it largely a response to the anti-Methodist demonstrations in Cork. True, this letter was written as Wesley was about to depart Ireland after his third visit to that Kingdom. But if Christians were engaging in one of their favourite pastimes of attacking one another, it is surely all the

⁷ Eamon Duffy (ed) *Challoner and His Church. A Catholic Bishop in Georgian England*, (London, DLT, 1981) p. 108.

⁸ John Wesley "A Letter to a Roman Catholic" in Albert C. Outler *John Wesley* (NY, OUP. 1964) p. 493.

more significant that someone raised a prophetic voice to denounce the animosity and point to the great realities which are held in common.

And is this 'Letter to a Roman Catholic' not typical of John Wesley's writings on Catholicism? Like all controversialists of the age, Wesley could fire the occasional broadside at his opponents. Wesley had some fears about the political dangers presented by Roman Catholics, though, in keeping with the spirit of his age, he was in favour of Recusants being permitted freedom of worship. This might be merely a minimal toleration and only a begrudging recognition of another Church. But it does suggest something of a 'catholic spirit' in practice.

Indeed we know that in his wide reading John Wesley was very catholic in his tastes. He wandered freely in that great supermarket of spirituality; the Fathers and the great classics. In the course of this wide reading he drew on many Roman Catholic authors: including St Francis de Sales from more recent times, and also a much older work *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis which was the very popular devotional work in the period after the Council of Trent. He knew St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, though he could also be very critical of them.⁹ One historian has referred to this as 'an abortive ecumenical movement, an international traffic in spiritual theology'.¹⁰

Indeed it was this willingness to use Roman Catholic authors which formed one of the telling points against John Wesley. Bishop George Lavington of Exeter, wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared* (1749) accusing Wesley of being too catholic in spirit. Wesley replied in *A Second Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared* (1775)

Your third argument runs thus: 'We may see in Mr Wesley's writings that he was once a *strict Churchman*, but gradually put on a more *catholic spirit*, tending at length to Roman Catholic. . . He rejects any design to convert others from any communion; and consequently not from popery.' This is half true (which is something uncommon with you) and only half false. It is true that for thirty years past I have 'gradually put on a more catholic spirit' finding more and more tenderness for those who differed from me either in *opinions* or *modes of worship*. But it is not true that I 'reject any design of converting others from any

⁹ John A. Newton 'John Wesley and Methodism, 1738-1988' in *Priest & People*, June 1988 p. 172.

¹⁰ J. Orcibal 'The Spirituality of John Wesley' in G. Rupp (ed) *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 1965.

communion'. I have, by the blessing of God, converted several from popery, who are now alive and ready to testify it.¹¹

Surely here we seem the same distinction between Catholic truths and Catholic opinions; or as he said 'opinions and modes of worship'. And his reference to 'modes' of worship meant just that. Here again one notes that distinction between the essentials and the non-essentials. No one who has read and used in prayer, the Eucharistic hymns by Charles Wesley can doubt the essential Catholicism of the eucharistic belief of the Wesleys. The one faith can be expressed in a variety of ways and embodied in a variety of liturgical practices. The eucharistic devotions of John can still prove useful:

Whither, O my God, should we wander if left to ourselves?
Whither should we fix our hearts if not directed by Thee?
Thou didst send forth Thy Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us;
to give Thyself in the Holy Eucharist to feed and nourish our hungry souls with that sacramental food.
Still Thou art really present to us in that holy mystery of love;
hence we offer up our devotions in it with our utmost reverence wonder and love.
These saving mysteries keep alive our dear Redeemer's death and apply to our souls all the merits of His passion.
Blessed are the eyes, O Jesu, that See Thee in these Holy signs;
and blessed is the mouth that reverently receives Thee.
Blessed yet more is the heart that desires Thy coming.¹²

The Sacramental teaching of Wesley is one point where this sense of the Catholic realities becomes abundantly clear. The 'Catholic Thing' is not merely some sediment that remains when all the eccentric opinions, bizarre liturgical practices and exotic devotions are skimmed off. The Catholic faith is more than that. It is a grace: something given; it is the self revelation of God, and it comes in and through this community of believers. Thus Wesley gives thanks for this faith which can be called 'Catholic':

O My Father, my God, I am in your hand; and may I rejoice above all things in being so. Do with me what

¹¹ John Wesley *A Second Letter to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd* (London: H. Cock, 1751) in Gerald R. Cragg (ed) *The Works of John Wesley*, Volume 11 (Oxford, Clarendon, 1975) pp.422-3.

¹² Gordon Wakefield *Fire of Love. The Spirituality of John Wesley*, (London:DLT, 1976) p.58.

seems good in your sight; only let me love you with all my mind, soul, and strength.

I magnify you for granting me to be born in your Church, and of religious parents; for washing me in your baptism, and instructing me in your doctrine of truth and holiness; for sustaining me by your gracious providence, and guiding me by your blessed spirit, for admitting me, with the rest of my Christian brethren, to wait on you at your public worship; and for so often feeding my soul with your most precious body and blood, those pledges of love and sure conveyances of strength and comfort. Oh, be gracious unto all of us, whom you gave at this day (or at any time) admitted to your holy table. Strengthen our hearts in your ways against all temptations, and make us *more than conquerors* in your love.¹³

In his 'Letter to a Roman Catholic' he sought to articulate this basic Catholic belief. Wesley pointed to one of the difficulties in our ecumenical quest when he admitted that our very effort to articulate the basic orthodoxy which lies at the heart of the faith, may result in expressions that do not do justice to these truths.¹⁴

Seemingly aware of such a danger, he began with the qualification - 'A true Protestant may express his belief in these or the like words'. This belief, he said, means firstly that 'I am assured that there is an infinite and independent Being. . . I believe that this one God is the Father of all things, especially of angels and men; that he is in a peculiar manner the Father of those whom he regenerates by his Spirit.' And the profession of faith goes on: 'I believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Saviour of the world. . . (that) he is the proper, natural Son of God, God of God, very God of very God; and that he is Lord of all.' And he followed this with his belief in Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and coming again in judgement. And then he continued: 'I believe in the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the father and the Son to be not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us. . .'

This belief in the Blessed Trinity was followed immediately by

I believe that Christ and his Apostles gathered unto himself a Church to which he has continually added such as shall be

¹³ John Wesley 'A Collection of Forms of Prayer for every day in the week' (1733) in Frank Whaling (ed) *John and Charles Wesley. Selected Prayers, Hymns, Journal Notes, Sermons, Letters and Treatises*, Classics of Western Spirituality Series (London, SPCK, 1981) p.80.

¹⁴ Albert C. Outler (ed) *John Wesley*, (NY, Oxford University Press, 1964) p. 92.

saved; that this catholic (that is, universal) Church, extending to all nations and all ages, is holy in all its members, who have fellowship with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; that they have fellowship with the holy angels who constantly minister to these heirs of salvation, and with all the living members of Christ on earth, as well as all who are departed (this life) in his faith and fear.¹⁵

To all of which any Catholic must say 'Amen. Amen'.

This leaves us, surely, with a great problem. I have suggested that it is clear that in Wesley we have an attempt to articulate Catholic doctrine and make it separate from Catholic opinions. Soon after in the Roman communion a bishop like JKL attempted to do the same. And the Oxford movement reiterated the process in the Anglican communion. And where did it all end? The nineteenth century, as we know, saw a hardening of lines between the Churches. Anglicans were more likely to be distinguished from Protestants and asserted their Patristic heritage; the Roman Communion asserted its separate identity ever more clearly in the movement known as Ultramontanist; the movement founded by Wesley as a renewal of the Church of England separated from it and splintered.

But as 19th century Christians sought to assert the identity of their various Churches they did so against the seeming hostility and indifference of the modern liberal society state, and not simply against each other. Yet in the short term the various movements of the 19th century were seemingly hostile to the Catholic quest. But not so, I believe, in the longer term.

Wesley pointed to one of the difficulties in our ecumenical quest when he seemed to say that our very effort to articulate the basic orthodoxy which lies at the heart of the faith, may result in words and expressions which distort the very truths we wish to express.¹⁶

Our RCC-UCA dialogue in Australia has seen an encouraging agreement on marriage though RCs refer to it as a 'sacrament', Uniting Church people do not. But vast areas of common faith lurk beneath the differences in vocabulary and dearly held formulations.

Meanwhile John Wesley can offer us some very practical assistance as we in our turn seek to plumb the depths of this faith which is Catholic,

¹⁵ 'A Letter to a Roman Catholic' in Outler (ed) *op. cit.*, pp. 494-5.

¹⁶ Albert C. Outler (ed) *John Wesley*, (NY, Oxford University Press, 1964) p. 92.

and express it in our life and witness. In the first place Wesley provided some guidelines regarding our attitude towards one another:

if we cannot as yet *think alike* in all things, at least we may *love alike*.
let us resolve, first, to do nothing unkind or unfriendly to each other. . . .
secondly, God being our helper, to speak nothing harsh or unkind to each other. . . .
thirdly, resolve to harbour no unkind thought, no unfriendly temper towards each other. . . .
fourthly, endeavour to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the kingdom.¹⁷

All this might amount to little other than armed neutrality or at best frosty politeness. How right was dear old JKL in his comments that we need to be educated together: we need time to strengthen that whole framework of a Christian society in which our ecumenical dialogue must prosper and deepen.

As we seek to do this, Wesley also has much to tell us. Wesley's spirituality can enrich us today with a freshness and vigour that is undimmed. The hymns, prayers of John and the hymns of Charles Wesley bring us into immediate touch with the essence of the 'catholic thing' more than the utter banality of many modern jingles that come under the rubric of hymns.

There is so much that we can learn from Wesley. The 'Rules of the Band Societies' give practical guide lines for regular meetings of Christians, regular prayer and an ongoing concern for the spiritual welfare of others.¹⁸ True, one may not wish to re-enact them literally in the present age. But they might provide some pointers for all who wish to see Christians help one another towards a deeper spirituality.

And again there is the sheer magnitude of the missionary work of John Wesley. 225,000 miles on horseback, more than 40,000 sermons preached, a deep pastoral concern for all any who came across his path all remind us of the need for a pastoral care that reaches to *all* people. Pastors who so often sit in a comfortable book lined study waiting for a troubled world to knock on the door, might be jolted into a more

No one who is even casually acquainted with his Journal can miss the number of entries which mention prayer. Nothing can replace that activity for any of us.

All this and so much besides, we can learn from John Wesley's life and writings. Roman Catholics have been reminded that

Whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a more perfect realization of the very mystery of Christ and his Church.¹⁹

I find the plea uttered by Thomas Merton even more compelling:

the 'universality' and 'catholicity' which are essential to the Church necessarily imply an ability and a readiness to enter into dialogue with all that is pure, wise, profound, and humane. . . A Christian culture that is not capable of such a dialogue would show, by that very fact, that it lacked catholicity.²⁰

Roman Catholics cannot afford to ignore this great Christian man. Wesley surely challenges all of us on two points. In the interests of a false freedom are we so much at sea that we have jettisoned the compass and never look at the Sun? Are we so bound to our favourite formulas and traditions that we lack the freedom of the children of God to explore more deeply the riches given us? It seems to me that the old interplay between Catholic obedience and Catholic freedom still has relevance.

This celebration of the death of Wesley invites us to renew our efforts to enter more deeply into that faith which we call Catholic and which was seen, but hardly realized, by such figures as John Wesley, Bishop Doyle, the Oxford Movement and a host of others. But an intellectual grasp of it is not enough. To know it implies that one seeks to live it; and such a living involves an ever deepening love for others. Let us pray that in grasping the opportunities of grace at this moment we might be encouraged and instructed by the witness of John Wesley: fellow Catholic.

Austin Cooper O.M.I.

¹⁹ 'Decree on Ecumenism' no. 4 Flannery *op. cit.*, p.458.

²⁰ Thomas Merton 'The Catholic World' in T. McDonnell (ed) *A Thomas Merton Reader*, (NY, Image, 1974) p. 303.

JOHN WESLEY: SANCTIFICATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social Responsibility and the Activity of Methodists.

My first awareness of the social justice implications of Methodism was as a young lad, hearing a chance remark directed to my father, "He is part of the pink-fringe of Methodism". At first, I thought this referred to those Methodists who read the "Sporting Globe". Up until ten or so years ago, there was no need to explain the significance of this misunderstanding. The 'Sporting Globe' was a bi-weekly sports newspaper, published on pink paper. My father bought it on a Saturday evening during the football season when my brother was playing for Geelong. However, I soon discovered that "the pink-fringe of Methodism" referred to those Methodists who were concerned to relate the claims of Christian faith to the life of society. This meant challenging some of the strongly held, albeit conservative, political views of Australian society in the early 1950's.

Some will remember these times; the days of the cold war 'Pig-Iron' Bob (Menzies) was Prime Minister and co-existence was a rude word. Even 'peace' was seen to be tainted with pink or red tinges. Unlike some of the social radicalism of the 60's and 70's, this particular form of social radicalism was often combined with a conservative stance on so-called personal moral issues and also with a conservative theology. Thus I grew up in a Methodist atmosphere of social/political radicalism and a conservative, but non-fundamentalist theology.

During my first year at Queen's in 1959, I was one of the last people to speak on 'The Voice of Methodism' on the Yarra Bank on a Sunday afternoon; another activity now consigned to historical memory. I have to say that I was very much a junior participant. Harold Wood, Rex Mathias and Frank Hartley were the main speakers. The names of these three, together with other such as Alan Walker, personify this peculiar confluence in Methodism of social radicalism and evangelical theology. During my first appointment in North Launceston, 1964-1967, my 'separated chairman' was Norman Kemp. Mr. Kemp, a Methodist originally from Yorkshire, baptized and confirmed in the 'church', but a member of the 'chapel', also combined a commitment to social justice with an evangelical zeal. These years, 1964-1967, saw the beginnings of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war, an involvement I strongly and publicly opposed. I continue to be grateful for the support and understanding I received from Mr. Kemp during this time, in one of the most conservative parts of Australia.

I had occasion to re-call some of these personal memories some months ago when I read Owen Pamaby's centenary history of Queen's College. It was fascinating to read his account of the 1950's and early 1960's and the significant number of Queen's men resident during these time, both theologs and non-theologs, who later exercised leadership in many areas of community and public life. For during these years, the emphasis of people such as Palmer Phillips, Os Barnett and John Westerman upon the importance of social responsibility was of great influence upon many Queen's students.

These personal reflections form the basis of my first thesis. It is that the impact of John Wesley upon social responsibility and social justice has been primarily through the example and commitment of the people called Methodists. That is, the motivation for, and expression of, the social implications of the Wesleyan heritage are to be found primarily in the actual activity of Methodists, and not primarily in Wesley's own writings or in any corpus of confessional Wesleyan theology, (if there is any such thing!) It is generally recognized that John Wesley's own theology and social ethic were eclectic to say the least; although I wish to suggest later that his doctrine of sanctification is of pivotal importance. However, I believe that the main contribution of Wesley's life and theology to social justice has been within the lives of the people called Methodists.

The Methodist organizational framework of class meetings and the connexional system were important ways in which Methodists were brought into close contact with the Wesleyan emphasis and discipline, as well as with each other. Thus the emphasis upon 'fellowship' within Methodism was in itself a vehicle of education, and was instrumental in helping to engender a spirit of social responsibility within many Methodists. The opportunity, indeed requirement, placed upon lay people to exercise leadership within Methodist societies and class meetings meant that many of them brought to their task of spiritual leadership a knowledge of, and commitment to, the need for social justice in many areas of society. Thus many Methodists became aware of many of the struggles for justice within society through the testimony of some of the lay people with whom they shared fellowship.

Relationship between Sanctification and Social Justice

My second thesis is related to one of John Wesley's distinctive theological perspectives, and its relationship with social justice, that of sanctification. The thesis could be stated thus : A doctrine of sanctification is necessary as a theological foundation for a consistent and distinctive form of Christian social action within society. Furthermore, some form of a doctrine of sanctification is necessary in

order to allow the human person a creative part to play in the working out of God's redemptive activity within history.

One of the most stimulating and evocative discussion I have read on the relationship between Wesley's doctrine of sanctification and social justice is by Theodore Runyon in an introductory essay he wrote in the book he edited, *Sanctification and Liberation* published in 1981.¹ Runyon maintains that the medieval preoccupation with the certainty of one's salvation was not fundamentally altered by the Reformation. However, the way in which this certainty was provided was changed. For Luther and Calvin this certainty was lodged with God; in God's grace in Jesus Christ; for Luther, in divine mercy, for Calvin, in divine election.

This divine assurance of salvation, in being justified by grace through faith, ensured that salvation of human beings was accomplished in a way that was not subject to the church's institutional control, or to the foibles of the human heart, or to the wavering will, or the inadequacies of human deeds. Runyon states:

With a single sweeping wave they removed salvation from the realm of dependence on human action and placed it in the realm of divine promise and faithfulness.²

However, Runyon maintains that the price paid for this way of grounding security resulted in a shift in the location of the human person and that person's essential humanity. "Our true being is to be found in God, in his election, or in his forensic declaration of our justification through Christ, rather than in our existence in the world".³ This meant a separation between the person and his or her "works" or deeds. This was necessary in order for the reformers to explain that sinners are justified, whereas their sinful deeds are not. Then to guarantee that the justified person would not rely on their good works, there was an insistence that all good works are to be attributed to the divine Spirit. This can give use to a form of, what Runyon calls, 'pneumatological docetism'. For when an action is no longer understood as an expression of the person who acts, and when work is viewed as extrinsic to that relationship which saves, the issue of accountability becomes problematic.

¹ Theodore Runyon, (ed.), *Sanctification and Liberation*, Nashville: Abingdon 1981.

² Ibid., page 27

³ Ibid., page 27

There can be no doubt that the doctrine and experience of justification by grace through faith were central to Wesley's life and theology. However, Wesley placed the activity of divine love in a much more comprehensive scheme of renewal of the world and humanity. Wesley emphasised the human partnership with the divine. However, it is not just that some actions require divine grace, whilst others are left to the free initiative of the person. On the contrary, all that humans say and do are capable of being inspired by the Spirit and consistent with the nature of the Spirit, lead towards the perfecting of the individual and of the human race. Wesley states:

We know 'without me you can do nothing! 'But, on the other hand, we know, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.....' God has joined these together in the experience of every believer; and therefore we must take care not to imagine that they are ever to be put asunder. ⁴

We can see how implicit within Wesley's foundations of his doctrine of sanctification is the importance of his doctrine of prevenient grace. Going ahead and beyond the grace that justifies is also the activity of prevenient grace, preparing and completing the saving and renewing walk of God in Christ.

It is interesting to note that Runyon does not believe that the Aldersgate experience altered Wesley's anthropology; the conviction that human life is fundamentally purposive activity. After Aldersgate, good works flowed out of freedom, not from a compulsive effort to please God and thereby become worthy of salvation. Through God's grace in Jesus Christ, one is released to be a liberated worker whose work now expresses a free co-responsible existence. Thus sanctification or Christian perfection is not defined negatively by Wesley, as the absence of sin. Rather it is defined positively, as the active presence of love expressed not only in word but also in deed; from God to humanity, from humanity to God, from God through human beings to their fellow human beings. Wesley continued to maintain very strongly the sole sufficiency of the divine mercy, of the justification by grace through trust, but what is new is the telos, the inherent goal and purpose of justification. No longer is it, as with Luther and Calvin, primarily directed towards heaven. The focus is reversed; heaven is brought to earth. Justification provides the substructure for refashioning life in the world through sanctification.

⁴ As quoted, *Ibid.*, page 29

John Wesley and Karl Marx

For my final comments I wish to tease out a couple of implications of the relationship between Wesley's anthropology, which is one important basis for his view of sanctification, for Christian social ethics today. I have mentioned that even before Aldersgate, Wesley held the conviction that human life is fundamentally purposive action. Runyon develops this insight in a fascinating and bold way in comparing Wesley's view of sanctification with Karl Marx's understanding of the human person. Runyon states, ".....the anthropology implicit in Marx's doctrine of alienated labour can provide a helpful perspective - in spite of the seeming contradiction - from which to view the anthropology implied in Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. ⁵

Wesley maintained that whilst human merit (or work) can never be the basis for justification, nevertheless, he argues that final justification is not apart from works. "We are not accepted for our works; and we are not saved apart from our works". ⁶ In the light of this conviction of Wesley, Runyon finds what he calls "some intriguing parallels" between Wesley's underlying anthropology and a Marxist understanding of the relation of work to human nature. For Marx, especially the early Marx, humans achieve their true being and come to self-consciousness through action. Through labour, human beings take the empirical world outside themselves and shape it into the authentic expression of their own being.

In this process humans produce something that is objective and apart from themselves and that yet is their own product and the genuine expression of their own creativity, through which they find pleasure and a sense of fulfillment. ⁷

Human labour is not only individual but also social in its expression and significance. Thus the creation of the "other", that is, the result of one's labour, is both the expression of the self and the self's interrelatedness with the objective world. This is the basic model of human fulfillment for Marx. However, this relationship between the worker and the objects of the worker's production has become distorted in industrialized, capitalist society. It is here that Marx introduces one of his most important perspectives of alienation. Industrialization produces more goods, but relegates workers to the condition of cogs in a machine. The worker becomes alienated not only from the object of his or her work, but also the process of production, the labour expended

⁵ *Ibid.*, page 42

⁶ As quoted, *Ibid.*, page 23

⁷ *Ibid.*, page 24

in producing it, becomes an alienating process. Work ceases to become a function of satisfying the worker's creativity, but merely a means of satisfying needs external to that essential humanity.

Runyon maintains that Marx's challenge to Feuerbach in maintaining that Feuerbach's materialism was still an idea, a system of thought, not praxis, parallel Wesley's challenge to the Moravian quietists of projecting the work of God away from this world and into a doctrinal heaven. Both Marx and Wesley were fundamentally concerned with the actual transformation of human existence in its personal and social dimensions. Hence Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it". Genuine knowledge and authentic human life are to be understood and expressed as 'revolutionizing practice'.

For Wesley, his doctrine of sanctification was a form of 'revolutionizing practice' which understood divine salvation to be working itself out in the relationships of this world. Righteousness is not merely imputed; it is imparted in such a way as to being about not only "a relative; but a real change" in the human condition. In this seems Wesley would be one to argue that orthopraxis is a more reliable clue to authentic faith than is orthodoxy.

Of central importance to this view is the conviction of the indispensable role of the "human project", of human life as fundamentally purposive action. If either purpose or action is taken away from human creativity and initiative, either by divine intervention into heaven, or by industrialized, capitalist society by mass means of production, then the human person is robbed of authentic means of self-actualization. Alienation can be experienced in many forms. Perhaps one form of alienation is a theology and social ethic that give only a formal, but not a material role to the human agent to fulfill within the on-going Christian life after the experience of justification by grace through faith. I believe some form of a doctrine of sanctification like that of John Wesley's helps to overcome this danger and provides a theological basis for the way in which the purposive action of believers can contribute in both a formal and material way to God's redemptive activity in history.

John Wesley and Reinhold Niebuhr

It is more than interesting to note how some of the limitations of Reinhold Niebuhr's social ethics are related to this point. Niebuhr followed the neo-orthodox theological emphasis upon the centrality and all-embracing force of justification. This means there is a very strong

tendency in Niebuhr to disclaim any way by which the purposive action of believers can be direct means of fulfilling and enhancing the purposes of God within history. For example, Niebuhr maintained a very sharp distinction between the absolute self-giving love of God on the cross of Christ and the proximate forms of justice able to be achieved by Christians with history.

This inability of Christians to give direct expression to the self-giving love of God in Niebuhr's thought is further reinforced by his pessimistic view of human nature and his understanding of eschatology. One of Niebuhr's famous dicta was, "Man sins inevitably, but not necessarily". This indicates Niebuhr's unwillingness to accept a mechanistic view of original sin. Nevertheless, his theology and social ethics were based upon a very 'high doctrine' of human sin. Thus for Niebuhr, the work of divine grace in justification results in a new self of 'intention', but not one of 'actual achievement'.

Also, for Niebuhr, the force of eschatological hope, (Wesley's 'final justification'), was primarily as judgement and corrective on our present. The fundamental dialectic in Niebuhr's thought was not between present and future, a temporal dialectic, but between transcendence and creatureliness, between God and the world. It was a vertical dialectic, in which the power of the final or eschatological hope was an impingement of judgement upon every present moment by God's transcendent love, not a source of hope by which the present can be aligned with the promised divine purpose. We can see how Niebuhr's thought clashes with Wesley's 'optimism of grace', whereby for Wesley, it was possible for the justified person to be an active co-partner with God and be able to express, in a direct manner, the fruits of the Spirit within their sanctified life. Ironically, although having a more optimistic understanding of the role of the justified believer in fulfilling God's purposes, Wesley's view means that the believer is held to a more rigorous form of accountability. For as believers seek to fulfill lives of Christian holiness, all their actions are to be held directly accountable to the imperatives of the Gospel.

I believe there is much force in the criticism of Niebuhr's 'Christian realism', that in the end, it ended up being more 'realistic' than Christian. That is, the proximate forms of justice which Niebuhr maintained were the only forms of justice able to be achieved in this world, were more influenced by pragmatic considerations than by Gospel criteria. Whilst I do not fully agree with the criticism of Reuben Alves in 1973 that Niebuhr's thought was "American ideology decked in religious symbols", nevertheless the critique inherent in that comment is of considerable power. That is, Niebuhr presupposed, either implicitly or explicitly, many of the current ideologies of his

society when formulating his 'middle axioms', which guided his understanding of contemporary Christian ethics.

This is one implication, I believe, of the too-distinct separation between justification and sanctification. For when the essential content and act of revelation is collapsed into the event of justification, with its concomitant focus on 'sola gratia', it can leave the purposive action of justified believers open to distortion from pragmatic and ideological forces. On the other hand, a theology of sanctification insists that believers' purposive actions must not only be directed to historical existence, but also be accountable directly to Gospel criteria.

Sanctification and Liberation Theology

An unscientific footnote; It is more than coincidental to my mind, to note that the origins of liberation theology owe much to catholic theology, a theology that has always been sympathetic to Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. At least one important characteristic of liberation theology is dependent upon some form of a theology of sanctification. It is the importance of human action, praxis, purposive action, in being indispensable in implementing the claims and imperatives of the Gospel within personal and social, historical existence. It has often been noted that John Wesley presupposed an individualistic anthropology within his theology in general and in his doctrine of sanctification in particular. This must be challenged in the light of a more recent awareness of the influence of social processes and structures upon human existence. However, I believe that Wesley's doctrine of sanctification provides a not inadequate theological foundation for the role of human action within the economy of God's redemptive and liberating activity within the world.

By recognizing the intrinsic role that human being have within the implementation of God's purposes it can be seen that the sovereignty of God is enhanced, not diminished. That is, because the purposive actions of believers are intrinsic to the implementation of God's purposes, people and their actions need constantly to be held accountable to the sovereign will of God. Thus God's sovereignty, a sovereignty of grace, is acknowledged as foundational to Christian life, not only at the event of justification, but also within the on-going life of the believer, the life of sanctification.

Ian S. Williams

JOHN WESLEY'S IRELAND

Why Ireland?

Challenged upon setting foot in another man's parish, John Wesley used those now familiar words, 'The world is MY parish'. Why then, out of all that world, did he choose to pay such attention to that Tasmanian-sized island on the north-western fringe of Europe? For pay it attention he did, crossing the Irish Sea twenty-one times in each direction, frequently at some risk from wind and wave and on at least one occasion from a French privateer.

One may posit a number of answers, both general and specific, to the question. In the first place there was the man's restless energy and boundless missionary zeal - his quarter million miles on horseback and 40,000 sermons, or whatever the number may be. Some would add that marriage to a nagging woman was additional incentive to travel! In fact, the Ireland of the 1700s was a not unimportant place. In the century before the *An Gorta Mor*, The Great Famine, when the staple potato crop failed for several years in the late 1840s, the population was a rapidly increasing one. Recent research suggests that it was up to one quarter higher than the eight million usually quoted. Georgian Dublin, with its gracious squares and many notable buildings, was the second city of the Empire and before Wesley's life was over Ireland had its own Parliament and a degree of independence from Westminster. This was brought to an abrupt end in 1798 by an uprising in which disaffected sections of the population, including Ulster Presbyterians, allied themselves with elements of French Republicanism. The revolution that Wesley is said to have prevented in England, by giving the newly industrialised masses an outlet for their energies, took this different turn in the neighbouring island, where the power of the establishment and the excesses of landlordism were often less restrained.

There were more personal links with Ireland. Mr. Garret Wesley, a prosperous but childless landowner of Dangan, Co. Meath belonged to another branch of the family. Anxious to adopt a son from from a less well-off relative his first choice was John's brother Charles, but the offer was refused. Of passing interest is the fact that the Wesley cousin subsequently adopted became the grandfather of Arthur Wellesley (a variant spelling), better known to us as the Duke of Wellington, hero of the Battle of Waterloo. On the distaff side, mother Susannah's father,

Rev. S. Annesley, was a grandson of Viscount Valentia. The Annesley family who today live in Co. Down are direct descendants. Rathfarnham Castle, near where I grew up in South Dublin, was in John's day an Annesley home, subsequently a Jesuit community house.

Another linking thread in Oxford days was the presence in the Holy Club of a few Irish undergraduates, including the son of a prominent Dublin merchant family, the Morgans. So all in all there was sufficient reason for John and Charles to have anticipated those words of the song, 'Maybe some day I'll go across the sea to Ireland . . .' (*Galway Bay*)

What Ireland?

'For natural sweetness of temper, for courtesy and hospitality, I have never seen any people like the Irish', wrote John after favourable first impressions. While he never retracted that view, he was not long in discovering that being treated hospitably and getting an Irishman to change his mind or stir himself are not necessarily synonymous. 'Oh, what a harvest might be in Ireland did not the poor Protestants hate Christianity worse than either Popery or Heathenism!' he wrote later. He was also highly critical of the Penal Laws by which Roman Catholicism was officially outlawed until the Emancipation Act of 1829. In fact his most scathing comments were directed at fellow Protestants and as late as 1773 he was reporting to Charles that he had been caught up in two mobs, a Catholic one in the South and a Protestant one in the North. 'The Protestant mob was far the worst', he wrote. In the following year John Smith, an Irish martyr, was the victim of such Protestant violence and there is a memorial tablet to him in the Moy Church in Co. Tyrone, Ulster. (c.f. *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. XIX, p. 99, where it is also noted that the great-grandfather of Prime-Minister Stanley Baldwin was brought into Methodism through the preaching of John Smith). This was not, in the main, religious opposition but arose from prejudice and ignorance and was at least matched in England. Indeed, Catholic Ireland had a better record than Protestant England in this regard.

The historic St. Marys Church near the centre of Dublin faces demolition. For those with an interest in Methodist history it will be sad if it goes because it was there, on the evening of Sunday 9th August 1747, that John Wesley preached his first sermon in Ireland, having landed that morning on the quayside of the River Liffey. His initial contact was William Lunell, a banker of French Huguenot ancestry, who likely gave the introduction to another Huguenot, Moses Roquier the curate of St. Mary's.

Methodism was there a little ahead of Wesley through, for example, Thomas Williams. Converted in England under Charles Wesley in 1738, that significant year, Williams had gone to Ireland in 1746 as a Methodist preacher, gathering a Society of some 300 members including William Lunell. It was reports of that work that brought John over just then. Others, including George Whitfield, had made visits and little pockets of Methodism had begun to be formed in several provincial towns, especially where there were army barracks and British soldiers going to and fro. While Methodists in the Irish Republic are not numerous today outside Dublin and Cork, where there are small Societies they are frequently to be found in former garrison towns.

Another pre-Wesley preacher was John Cennick who referred in a sermon to the babe wrapped in 'swaddling' clothes. A Roman Catholic priest, not quite as familiar with the King James Authorised version of the Bible, hearing the strange word dubbed the Methodists 'Swaddlers', a name which was to stick for many years. Cennick later joined the Moravians, by whom of course Wesley had been influenced, and close relations between Methodists and the small number of Moravians in Ireland continue to the present time.

It was, in fact, Charles Wesley who was most influential in getting Methodism well established in Dublin and immediately beyond. Perhaps it is a legacy of his more conservative churchmanship and liturgical style that the oldest continuous Society in the city still uses an Anglican style Order of Morning Worship Sunday by Sunday. Under Charles' guidance a site was obtained in Whitefriar Street and a church erected there in 1752, the Mother Church of Irish Methodism. When in the next century the ninety-nine year lease expired and could not be renewed - the White Friars (Carmelites) reclaimed it for their own use - the congregation built a magnificent new church on St. Stephen's Green, in 1843. It was named the *Centenary Church*, having been funded by money raised to celebrate the first century of Methodism. The Annual Conference rotates to Dublin and other centres and it was always held in the *Centenary* during its lifetime, but tragically the building was burnt down about twenty-five years ago at the hands of a pyromaniac 'caretaker' and all that remains is the facade which forms the entrance to a bank! The congregation moved, with its insurance money, to join forces and share premises with a Church of Ireland (Anglican) parish at Leeson Park.

Belfast responded more slowly to Methodism, being little more than a provincial town until the expansion of the linen and shipbuilding industries in mid-nineteenth century. Not until 1778 did it become a Circuit on its own. Donegall Square Church in the city centre is the successor to the first preaching house in nearby Fountain Street, and the

present building, designed by the same architect as the *Centenary Church* in Dublin, was erected a few years after its older sister. Now, for different reasons, it too seems destined to front up a bank, although it is planned to have a continuing church incorporated into the development. (According to the First Draft of Stations issued earlier this month, one Kenneth Thompson is being proposed to Conference for appointment as Superintendent Minister of that Circuit from July!).

Beyond the Pale

After his brief two week visit of August 1747 John returned to Ireland the following March and stayed three months. While Charles spent more time there initially, and laid the foundations, it was John who continued and spread the work countrywide. From that second visit onwards he went about every two years, spending from three to five months each time, adding up to seven years of his life. Setting out from Dublin he travelled extensively and Societies sprang up in the towns along the main routes out of the city, places like Tullamore, Edenderry, Mountmellick and Athlone. Some still exist but sadly many are gone - the devastation of the population in the Famine years and the flight from the land has taken its toll. For a century and a quarter Ireland's population declined steadily until by 1970 it was less than one third of what it had been. Only in very recent years has there been a small upward movement again.

In places the Methodist buildings are to be found but no worshippers. For example, there are charming and unusual premises on the town green in the far western town of Castlebar, Co. Mayo, where the minister's vestry was actually the study in his manse. The preacher literally stepped from his desk into the pulpit. On Wesley's first visit to Castlebar he received a friendly welcome from the Rector, Rev. Mr. Ellison, which was by no means true everywhere. On his next visit in 1758 he was invited to administer Holy Communion, the first recorded instance in Ireland. In 1787 he preached in the 'new chapel' which remained in use until closed for worship in 1960. This was made all the more sad by the fact that it was the only remaining Methodist building in Ireland dating back to Wesley's day. Over the door in Castlebar one can read that the building was erected through the generosity of Lord Lucan (ancestor of the present lord of disappearing infamy) with the stone laid by 'Rev. John Wesley A.M.'

Adult Methodist membership peaked in Ireland in 1844, immediately pre-Famine, at 44,314 and in rural and provincial Ireland declined steadily thereafter. For example, Castlebar Circuit still had 150 members in 1900 but by 1960 was down to 19, almost all of whom lived in Ballina twenty miles away. Conversely, the city and suburban

churches benefited to an extent and continued to show an increase, right up to 1960 in many cases. Now the acids of secularism have begun to eat away at numbers. While up to 70,000 persons return themselves as Methodist in a national census, adult Full Membership is now just under 20,000. Prior to the separation from the Anglican Church, John Wesley encouraged the members of his Societies to worship and receive the sacraments in their local parish church. In Dublin so large were the numbers attending at one time that extra large communion vessels had to be provided in St. Patrick's Cathedral. They are still there and were last used when we celebrated the 250th Anniversary of Methodism at a great Service in May 1988.

John Wesley and Roman Catholics

It is not difficult to find in his writings many an uncomplimentary remark about 'Popery'. He was a man of his time, but it is important to distinguish, as Ian Paisley and his like fail to do, between this and his attitude towards Roman Catholics personally, and indeed to Catholic worship. Significant among his writings, and of great interest to present day ecumenists, is his *Letter to a Roman Catholic* written in Dublin on 18th July 1749, by way of reply to a particular priest but soon after published as a penny pamphlet for wider distribution. It reads in part:

You have heard ten thousand stories of us who are commonly called Protestants, of which if you believe only one in a thousand, you must think very hardly of us. But this is quite contrary to our Lord's rule, 'judge not that ye be not judged'; and has ill Consequences, particularly this, it inclines us to think as hardly of you. Hence we are on both sides less willing to help one another, and more ready to hurt each other. Hence Brotherly Love is utterly destroyed . . .

I do not suppose all the Bitterness is on your Side. I know there is too much on our Side also. So much that I fear many Protestants (so called) will be angry at me too, for writing to you in this Manner; and will say, 'it is showing you too much Favour; you deserve no such Treatment at our hands'. But I think you do . . .

Come, my Brother, let us reason together. Are you right if you only love your Friend and hate you Enemy? Do not even the Heathens and Publicans so? . . .

In the Name then, and in the Strength of God, let us resolve, First not to hurt one another: to do nothing unkind or unfriendly to each other, nothing which we would not have done to ourselves. Rather let us

endeavour after every Instance of a kind, friendly and Christian Behaviour towards each other.

Let us resolve, Secondly, God being our Helper, to speak nothing harsh or unkind of each other. The way to avoid this is to say all the good we can, both of and to one another . . .

Let us, Thirdly, resolve to harbour no unkind Thought, no unfriendly Temper towards each other . . .

Let us, Fourthly, endeavour to help each other on, in whatever we are agreed leads to the Kingdom. So far as we can, let us always rejoice to strengthen each other's Hands in God. Above all, let us each take heed unto himself (since each must give an Account of himself to God) that he fall not short of the Religion of Love . . .

The significance of these words for 20th century Catholic/Protestant relations in Ireland and beyond was recognised by Fr. Michael Hurley SJ, Founder Director of the Irish School of Ecumenics. He wrote a contemporary commentary, with prefaces by Cardinal Bea of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity and Bishop Odd Hagen, Chairman of the World Methodist Council, and had it published in the late sixties. This edition is now out of print, unfortunately, but there are two copies of the 1755 First Edition in the Queen's College Sugden Collection.

Special Features

While Irish (Gaelige) is the first official language of the Republic, it is now only spoken by a comparative handful of the population in the normal course of daily life. In Wesley's day it was much more widespread and served, at times, to distinguish native from planter and consequently Catholic from Protestant. Preaching in Irish was a feature of early Methodism. Thomas Walsh, a convert from Catholicism and one of the saints of those days, often accompanied Wesley to preach in Irish, being a fervent evangelist and Bible scholar. Wesley said that he was the best Hebrew scholar he had ever met. In 1756, the pair were forced to flee from a mob in Newtownards and Walsh received a severe wetting which contributed, with other such experiences, to an illness from which he died at the untimely age of twenty-eight. He is commemorated by a tablet in the church at Ballingrane, Co. Limerick, near his birthplace.

In the years immediately following Wesley's death others took up this work, men like James McQuigg who edited the Bible in Irish, ordained by Thomas Coke, Wesley's successor. In turn Adam Clarke continued

the interest. A noted scholar and preacher with a particular concern for education, he established six day-schools in his native Ulster, one of them at Portrush in Co. Antrim in which seaside town stands the Adam Clarke Memorial Church. Worshipers are summoned by the 'Moscow Bell' given to Clarke by the Duke of Newcastle, who had received it from the Emperor Alexander of Russia when British Ambassador. Adam Clarke was among some of the early preachers who went to and remained in England. It was said of him that more than any other man, perhaps, he kept Methodism together in the difficult years after Wesley's death. I believe that his educational ideas were followed in schools in some parts of Australia.

Organisation

From the beginning the Methodist Church in Ireland developed a structure that led to independence from British Methodism, yet retaining close fraternal links. The roots of the relationship go back to Wesley himself and his Presidency of the Irish Conference. The first occasion, when he called together his ten preachers, was in Limerick on 14th and 15th August 1752. For the next thirty years they were held on his visits to Ireland, usually in Dublin. From 1782 they were held annually, and have been ever since with one exception - 1791 the year of Wesley's death. The 222nd Irish Conference will assemble in Cork on 11th June next.

Many of the early preachers came from England but as the Irish Church grew the exchange was reversed. For example, William Thompson of Co. Fermanagh, the first Irish preacher on record (received into Full Connexion in Bristol in 1758) was President of the British Conference in 1792. By 1800 Ireland had become self-sufficient and no more manpower was brought over from England. One quaint tradition that survives is that the British President still comes and presides over our Annual Conference each year, to the confusion and exasperation of the news media who have to be constantly reminded during that week that the Irish President is, in fact, Vice-President of the Conference! The mills of Methodism grind slowly but I would be prepared to wager, if a good Methodist did such, that there will be a change in this procedure before the century is out, not because of any cooling of relations I hasten to add. I am sure there will continue to be an annual exchange of representatives and close co-operation between our two Conferences.

Missionary Impact

Forced and voluntary emigration, together with a missionary heritage going back to the 6th century monks and the succeeding years of saints and scholars, means that the Irish Church has played a part beyond its

size in the spread of the gospel worldwide. Notable in Methodist terms is the impact on North America.

In Co. Limerick, around the villages of Ballingrane and Rathkeale, Wesley found a group of Palatines, industrious German Protestants who as refugees had been settled there in Queen Anne's day. Initially speaking little English, and with no pastor of their own, they began to drift away from religious faith and practice. Contact with two early Methodist preachers in 1749 led to the Burgomaster, Philip Guier, forming a Methodist Society and himself becoming the first recognised Local Preacher in the land. Wesley visited and re-visited the area on many occasions and was disturbed to find in 1765 that many were being driven out by exorbitant rent increases. 'Have landlords no common sense (whether they have common humanity or no) that they will suffer such tenants as these to be starved away from them?' he wrote in his Journal.

Good came out of evil, however, and two of the Palatine emigrants, Philip Embury and Barbara Heck, founded one of the first two Methodist Societies in America. The present church in John Street in the heart of New York's financial district is on the same site as the 'Wesley Chapel' opened there in 1768. Contemporaneous was the emigration from Tandragee, Co. Armagh, of Robert Strawbridge, who brought Methodism to Sam's Creek near Baltimore, Maryland in 1766. He was born in Drumsna, Co. Leitrim, just a few miles from my own father's birthplace.

Many of the heirs of the little Palatine community, bearing the same family names, are still to be found in and around Ballingrane and Rathkeale. Barbara Heck's old home is there and, until the middle of this century, the pear tree under which Wesley preached. In June 1960, the 200th Anniversary of the departure of the emigrants, a plaque was placed at the spot and in the present church in Ballingrane is the horn that was once used to summon the Methodists to worship. In Donegall Square Church in Belfast there is the Embury/Heck memorial window, erected as a result of gifts from across the Atlantic. These, and many more, are symbols of small beginnings but widespread influences for the cause of Christ arising from the love of that remarkable little man John Wesley, for the people of my homeland.

Kenneth H. Thompson

