

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIAL INTENT IN JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF  
SANCTIFICATION**

**by**

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**submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of**

**MASTER OF THEOLOGY**

**in the subject**

**CHURCH HISTORY**

**at the**

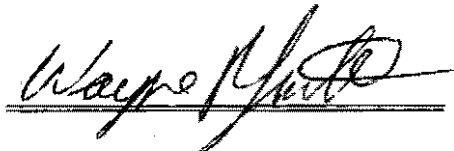
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**NOVEMBER 1997**

**DECLARATION**

I declare that An Assessment of the Social Intent in John Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification is my own work and that all the sources I used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references in the text and in the bibliography.



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank several individuals and organisations for their help and encouragement, for without them, this dissertation would be far from finished.

1. My wife Claire, who graciously endured my scrambling to get finished when I should have been more diligent through the year.
2. Ms. Mary-Lynn Suttie, the Church History librarian at UNISA, who has been a great help with advice and material.
3. The staff of the Divinity Library at Duke University, who pointed me in the right direction.
4. The library staff of North Carolina Wesleyan College. This is an independent school with United Methodist Church roots.
5. Two pastors in my home town who opened their personal libraries to me. Rev. Tom Legg of the Church of the Nazarene, and Rev. John Check of the United Methodist Church.
6. Dr. Bud Bence who has, more than any other single person, helped me to understand the doctrine of sanctification, both as a professor at Indiana Wesleyan University, and as a scholar. His Ph.D. dissertation from Emory University was very useful.
7. Dr. J. Millard of UNISA for her patience and gentle rebukes to stay on the subject, and not to preach, to mention just two of her pointers.
8. The Reverend John Wesley (1703-1791) who chose to do what God wanted him to do, rather than what may have been expected of him. For this reason, all of us in the Wesleyan Methodist heritage are thankful.

## **SUMMARY**

John Wesley was a well educated son of a cleric, who chose to be a theologian and a minister in the Church of England. His theological distinctive was his insistence on the possibility of entire sanctification in this lifetime. In response to their position on sanctification, Wesley and the Methodists sought to save souls and cure the ills in society because they believed it was divinely mandated. Their love and work for the less fortunate was a response to their love for God and in obedience to His commandments. This is the great success of their work. They were able to serve God and their generation in a balanced yet inseparable way. The result of Wesley's life, direct and indirect, was that the social and spiritual plight of thousands of individuals and families was improved and dozens of church groups, missionary societies and benevolent organisations have emerged.

## **KEYWORDS**

**Arminianism**

**Holiness**

**Methodism**

**Social Gospel**

**Society**

**Wesleyan**

**Christian Perfection**

**Methodist**

**Social Reform**

**Sanctification**

**Wesley**

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## INTRODUCTION

John Wesley was an ordained priest in the Anglican Church and an exceptional scholar with an Oxford education. He could have chosen a career as a university lecturer or he could have settled into the stable and quiet life of a parish priest in some small village in England. He chose neither. Instead he gave himself to a life of itinerant preaching and social reform. As a preacher Wesley stressed salvation by faith and holy living. He believed that God expected all believers to live a life of holiness before God and before man. He was convinced that it is possible to be "delivered from all evil" (Works VIII : 295) and that this work of grace brought about in a believer's life, was the work of entire sanctification. (See chapter two). Asbury Theological Seminary professor, Laurence W. Wood (Alexander ed. 1988 : 96) says, "for Wesley, holiness is a process of becoming in reality what is already ours in Christ through the new birth". He goes on to note that according to Wesley sanctification "begins at the new birth; entire sanctification is the experience of being made perfect in love". (Alexander ed. 1988 : 96). Melvin E. Dieter (1987 : 13) says "the concept 'faith working by love,' as the ultimate hermeneutic for understanding God's entire plan of salvation, strongly shaped his teachings on sanctification". He also states that Wesley believed that freedom from the dominion of sin and victory in Christ was possible for "every person who is born of God". (Dieter 1987 : 13).

Coupled with and inseparable from a life of holiness, Wesley stressed a life of commitment to the needy in society. (See chapter three). To Wesley, one could not claim love for God and indifference to the needs of society:

'Holy Solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social, no holiness but social holiness.

'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. (Works XIV : 321)

In an article appearing in Touchstone, Victor Shepherd (1988 : 32) says in regard to Wesley's zeal for good works, that "sanctification impelled such works". Also on the subject of Wesley's social actions, Luke Keefer (1990 : 8) says that for "nearly seventy years he sustained a constant attention to the needy". Although Charles Villa-Vicencio (1989 : 94) is critical of Wesley's apparent overemphasis with regard to saving souls with not enough emphasis on the needs of the poor, he does concede that the early Methodist movement of the eighteenth century "showed a genuine compassion for 'harlots, and publicans, and thieves'". Other critics of the extent of Wesley's social actions will also be discussed in chapter three.

Wesley's position on theology and his actions in life were a synthesis of his single desire to serve God. (See chapter four). Wesley held that all believers were expected to have perfect love for God and for man, and that this love comes about as a result of a work of grace which God does in the hearts of those who seek after it. In his sermon on patience Wesley says:

But what is the perfect work of patience? Is it anything less than the "perfect love of God," constraining us to love every soul of man, "even as Christ loved us?" Is it not the whole of religion, the whole "mind which was also in Christ Jesus?" Is it not "the renewal of our soul in the image of God, after the likeness of him that created us?" And is not the fruit of this, the constant resignation of ourselves, body and spirit, to God; entirely giving up all we are, all we have, and all we love, as a holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God through the Son of his love? (Works VI : 487)



This Love for God and man is the basis for Wesley's theology and his social reforming spirit. He could not separate one from the other. He never separated his teachings on sanctification from his emphasis on social issues. De Gruchy (1993 : 3) concurs when in his Master of Theology thesis for the University of South Africa (1993) entitled A Critical Analysis of John Wesley's Socio-economic Thought, it's Consequences and Implications, says, "Wesley's socio-economic ethics cannot be viewed as an addendum to his theology but must be seen as an integral part of his understanding of Scriptural Holiness". Hulley (1988 : 2) captures the essence of Wesley's life with the title of his book To Be and To Do. He says that "Wesley's theology and ethics are integrated ... any attempt to separate these two strands in his understanding of perfect love would do violence to his teachings".

Wesley unreservedly preached sanctification and tirelessly campaigned for those at the bottom of the social ladder. The same can be said of many in the holiness movement of America in the nineteenth century. (See chapter five) The Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America, and several other Methodist related churches and groups took Wesley's lead in the struggle for social reform, including the pressing need to free slaves in America. Dayton (1976 : 75) says that the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America is "one of the few churches in Christian history to be founded squarely on a social issue". While noting several church schisms which occurred in America in the nineteenth century, Walker (1985 : 659) says that "the most extensive" of those schisms occurred over the issue of slavery in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Wesley was convinced that a life of holiness before God and a heart of compassion for the world's hurting went hand in hand. In fact, it was Wesley's conviction that the great Scriptural doctrine of sanctification was incomplete if it stopped at demanding perfection before God alone. Wesley lived his life and encouraged his followers to live a life of purity, holiness and perfection before God and in the world. Wesley and the early

Methodists were committed to seeing the hungry fed, the poor helped and the widowed cared for. The basis for such a life was rooted in and inseparable from the teaching of Scriptural Holiness or sanctification.

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the connection between and assess the motives for Wesley's position on sanctification and his social reforming actions. This paper will detail Wesley's tireless, creative and very active life of dedication to the needy of his day, and how his message of sanctification was often used as a motivating and challenging factor. This paper will also show how these two positions were upheld by the Wesleyan Methodists and the holiness movement of the nineteenth century, but were to some extent lost or misdirected by the Wesleyans of the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ENGLAND IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

#### 1.1 THE DEVELOPING CHURCH

At the time of John Wesley's birth in 1703 the whole of Europe had been going through more than two hundred years of significant change. The Protestant Reformation had already taken place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In earlier centuries the church had controlled almost every aspect of ecclesiastical life, social and economic, but this was now changed forever. A large split from the Church of Rome had occurred which resulted in numerous Protestant groups scattered mostly in northern Europe and England. The whole of Europe was eventually divided over lines of tradition and loyalty. Some stayed loyal to the church of Rome and its traditions, while others remained loyal to their own leaders or clergy who opposed the church. Unfortunately the splits on the Protestant side continued to occur. New churches and groups began to emerge such as the Lutherans in Germany, the Anabaptists in Switzerland and the Church of England, to name but a few. Although the church came through this turbulent period largely fragmented, it enjoyed a measure of freedom and self determination, something which the reformers and particularly the peasants had never known before.

The leaders of the Reformation challenged the greatest 'world' power ever known to man, the church of Rome. The succeeding years would reveal how often the same sort of 'protests' would have to take place if Protestantism was to stay true to those who dared to try to bring new life into the Christian Church. The Church of England became the dominant ecclesiastical body in Britain. It was the church in which Wesley was raised, and for which he and his followers would work so hard to bring revival.

By the 1700's the church in England was influential and extremely formal in their manner of worship. When speaking about the purpose of the Methodists, Wesley said they were "not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land". (Works VIII : 299). Although Wesley wanted to see the church reformed, he did not make it his life's ambition. He devoted his life to saving souls, spreading scriptural holiness, and improving the lives of those he came across. He hoped that by his message the church and nation would be reformed. His life of itinerant preaching and his message of perfection were not in keeping with the church's traditions and its formalism. Wesley had to contend with this and rise above it, both in his message and his social concern. He also had to live out his calling and deliver his message in a rapidly changing industrial world.

## **1.2 THE DEVELOPING SOCIAL SCENE**

In the early eighteenth century "Great Britain stood on the eve of the industrial revolution". (Walker 1985 : 597). England's two main industries had been farming and shipping. Craftsmen were still needed to manually manufacture many goods by hand, but this changed to such an extent that by the middle of the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution was in full progress. Due to the invention of machines like the steam engine unemployment soared as labourers competed for jobs which machines were doing more quickly and efficiently. England was transformed "in the last third of the eighteenth century from agriculture to manufacture". (Walker 1985 : 597). Wesley and the Methodists would find themselves ministering to its rapidly changing society. The new socio-economic scene led thousands of job seekers into the already overcrowded cities. The cities of England became over crowded and small towns soon became cities. At the same time failing farms and the break up of the feudal system were forcing masses of people into the cities in a quest for work and a place to live. (De Gruchy 1993 : 7). A

significant and troubling aspect of English life in the eighteenth century was that of child labour. Children were not being schooled nor were they allowed a proper childhood, but were instead working in factories from as young as five years old. Although Wesley's parish duties would have kept him in relative comfort and away from most of the pain of a rapidly industrialised country, he opted to give most of his life and talents to seeing England cope adequately with the birth pains of a new era. The Industrial Revolution transformed "the character of English society". (Pillay 1991 : 187). In this regard Wesley was facing a society which was in desperate need of a spiritual revolution.

### **1.3 A CHALLENGED CHURCH**

The Industrial Revolution also forced some changes on the church. The church needed to respond to an ever increasing population and changing economic situation. The changes were increasing not only the wealth of the rich but also the poverty of most of the population. Crowded cities with poor sanitation and a weak police force added to the problems. "It was to this situation that Methodism (and John Wesley) brought a message of hope". (Pillay 1991 : 188).

In every town besides the prosperous masters, journeyman and apprentices, lived a mass of beings, physically and morally corrupt, for whose bodies no one, and whose souls only the Methodists, had a thought to spare. (Trevelyan 1937 : 12).

Meanwhile in the cold and formal Church of England, enthusiasm in worship and Christian living was discouraged and outward expressions of spirituality were frowned upon. (Douglas 1974 : 290). Moderation and toleration was the norm. The spread of Enlightenment thinking and Deism, which portrayed God as distant and unmoved by His people, also contributed to the state of religion in England. These philosophies reasoned

away miracles, the supernatural was denied and revelation lost significance. Walker (1985 : 596) says "that even among the orthodox, Christianity seemed little more than a system of morality supported by divine sanctions". Because the church was too rigid to respond adequately to the changing social scene it was left to men like Wesley, and the movements they founded, to do it. Pillay (1991 : 201) includes Pietism in Germany and the Great Awakening in North America when he says the following about the Evangelical movement in England:

The Evangelical Revival in England (attempted) to make the Gospel of consequence in the lives of ordinary people... (Evangelicals) reacted primarily to the widespread lack of Christian devotion in the established Protestant churches and the spiritual alienation of ordinary people from the church leaders. (The movement) had both religious and socioeconomic implications for their times.

#### **1.4 WESLEY'S BACKGROUND IN 18TH CENTURY ENGLAND**

John Wesley was born in Epworth into a line of clergy who boldly stood for what they believed, and suffered the consequences of it.

His grandfather and great-grandfather, on his father's side, were both dissenting clergymen who found themselves evicted from their respective parishes when the 1662 Act of Uniformity was passed and enforced. They were not prepared to give their 'unfeigned consent and assent' to the slightly revised Prayer Book. (De Gruchy 1993 : 19)

Although Wesley's father was initially educated at dissenting colleges, the term being used for those who objected to and withdrew from the Church of England, he accepted a parish with the Church. John Wesley was one of nineteen children, so on the income from a small parish, careful frugal living was always a concern. Wesley grew up knowing the

value of spending wisely and working hard. He also grew up valuing a life which was almost lost through a fire at the Epworth rectory in 1709. John was rescued from the burning house and thereafter referred to himself as a 'brand plucked from the burning'. He used this phrase many times in his writings. (For example Works XIII : 409).

### **1.5 WESLEY'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY UNTIL ALDERSGATE STREET**

Although he was raised in a very conservative and religious home, the son of an Anglican priest, Wesley still did not have the spiritual assurance for which he longed. He studied hard at Oxford University and poured himself into the writings of the early church fathers. In 1728, at the age of 25, he was ordained a deacon and served with his father at Epworth for a short period. On returning to Oxford he found that his brother Charles had started a small group of students whose aim it was to live the true Christian life. They met regularly for prayer, Bible reading, frequent attendance at Holy communion, and they cared for the poor and imprisoned. "But (in spite of this) John was quick to confess that he lacked the inward peace of a true Christian. God must have something more in mind". (Shelley 1982 : 353).

While at sea on the way to a missionary trip to America, Wesley witnessed the faith and joy of German (Moravian) Christians who were not frightened by the repeated storms. The storms caused Wesley to question his own lack of faith while, at the same time, he was impressed with the attitude of his German companions. (Works I : 21-22). Wesley felt that his missionary trip to America was a failure, and this heightened his deep desire for spiritual peace. While sailing back to England on January 8th, 1738, he wrote "Lord , save, or I perish! Save me," (Works I : 72), and: "I went to America, to convert the Indian; but O! who shall convert me?" (Works I : 74).

In March of the same year (1738) Wesley met with his Moravian friend Peter Bohler. On several occasions Wesley asked Bohler for spiritual help and guidance, and whether he thought that he, Wesley, should stop preaching due to his poor spiritual state. Bohler told Wesley to "preach faith *till* you have it ; and then, *because* you have it, you will preach faith". (Works 1 : 86). Wesley also questioned Bohler on the possibility of immediate justification by faith. According to Walker, (1985 : 601) Peter Bohler "taught a complete self-surrendering faith, an instantaneous conversion, and a joy in believing".

In May 1738, Wesley reluctantly went to a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. While an extract of Luther's preface to the book of Romans was being read, Wesley had his famous 'heart warming' experience and wrote:

I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust 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. (Works I : 103).

Scholars are divided as to whether this was Wesley's conversion or the assurance of his conversion. What is certain is that Wesley had an experience and found the spiritual assurance he had sought. For years he had served the Lord and the church the best he could, but with doubts and questions about his own soul. His life and ministry were about to take on a whole new dimension. "John Wesley lacked the passion in Georgia, but when he found it, all of England knew it". (Shelley 1982 : 351).



## 1.6 THE EVANGELICAL REVIVAL BEGINS

Wesley has been remembered for some remarkable qualities and accomplishments. In his diary entry of June 28th, 1774, Wesley states that he "never travelled less, by sea or by land, than four thousand five hundred miles per year". (Works IV : 21). Pillay says:

It is estimated that he travelled a quarter of a million miles, preached over 40 000 sermons, made extensive journal entries, compiled Hebrew and Greek dictionaries and made several trips to Ireland and Scotland. (Pillay 1992 : 207)

Wesley was not always adept at the outdoor preaching, for which he was especially noted. It was his friend George Whitefield who persuaded the Oxford scholar to take his message to the open country. Wesley himself felt that this was not immediately suited to him:

I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields ... having been ... so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church. (Works. I : 185).

But once he got started nothing kept Wesley from preaching anywhere and to anyone, especially poor people. Although there were already signs of revival in Wales and Scotland, "only with the emergence of its three great leaders - John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield - did the evangelical revival swell into a mighty tide". (Walker 1985 : 598):

Wesley was a preacher with few equals in popular effectiveness - earnest, practical, fearless. Attacked , especially in the early part of his ministry, and often in peril from mob violence, no danger could daunt him, no interruption could check him. (Walker 1985 : 602).

## 1.7 THE REVIVAL TAKES SHAPE

Wesley soon realised the need for a strong administrative structure which he organised with great skill. Less than three years after he started his outdoor ministry he divided his followers into small groups of about twelve, called "classes" in order to help with administration. Wesley's small groups (class meetings) were an adaptation of the Moravian small group concept, as well as a practice started in London in the previous century. Small groups were formed in the mid 1600's for "the cultivation of a religious life, frequent communion, (and) aid to the poor", (Walker 1985 : 597) besides other activities. Samuel Wesley, John's father, had started one at Epworth in 1702. These 'religious societies', although declining in number by the time Wesley set up his groups, were of importance "in the beginnings of Methodism". (Walker 1985 : 597).

Wesley appointed stewards who would collect a penny a week from each member, (Works I : 357) and the classes would meet for prayer, testimonies and mutual support. Later Wesley used members of these classes as personal assistants. They assisted with visiting the sick, caring for property, and teaching in the schools. In 1744 he started the annual conferences which facilitated the formation of policy and other matters for the societies. (Works I : 448). "John Wesley had many friends and assistants, but few intimates who shared his responsibilities....Over all the multitudinous concerns of Methodism he exercised a wise but absolute authority". (Walker 1985 : 604).

Wesley's message of sanctification would be heard by thousands across England, and the social concern of his and the Methodists would be appreciated by numerous individuals and families who would benefit. The following chapter deals with Wesley's position on sanctification.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WESLEY'S POSITION ON SANCTIFICATION

John Wesley was an exceptionally talented and educated man. Ayling (1979 : 28) notes that "at the age of sixteen he was already adding Hebrew, learned under the direction of his brother Samuel, to his Latin and Greek". Wesley graduated with his bachelors degree in 1724, and with his masters degree in 1727. He was proficient on the lives and theologies of early church leaders as well as being familiar with the numerous theological and intellectual arguments which were coming to the fore in his time. Wesley could argue intellectually with the best, yet he was able to speak to and appeal to the uneducated. In spite of these very evident intellectual capabilities he never produced a systematic theology to explain his position on points of doctrine. Wesley's theology appears in his writings, and is woven into the very fabric of his life. He preached, wrote, and lived his theology. For this reason Wesley may have concluded that a systematic detail of his theology was not essential, or he simply did not have the time, as Burtner and Chiles (1954 : 7) point out in the preface to their Compend of Wesley's Theology, when they state that in Wesley's busy life he "rarely pursued his study of a doctrine long enough to work all the subtle details into adequate systematic form". As a result, those who attempt to formulate a systematic theology of Wesley, have to sift through his works and his life story in order to produce statements which would best reflect his thoughts on any particular theological issue. Rather than producing a systematic theology on Wesley, Burtner and Chiles (1954) have compiled various extracts from Wesley's works into theological classifications, thus attempting to produce what may have been Wesley's own systematic theology. Although their book is a useful resource, definitive and systematic statements are still lacking, because there is a lack of them in Wesley's work. This is the case with Wesley's position on sanctification. His life and his teachings exemplify his stand on

holiness and the Lord's work of sanctification in the heart of believers, but exactly what he believed on the subject must be drawn from notable sermons such as, "Christian Perfection" (XL), "The New Birth" (XLV), "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (XLIII), "The Way of the Kingdom" (VII), "The Circumcision of the Heart" (XVII), and his essay, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection". Wesley's seemingly endless stream of letters and his journal also reveal much of his position on sanctification. It needs to be noted that Wesley was never consistent with his use of terms when talking about sanctification. Some of his other most commonly used words are, holiness, heart holiness, Christian perfection, and perfect love.

In spite of any apparent short comings in the way of a systematic theology, the entire Methodist movement would have known where Wesley stood theologically because sanctification became one of Wesley's most distinctive doctrines, if not 'the' most distinctive, and one of the most debated of Wesleyan beliefs. Heitzenrater (1995 : 48) in Wesley and the People Called Methodists, agrees when he says that "Christian Perfection, would not only become the distinctive hall mark of Methodist theology in the eighteenth century, but also act as a compass for his own lifelong spiritual pilgrimage", and Outler (1991 : 51) says that perfection was Wesley's "most distinctive and misunderstood teaching". Although many varying positions exist on Wesley and sanctification, most have entered the debate with great respect for the man and his work. This chapter will draw on the works of some of these scholars, as well as attempt to allow Wesley to speak for himself on the difficult, but important subject of sanctification. Chapter three will detail Wesley's social concerns followed by chapter four, which will attempt an assessment of how his position on sanctification, and his social concerns relate to each other.

## 2.1 DEVELOPMENT

The doctrine of sanctification was not new to Christendom, although in light of the debate it generated, both inside the movement (it became a regular topic at annual conferences) and within the Church of England, one could easily conclude that Wesley introduced something altogether foreign into the church. He held to his position with great conviction and passion, all the while claiming that he was not preaching anything new. As Heitzenrater (1995 : 129) points out:

Wesley could claim with some justification that he was simply preaching the 'old religion' of the Church of England, ...He correctly pointed out that most Methodist beliefs and practices were in common with large segments of Christianity.

Tuttle (1978 : 331) in his book, John Wesley: His Life and Theology, attempts a very difficult task when he divides Wesley's theology according to chronological order, using Aldersgate as a starting point, yet he concludes that Wesley exhibited "a basic continuity in his understanding of perfection". (1978 : 337) Tuttle, (1978 : 337), however, seems to agree with Outler, when he quotes Outler stating that Wesley's later position on perfection was "strikingly different in substance and form' from his earlier concept", and later says, "Wesley expressed the necessity of sanctification before death in much stronger terms during later years". (Tuttle 1978 : 337). Heitzenrater (1995 : 343) also agrees that Wesley's position underwent some change, yet Wesley himself saw no change in his position. In the concluding paragraphs of his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection", Wesley (Works VI : 444) says that his position is one which "I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765". Although Wesley made this statement almost thirty years before his death, one would be hard pressed to find any significant shift in Wesley's theology of Christian Perfection, either before or after 1765.

## 2.2 TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Bence (1981 : 157), in his thesis on John Wesley's Theological Hermeneutic writes:

One might wonder what further salvation is attainable in this life after reading Wesley's description of the great privilege of those who are born again. Yet he offers a further goal that also can be reached within the limits of one's lifetime--full salvation from sin or Christian perfection.

Wesley believed that there was more to salvation than just the 're-birth' experience, but that God could also purify one's heart of the root or cause of sin and thus make the person perfect in His eyes. Wesley never intended to teach a state of absolute perfection which was attainable in this life, but he did believe and teach that God can bring a Christian to a point where all sin can be dealt with, both the acts and nature of sin. Perfection or sanctification was a gift from God which He holds out to all who come to Him in repentance "and that it involved, total communion with God". (Heitzenrater 1995 : 341). Wesley explains in his sermon on Patience how sanctification can be attained in this life. After exhorting his listeners to understand that sanctification is a work of grace and not of works, Wesley presents four principles which must be believed if sanctification is to be attained:

First, believe that God has promised to save you from all sin, and to fill you with all holiness. Secondly, believe that he is able thus "to save to the uttermost all that come into God through him." Thirdly, believe that he is willing, as well as able, to save you to the uttermost; to purify you from all sin, and fill up all your heart with love. Believe, fourthly, that he is not only able, but willing to do it now. Not when you come to die; not at any distant time; not tomorrow, but today. He will then enable you to believe, it is done, according to his word: And then "patience shall have its

perfect work; that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing". (Works VI : 492).

### 2.2.1 SANCTIFICATION AT SALVATION

The whole process of sanctification starts with salvation, or the new birth experience. With salvation believers are sanctified but not entirely. In answer to the question, "when does inward sanctification begin?" Wesley says: "In the moment we are justified. ...From that time a believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace". (Works VIII : 285). Although God's forgiveness of the acts of sin is a complete work, in that God does not leave confessed sin unforgiven, it is also incomplete because of the sinful state which remains. Bence (1981 : 158) says "Wesley himself recognises the soteriological tension in his claim that we are restored to holiness in regeneration and yet retain sin in our lives". He goes on to state:

Justification marks the beginning of eternal salvation by forgiving one's actual sins. The 'second change' is distinct from justification in that the focus of God's atoning work is upon original rather than actual sin, and the action is one of cleansing rather than pardoning. (Bence 1982 : 162)

Wesley in his sermon, "Repentance in Believers" (Works V : 156-170) says:

On the contrary, a deep conviction that we are not yet whole; that our hearts are not fully purified; that there is yet in us a "carnal mind," which is still in its nature "enmity against God;" that a whole body of sin remains in our heart, weakened indeed, but not destroyed; shows, beyond all possibility of doubt, the absolute necessity of a farther (sic) change. We allow, that at the very moment of justification, we are *born again*: In that instant we experience that inward change from "darkness into marvellous light;" from the image of the brute and the devil, into the image of God; from the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, to the mind which

was in Christ Jesus. But are we then *entirely* changed? Are we *wholly* transformed into the image of him that created us? Far from it: We still retain a depth of sin; and it is the consciousness of this which constrains us to groan, for a full deliverance, to Him that is mighty to save. (V : 168-169)

For Wesley it is this realisation of a state of sin still in the believer, which should spur them on to seek a deeper cleansing from the Lord. To explain the tension between inner sin and the need for inner purity, Wesley refers to 'new and old creatures' in a believer in his aptly titled sermon, "Sin in Believers". (Works V : 144-156).

Now certainly a man cannot be a new creature and an old creature at once. Yes, he may: He may be partly renewed which was the very case with those at Corinth. They were doubtless "renewed in the spirit of their mind," or they could not have been so much as "babes in Christ;" yet they had not the whole mind which was in Christ ...his old desires, designs, affections, tempers, and conversation. All these are undeniably become new, greatly changed from what they were; and yet, though they are new, they are not wholly new....

He is saved from sin; yet not entirely: It *remains*, though it does not *reign*. (V : 151)

Because the sin state remains in the believer, they must press on toward a deeper work of grace. Wood (Alexander ed. 1988 : 96) says Wesley held that "sanctification begins at the moment of the new birth; entire sanctification is the experience of being made perfect in love".

### **2.2.2 SANCTIFICATION AS PROCESS**

Wesley believed that sanctification developed all through life as Christians walked diligently with the Lord. There would be moments, or instants, of assurance and moments of crisis, but sanctification, either as experience, or as assurance, never marked



the end or goal of his teachings on the doctrine. Dieter (1987 : 18-19) confirms that "a crisis point in the quest for holiness, does not represent the final step...Wesley allowed no stopping point in the Christian quest for holiness". When discussing Wesley's "relationship between justification (what God does *for* us, forgiveness of sin) and sanctification (what God does *in* us, holiness of life)", Heitzenrater (1995 : 104) says that this imparting of Christ's righteousness in the believer "was not a one-time experience, but a matter of daily concern and (hopefully) growth for all".

Bence (1982 : 159) states that this moving from justification to sanctification was "not a paradoxical coincidence of opposites so much as it is a gradualism, a teleological progression typical of Wesleyan theology". Wesley would have agreed because to him, justification or "The New Birth" (Wesley's sermon so titled; Works VI : 65-77) is what opens "the gate ... the entrance into" (Works VI : 74) this move toward entire sanctification. Bence's (1982 : 159) very good illustrative explanation helps to add more clarity to this process in Wesley's position when he says Christians are "moving from more sin/less holiness to less sin/more holiness". Although he says that this is only a stage in a series of moves "leading to the ultimate realisation of the goal", (Bence 1982 : 159) it needs to be pointed out again that Wesley's ultimate goal was not entire sanctification. The stages of the new birth, progression toward holiness of heart and the assurance of sanctification are all moving believers toward eternity. Burtner (1954 : 139) says "Wesley weds justification and sanctification, makes faith the condition of both, and sets eternity as the goal toward which both move". Wesley's Christian should never stand still in grace, but should continually be growing toward holiness, growing in holiness and growing on, even after the assurance of entire sanctification, never ending until death. It was in this process that Wesley urged "all the believers to go on to perfection, and to expect deliverance from sin every moment". (Works XII : 452-453). Wesley would agree with Coleman (1990 : 67) when he says; "life in Christ is always moving 'on toward the goal for

the prize of the upward call of God' (Phil. 4:14),...Whatever we may have experienced heretofore, the best is yet to be". Coleman (1990 : 72) says that Wesley was "a living example" of this work of God, and that "the relationship between justifying faith and transformation in Christ can be seen vividly in the experience of John Wesley".

An inherent problem in this position of pressing believers on toward perfection is the tendency to think that it is what the individual is achieving, and not what God is doing in the believer. It was often levelled at Wesley that he was preaching a theology of salvation and sanctification by works. In response to this accusation Wesley says, "I have constantly declared just the contrary;...I have continually testified in private and in public, that we are sanctified as well as justified by faith. ...Faith is the condition, and the only condition of sanctification". (Works VI : 49). Although the believer is exhorted to press on, holiness is never the believer's work, it is always an act of God's grace. Bence (1982 :161) says "Wesley cannot forget the lesson of Aldersgate; salvation is a gift of grace, not the product of human striving. Although one presses forward in a gradual dying to sin and growing in grace, the moment of full salvation is still a divine act of redemption". In his sermon, "Repentance of Believers" Wesley puts it this way:

Although we may, "by the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the body;" resist and conquer both outward and inward sin; although we may weaken our enemies day by day, — yet we cannot drive them out. By all the grace which is given at justification we cannot extirpate them. Though we watch and pray ever so much, we cannot wholly cleanse either our hearts or hands. Most sure we cannot, till it shall please our Lord to speak to our hearts again, to speak the second time, "Be clean." And then only the leprosy is cleansed. Then only the evil root, the carnal mind, is destroyed; and inbred sin subsists no more. (Works V : 165)

### 2.2.3 INSTANT AND ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Although Wesley strongly held to a gradual work of grace toward sanctification, he was convinced that when entire sanctification occurred, it occurred in an instant. Wesley explains that if at one stage or moment, in a believer's life, they are not sanctified, and the next stage they are, then the work which moved them from the one to the other must have occurred in an instant. With his usual emphasis on reason, he puts it this way:

From the moment we are justified, there may be a gradual sanctification, a growing in grace, a daily advance in the knowledge and love of God. And if sin cease before death, there must, in the nature of the thing, be an instantaneous change; there must be a last moment wherein it does exist, and a first moment wherein it does not. (Works VIII : 329)

Heitzenrater (1995 : 341) believes that it was his experience at Aldersgate which "convinced Wesley that sanctification (like justification) was granted in an instant". Wesley felt that because God did the work in an instant, those seeking it should also seek it in an instant. Wesley encouraged Christians at Cornwall to expect to be "perfected in love" (Works III : 115) hourly, and from the testimonies which he heard, Wesley says "all who believe they are sanctified, declare with one voice, that the change was wrought in a moment, I cannot but believe that sanctification is commonly, if not always, an instantaneous work". (Works VI : 491).

A source of some concern to Wesley was to try and explain his use of the word 'entire' when referring to sanctification. Wood (Alexander ed. 1988 : 99) says entire sanctification sounded too much like "absolute perfection or angelic perfection--both of which Wesley distinguished from Christian perfection". He also explains that the word entire did not mean an idea of completeness, but rather one of "quality and purity of love...

(and) a pursuit of love". (Alexander ed. 1988 : 99). The use of the word entire, also clearly meant to Wesley, that the 'entire' work can be reached in this life, and not only at the point of death. Wesley's sermon on Patience helps explain his point when he says, "believe, ...that he is not only able, but willing to do it now. And then "patience shall have its perfect work; that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing". (Works VI : 492).

Wesley's "Minutes of Some Late Conversations" (Works VIII : 285; 293-296) indicate the debate he had with those who held that sanctification was only possible at death. Wesley reasons "from the very nature of the command, which is not given to the dead, but to the living" (Works VIII : 296), and cites several references, that since God has commanded and promised that we be perfect (Psalm 130:8; Ezekiel 36:25,29; II Corinthians 7:1; Matthew 5:8), and since the writers of the Scriptures testify that it is possible (I John 4:17; Luke 1:69-75; Titus 2:11), we should seek it and expect to experience it in this life.

#### **2.2.4 CHRISTIAN PERFECTION**

The term which Wesley may have favoured the most when talking about sanctification was Christian Perfection. While still a doctoral student at Drew University, Robert Rakestraw (1984 : 200) said that the doctrine of Christian Perfection was "at the heart of Wesley's theology of sanctifying grace". It was a term which caused a great deal of debate then, as it does today. In a paper for the Methodist 'Bicentennial Theological Consultation', Stanley Hauerwas (Runyan ed. 1985 : 251) says:

I often wish that Wesley might have hit upon a less troublesome notion than 'perfection'. Perfection unfortunately conveys too much of a sense of accomplishment rather than the necessity of continued growth that was at the heart of Wesley's theological account on sanctification.

Although Burtner (1954 : 139) agrees that it is difficult to define with clarity, the difference in Wesley's various terms for sanctification, he suggests that entire sanctification is considered to be "the second work of salvation through faith" (1954 : 139), while Christian perfection is "an ideal of the ethical life". (1954 : 139). He further argues that "entire sanctification is the event, a subjective act, wrought by God", (1954 : 195) and that "Christian perfection is a process". (1954 : 195). By so doing Burtner takes the stand that there is a clear distinction between the terms in Wesley's usage.

Along with Outler (1991 : 51) and several other scholars, Weens (1982 : 35) shows how Wesley's position on Christian perfection was easily misunderstood. He says that Wesley's position was not based on the Latin word for perfect, which would imply perfection as a completed achievement. Instead, Wesley's position on Christian perfection was based on the Greek meaning which would explain a spiritual state of "process, growth and journey". (Weens 1982 : 35). Christian perfection to Wesley was never an end achieved nor was it an experience of a single moment. It was a lifetime of experiences of devotion to God and service to humanity.

In a capsulated definition of Wesley's position on Christian Perfection, Heitzenrater (1995 : 48) says that it is a call "for love as 'the sum of the perfect law [and] the true circumcision of the heart'. It is training all of one's affections upon the will of God, having 'the mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus'". Bence (1982 : 164) says that for Wesley, "Perfection is the attainable goal, toward which all believers should strive. It offers an invitation to go on in grace".

Yet another term of Wesley's which can be used for Christian perfection is 'perfect love'. The result of God's sanctifying work in the life of the believer should result in perfect love

for God and perfect love for others. Outler (1964 : 31) says "perfect love as Wesley understood it, is the conscious certainty, *in a present moment*, of the fullness of one's love for God and neighbor". Wesley says this "love is the fulfilling of the law...Love is the sum of Christian sanctification". (Works VI : 488). He also says:

Till this universal change was wrought in his soul, all his holiness was mixed. ...His love of God was frequently damped, by the love of some creature; the love of his neighbour, by evil surmising, or some thought, if not temper, contrary to love. ...His whole soul is now consistent with itself, there is no jarring string. All his passions flow in a continual stream, with an even tenor to God. (Works VI : 490)

Dunning (1988 : 465) shows Wesley's progression towards perfect love:

Wesley interprets the Christian life as a process of developing love that moves along in part by way of definable stages. Love is instilled in the heart in regeneration. From that point on, there is a gradual development that knows no *finis*, not even death. But there is an instantaneous moment in the process that may be called perfect love, or entire sanctification, perfect only in the sense of being unmixed.

### **2.2.5 CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AND SIN EXPLAINED**

Christian perfection is not absolute sinlessness or perfection in knowledge and nor is it escape from human infirmities. "It seemed so obvious to Wesley that no human state is absolute (yet) he was constantly baffled by those who misconstrued his teachings to this effect". (Outler 1964 : 31). Christian perfection enables a person to live without sin for it

is perfect "love expelling sin". (Dunning 1988 : 465) If this 'expelling of all sin' was not possible, then God's grace would not be sufficient. Outler (1964 : 32) explains:

To deny this as at least a possibility seemed to Wesley to imply that deliberate sin is inevitable and unavoidable--which would be to say that man was made to sin and that his sinful disposition is invincible. But this effectively impugns (*questions*) God's sovereignty as well as his goodness. The assumption that our 'wandering thoughts' have power superior to grace entails the consequence that sin inheres in man's created essence, and from this it follows that sin is a part of God's design and purpose. (Italics added).

Langford (1983 : 40) concurs with Outler, when in response to Wesley's argument against the notion that perfection can only be reached at death, he says "Wesley argued that such a notion limits God's ability to affect human life. He could not escape the theoretical possibility of God's redeeming power, for surely the Holy Spirit can convey such transformative power". Dieter (1987 : 13-14) also explains Wesley's position that it is possible to escape the clutches of sin in this lifetime. He says:

He (Wesley) never allowed that entirely sanctified Christians could become sinless in the sense that they could not fall again into sin through disobedience. He did teach that so long as men and women were the creatures of free will, they were able to respond obediently or disobediently to the grace of God. They would never be free from the *possibility* of deliberate, wilful sinning in this life. They could, however, be delivered from the *necessity* of voluntary transgressions by living in moment-by-moment obedience to God's will.

### **2.3 THE BASIS OF WESLEY'S POSITION ON SANCTIFICATION.**

Outler (1991 : 21-37) coined the term 'quadrilateral' as a means of defining Wesley's four-fold base of authority. Although Wesley stood Scripture in a class on its own as a source for authority, he also looked to three other areas when weighing the validity of a teaching or practice, namely tradition, reason and experience. Wesley's works are saturated with Scriptural references. In his book, Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition, Langford (1983 : 39) says that Wesley "always regarded himself as a biblical thinker; above all, he intended to be loyal to scriptural teaching", and on the subject of Christian perfection, he writes "in some thirty New Testament passages, especially in the John letters, he (Wesley) found statements with which he had to come to terms". Dieter (1987 : 13) says that "Wesley's lifelong passion for Christian holiness was fired by his conviction that the word of God teaches, by precept and by promise". Wesley affirms this when he says, "There is such a thing as perfection; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture". (Works XI : 441). Then further on in the same work on Christian Perfection, Wesley quotes what is arguably one of the best Scriptural references in support of his position when he uses the words of Jesus as they are found in Matthew 5:48. "Ye shall therefore be perfect, as your heavenly Father who is in heaven is perfect". (Works XI : 444). Wesley was always eager to show how his teachings were, at least in his mind, based on Scripture:

It is the doctrine of St. Paul, the doctrine of St. James, of St. Peter, and St. John; and no otherwise Mr. Wesley's, than as it is the doctrine of every one who preaches the pure and the whole gospel. I tell you, as plain as I can speak, where and when I found this. I found it in the oracles of God, in the Old and New Testament. (Works XI : 444)



## 2.4 WESLEY'S EMPHASIS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF OTHERS

According to Weens (1982 : 22) Wesley does not emphasise experience above Scripture when he says, "while experience is suspect if it stands alone, experience remained indispensable for Wesley". Weens contends that to Wesley religion was useless if it was not able to be experienced. Just as Wesley lived his faith, so he taught the need for all of God's children to experience faith in their lives. This naturally applied to sanctification. To Wesley, it was not just a theory, it was a very real possibility, which could be experienced, and these experiences of sanctification were so important to Wesley, that he devoted time in his schedule to listen to, and record them. It is difficult to say exactly where and when Wesley's strong pull toward the necessity of experience started. We do know that the experience of perfection, recorded by the early church fathers, was an area of study Wesley explored, particularly in his early student years. Outler (1964 : 9-10) says "what fascinated him in these men was their description of 'perfection' ...as the goal ...of the Christian life".

Wesley was convinced that believers in the Methodist societies who were testifying and experiencing the fullness of God's work in their lives, were being made perfect. In early 1760 a revival broke out in Yorkshire. It seems as if Wesley is including the account of an eye witness to this great out-pouring of God at that time when he details the following:

While they expressed the travail of their souls by loud and bitter cries. They had no doubt of the favour of God; but they could not rest while they had anything in them contrary to His nature. One cried out in an agony, 'Lord, deliver me from my sinful nature!' ...one broke out, 'Blessed be the Lord for ever, for He has purified my heart!' another, 'Praise the Lord with me; for He has cleansed my heart from sin;' another cried, 'I am hanging over the pit of hell!' another shrieked out, 'I am in hell! O save me, save me!' while another said, with a far different voice, 'Blessed be

the Lord, for He hath pardoned all my sins!' Thus they continued for the space of two hours, some praising and magnifying God, some crying to Him for pardon or purity of heart, with the greatest agony of spirit. Before they parted, three believed God had fulfilled His word, and cleansed them from all unrighteousness.

Here began that glorious work of sanctification, which had been nearly at a stand for twenty years. ...And wherever the work of sanctification increased, the whole work of God increased. (Works XIII : 349-350)

"Wesley was fascinated by these spiritual assertions that seemed to attest to his long-held teaching that one could be cleansed from all sin ... and experience pure love before death". (Heitzenrater 1995 : 209). In the context of these revivals, and the subsequent testimonies of perfection, Rack (1989 : 398) claims that Wesley placed so much emphasis on their validity, that he equates them as a source of authority along with the scriptures when he says, "Wesley now had numerous examples of claims to the experience which he carefully investigated and often believed". Here are just two examples.

On August 4th, 1775, Wesley recorded this account in his journal:

I preached at Bradford, where the people are all alive. Many here have lately experienced the great salvation, and their zeal has been a general blessing. Indeed, this I always observe, — wherever a work of sanctification breaks out, the whole work of God prospers. Some are convinced of sin, others justified, and all stirred up to greater earnestness for salvation. (Works IV : 51)

In a letter to John Smith, which may have been an assumed name for Dr Thomas Secker.

(Works XII : Footnote, 56) Wesley writes:

Concerning the instantaneous and the gradual work, what I still affirm is this: That I know hundreds of persons, whose hearts were one moment filled with fear, and sorrow, and

pain, and the next with peace and joy in believing, yea, joy unspeakable, full of glory; that the same moment they experienced such a love of God, and so fervent a goodwill to all mankind. (Works XII : 68)

These were all wonderful experiences for Wesley as they gave his work added reason to continue. He would press his preachers to preach and to look for this experience. According to Wesley, the preaching of sanctification had a great effect all through the Methodist movement, and where the experience was preached, so the accounts of personal experience grew. He was convinced that he was preaching and teaching a divine truth, and that those who testified to it were mostly authentic, and for this purpose, Wesley came to realise, God Himself had raised up the Methodists. The very real possibility of experiencing entire sanctification in this life, was "the grand depositum which God has lodged with his people called Methodist; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up". (Works XIII : 9). This was Wesley's great calling (see 4.5 below), but what about his own experience?

## **2.5 WESLEY'S OWN EXPERIENCE**

A significant amount of conjecture exists and varying opinions surround Wesley's experience at Aldersgate Street and whether it was his conversion, his sanctification, both or neither. It is not entirely clear as to what the moment meant to Wesley spiritually. Very few scholars will commit to a definitive interpretation of Wesley's experience at Aldersgate, yet all will conclude that it was significant. Perhaps it was neither his conversion, nor his sanctification. Perhaps it was just one of many significant, if not the most significant, spiritual leaps Wesley took as he sought peace and assurance from God. Outler (1964 : 14) says that "there is ample evidence that fixes the year 1738 as the decisive period in Wesley's change from faith in faith to faith itself, from aspiration to

assurance", and Heitzenrater (1995 : 339) says. "before Aldersgate Wesley would never have been able to speak of perfection in terms of 'the full assurance of faith'". Wesley had been striving for spiritual peace and spiritual fullness for many years, but it had eluded him. Coleman (1990 : 72) details this quest of Wesley's:

For years he had sought to know the reality of personal righteousness. Unsparingly he devoted himself to attain God's blessing through works of devotion and charity--he engaged in regular Bible study and prayer, entering into a small group to seek with others holiness of life, observed frequent attendance at holy Communion, visited the sick and those in prison, gave generously of his means to the poor and naked, served as a minister of the Gospel at home and abroad--but all to no avail. He still had no assurance of salvation.

It was not until his short walk to Aldersgate Street on May 24th, 1738, that his life of service to God took on the significance for which he became so well known. Yet what happened at Aldersgate can in no way be interpreted as the end of his search for full spiritual assurance. Coleman (1990 : 73) incorrectly states that Wesley's "quest ended at Aldersgate". It did not, for even after Aldersgate, "there are times when Wesley doubted if he was a Christian". (Tuttle 1978 : 196). Wesley's own words help clarify this point. On the day of the Aldersgate experience he records the following in his journal which indicates a typical spiritual struggle most Christians have shortly after a great victory in God:

Wednesday 24 . . . I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, "This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?"

After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations; but cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and He "sent me help from his holy place."

Thur. 25. — The moment I awaked, "Jesus, Master," was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon him, and my soul waiting on him continually. ... Yet the enemy injected a fear, "If thou dost believe, why is there not a more sensible change?" I answered, (yet not I,) "That I know not. But this I know, I have 'now peace with God.' And I sin not today, and Jesus my Master has forbid me to take thought for the morrow. (Works I : 98-105)

The above journal entries do not indicate a pessimistic spiritual disposition, but Wesley's thoughts less than a year later reveal a spiritual life which at best was still desperately seeking a deeper experience:

My friends affirm I am mad, because I said I was not a Christian a year ago. I affirm, I am not a Christian now... I have not any love of God. I do not love either the Father or the Son. ...  
 Again, joy in the Holy Ghost I have not. I have now and then some starts of joy in God: But it is not that joy. For it is not abiding.  
 Yet again: I have not 'the peace of God,' that peace, peculiarly so called. The peace I have may be accounted for on natural principles.  
 From hence I conclude,... though I have given, and do give, all my goods to feed the poor, I am not a Christian. I have not the fruits of the Spirit of Christ. Though I have constantly used all the means of grace for twenty years, I am not a Christian. (Works I : 170-172)

Tuttle (1978 : 196) blames this pessimism on Wesley's theology. He says it was Wesley's "rather irresponsible Arminian doctrine held the first few years following Aldersgate which convinced Wesley that if he did not at that moment feel love for and acceptance by God as the all-consuming fires, he was not a Christian". It may be true that in the first few years after Aldersgate, Wesley was relying too much on feelings, but although he did not go on from Aldersgate into a life of endless spiritual bliss, he did become a great servant of the Lord, and a determined exponent of the possibility of Christian Perfection.

Tuttle (1978 : 143) may come closest to interpreting Aldersgate accurately when he calls it Wesley's "evangelical conversion", because it moved him from the formalism of his church to the 'enthusiasm' which he eventually exhibited in his spiritual life until his dying day. Rack (1989 : 396) says that Wesley's Aldersgate experience "seems in fact to contain elements of justification by faith, new birth, assurance and even perfection, all in the same instance", and it "made Wesley a Christian in the full sense of the word and directed his greatness to the needs of the people". (Tuttle 1978 : 217).

Outler (1964 : 22) and Clark (1993 : 19&134) correctly say that Wesley was "no 'professor'" of entire sanctification. Wesley preached strongly on the promises of entire sanctification and "continued to do so to the end of his life without ever, ...being able to testify he had personally experienced their fulfilment". (Smith 1985 : 249). Jessop (1950 : 84) considers the position that Wesley was never sanctified as "the most arrogant argument of all". Jessop (1950 : 85) questions how Wesley could write, preach and talk about an experience which he never had:

Who could have any respect for or confidence in such a man as a spiritual leader if, after all this, he did not know the experience for himself? If Wesley was the man which the world thinks he was, there can be no doubt about his enjoyment of the experience of entire sanctification.

Jessop (1950 : 86) attempts to determine the exact date of Wesley's entire sanctification experience and finds it to be his experience at Snowsfields in December, 1744, six and a half years after Aldersgate, because of the following journal entry:

While I was reading Prayers at Snowsfields, I found such light and strength as I never remember to have had before. I saw every thought, as well as action or word, just as it was rising in my heart; and whether it was right before God, or

tainted with pride or selfishness. I never knew before (I mean not as at this time) what it was "to be still before God."

I waked, (sic) by the grace of God, in the same spirit; and about eight, being with two or three that believed in Jesus, I felt such an awe and tender sense of the presence of God as greatly confirmed me therein: So that God was before me all the day long. I sought and found him in every place; and could truly say, when I lay down at night, "Now I have lived a day." (Works I : 478-479)

McLeister (1976 : 4), in volume one of the Wesleyan History Series, cites a letter Wesley wrote in 1771, as his testimony to being entirely sanctified, "which was the first blessing he and his brother Charles started out to obtain". In the letter, Wesley writes the following:

Many years since I saw that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." I began following after it, and inciting all with whom I had any intercourse to do the same. Ten years after, God gave me a clearer view than I had before of the way how to attain this; namely, by faith in the Son of God. And immediately I declared to all, "We are saved from sin, we are made holy, by faith." This I testified in private, in public, in print; and God confirmed it by a thousand witnesses. I have continued to declare this for above thirty years; and God hath continued to confirm the word of his grace. (Works XII : 368)

It seems clear in this letter that Wesley is testifying more to the revelation God gave him as to how one is sanctified, than an explicit testimony about experiencing the blessing himself. With this ongoing uncertainty about Wesley ever being entirely sanctified, one would ask where Wesley found the spiritual peace and strength that would fill his life in later years. Outler (1964 17-18) contends that it was not so much the Aldersgate experience which established Wesley's faith, but that it was the visible fruits of his preaching in Bristol and beyond which did it. Outler says:

It is most impressive to observe the marked effect this success at Bristol had on Wesley's spiritual equilibrium. Up to this point the story is full of anxiety, insecurity, futility. Hereafter, the instances of spiritual disturbances drop off sharply and rarely recur, ... Whitefield had shown him that the Word rightly preached bears visible fruit. And now, before his eyes, was a harvest of such fruit. What had happened was that he had preached faith until *others* had it, and now his own was confirmed by theirs! For the next half-century, in failure and triumph, tumult and peace, obloquy and fame, the picture rarely varies: A man with an overmastering mission, acutely self-aware but rarely ruffled, often in stress but always secure on a rock-steady foundation.

If Wesley attained Christian Perfection in his life time, it is possible that it was more a gradual work, than an instantaneous one, and the fact that Wesley never testifies to it could be because he could never point to a moment when it was confirmed to him. In a letter to his brother Charles, dated June 27, 1766, almost thirty years after Aldersgate, Wesley indicates his leaning toward the gradual work of God in a believer, when he tells Charles to "go on, in your own way, what God has peculiarly called you to. Press the instantaneous blessings: Then I shall have more time for my peculiar calling, enforcing the gradual work". (Works XII : 130). Although emphasising both gradual and instantaneous works of perfection, it could be argued that Wesley favoured the former. He pressed his hearers to be diligent, patient, and zealous for good works, in this gradual work of God's which leads to perfection. As to his lack of testimony regarding the work in his own life, some have suggested he may have not wanted to appear spiritually proud or boastful. Outler (1964 : 32) says that "the gift of perfection is to be sought and expected—but never scheduled or advertised". If Wesley did not experience Christian Perfection in his life, he certainly believed in the possibility of it and confirmed it in numerous believers around him. He would have searched for it along with thousands of other Methodists. He



showed that he was earnest and extremely diligent in his pursuit of it, and that any lack thereof, did not keep him from doing his best for his God, and as Heitzenrater (1995 : 48) says, Christian Perfection would "act as a compass for his lifelong spiritual pilgrimage". This pilgrimage led him to serve society by saving as many souls as he could, and to work for reform wherever he saw the need.

### 3.1 WESLEY'S VARIOUS SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

John Wesley never allowed himself the indulgence of just seeing the pain and suffering in society without getting actively involved in it. He did not preach and pray without offering practical assistance. Wesley's faith led him to help, reform and save those less fortunate than himself. If God can save a person from their sins and cleanse their hearts of all unrighteousness then surely, Wesley believed, God can do it in society too. By addressing social issues Wesley and the Methodists were expressing their holiness in practical ways.

Wesley's diverse social concerns are evidenced in the following account he gave of money entrusted to his care. (Works XIII : 173). It also shows his diligence in wanting to account accurately for every penny used.

DEAR SIR, February 4, 1750-1.

THE money you left in my hands was disposed of as follows: —

	£. s. d.
To the Lending Stock	02 02 00
To Eliz. Brooks, expecting daily to have her goods seized for rent	01 01 00
To Eliz. Room (a poor widow) for rent	00 05 00
Toward clothing Mary Middleton and another poor woman, almost naked	00 10 00
To John Edger, a poor weaver, out of work	00 05 00
To Lucy Jones, a poor orphan	00 02 00
To a poor family, for food and fuel	00 05 00
To Christopher Brown, out of business	00 02 06
To an ancient woman in great distress	00 02 06
Distributed among several sick families	<u>00 10 00</u>
	05 05 00

This shows how Wesley was involved in helping people in whatever sort of need they found themselves. There is no way Wesley could have done this effectively alone. He had to set up an organisational structure to provide the necessary infrastructure for the success of the movement. This was one of the many areas in which Wesley excelled. Latourette (1997 : 1026) called him an "extraordinarily able organiser and administrator". He set up a very tightly structured network of 'helpers' or preachers, all of whom need to be credited with the success of the Methodist movement. To keep these helpers focused they had to attend regular meetings where they gave account of their work and where problems could be settled. Part of this structure was a set of twelve rules (Works VIII : 309-310) which included diligence about one's time, speech, judgements and morals. The motto for the helper was "holiness unto the Lord" and their all-encompassing task was to "save souls". Wesley made it clear that these workers were expected to keep the rules and to do the work assigned to them with great care and commitment. He also made it clear that they were responsible to him, and subject to his authority. Wesley employed them "or dropped them ... as he thought fit" (Rack 1989 : 243), and Walker (1985 : 604) recognises that "over all the multitudinous concerns of Methodism he exercised a wise but absolute authority".

Wesley also used woman preachers, or at least approved of them, which was yet another way he broke from traditional moulds of ministry. Rack (1989 : 244) says that Wesley "always had a tenderness for holy women", which is why he could not refuse another worker for the Lord, solely on the basis of gender. Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet were just two of the woman who Wesley found extremely useful in the Methodist movement. Mrs Crosby, who was widowed at the age of twenty and never remarried, was one such woman preacher. She was the leader of a class-meeting in 1761, and at times had over two hundred people to hear her preach. (Tyerman 1873 : II : 398). In a letter to Sarah Crosby, Wesley encouraged her to be "willing to follow wherever he (the

Lord) leads". (Works XII : 355). Wesley compliments Mrs Crosby on her preaching ability, when in a letter to Miss Jane Hilton, (Works XII : 380) later Mrs Barton, he says that Mrs Crosby was good at "exciting believers to go on to perfection". This would never have happened in the Church of England, but Wesley probably concluded since God saves and sanctifies any who sincerely call on Him, then surely God can use anyone to propagate His message, women included.

Although the following ten areas of Wesley's social involvement came about as a result of his burdened heart for those in need and the hard work of concerned Methodists, it was their sense of God's calling to spread holiness which was constantly before them. As they preached they also served in action. The possibility of being made perfect in the Lord would be accepted more readily when God was seen to be at work improving society, particularly in areas where those being helped had thought improvement was almost impossible.

### **3.1.1 HELPING THE POOR**

From the first formation of the informally organised but sincere group at Oxford, and throughout his life, Wesley did all he could to alleviate the suffering of the needy. One group who benefited greatly from the help of Wesley and the Methodist societies was the poor. On November 3rd 1740 he wrote, "we distributed, as every one had need, among the numerous poor of our society, the clothes of several kinds". (Works I : 291). Wesley never provided for the poor in a distant and condescending fashion, but was willing to get close to the people and spend time with them. When he and his preachers were in London they would visit the "Poor House", (see points 3.1.2 and 3.1.4) sharing their meal around a common table. (Works VIII : 265).

Wesley could not accept the popular notion that poverty was an intended state of existence ordained by God. De Gruchy, (1993 : 22) in referring to Wesley's sermon on "Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations" (Works VI : 91) writes:

Wesley would also have no part in the belief that poverty was in some special way intended and thus blessed by God. His experience of poverty in England left him in no doubt that those without food, clothing and shelter suffered terribly. Those who thought otherwise, according to Wesley, had no idea as to the horrors of poverty.

Wesley also rejected the idea that those who were poor, were only so because they were lazy. He considered the idea to be "so wickedly, devilish false" (Works II : 280) because on one particular visit to the poor, Wesley found that although they were hungry, cold and weak all those who could work were employed. Weens (1982 : 40) refers to comments by Outler when he says that, "Outler knows of no other person in Wesley's century who so identified himself with the English poor or whose identification was more heartily accepted by them". Ministry to the poor had a dual purpose. When the poor felt the genuine concern of the Methodists, and saw their social situation improve, they became more receptive to the message, and when they accepted the message, a natural inclination developed to improve their lot in life. In addition to this, perfection was held out to them as an attainable goal, so if God could lift them out of physical poverty, then God could also lift them out of spiritual poverty.

### **3.1.2 HOMELESS CHILDREN**

Wherever possible Wesley and the Methodists used existing buildings for their work. Where and when needed, they resorted to building community centres, which was the case in Newcastle. Wesley and his helpers built a house which was used for teaching,

preaching and study. It also housed some of the homeless children and served as "a refuge for the injured and oppressed, the northern home of Wesley, and the 'theological institution' of his preachers". (Tyerman 1873 : I :543). They called this the Orphan-House, and a similar facility they operated in London was called the Poor House. (Works VIII : 265). Both of these buildings were used, in part, to house homeless children.

### 3.1.3 EDUCATION

A good and affordable education was of particular concern to Wesley. He himself had an excellent Oxford education, but he preached to masses of people who had little or no education. It disturbed Wesley greatly when he came across children who were working in factories at a very young age, rather than being at school. He was also disturbed by the state of existing educational structures, of which he had four basic criticisms. He felt that the existing schools were mostly centred around large towns, that they admitted just anyone; the masters had little religion and the instruction was not well planned. (Rack 1989 : 355). Wesley's model for education was quite different. His idea of Christian education was for the "forming of their minds, through the help of God, to wisdom and holiness, by instilling the principles of true religion, speculative and practical, and training them up in the ancient way, that they might be rational, Scriptural Christians". (Works XIII : 293).

The town Wesley chose for a school was Kingswood, in the west of England. According to Wesley's own account, it was a decadent town. The people were "famous...for neither fearing God nor regarding man: so ignorant of the things of God; that they seemed but one remove from the beasts that perish". (Works I : 251). A year after George Whitefield's successful preaching there Wesley wrote that the city no longer "resounds with cursing and blasphemy. It is no more filled with drunkenness and uncleanness... Peace and love

are there". (Works I : 251). The school which Wesley and the Methodists established ensured that "their children too might know the things which make for their peace". (Works I : 252). Wesley also established a school at Bristol and used 'The Poor House' in London, which was originally for widows, as a school.

Parents who could, paid for the schooling, but for the most part the cost of operating the schools came from society funds and offerings. Some of the children were also clothed at the school and for those who really needed it, lodging was given. At one stage the school in the Poor House alone was catering for around sixty children. (Works VIII : 266) Wesley had to contend with social suspicion and prejudice regarding the need to educate the poor. One of his primary concerns in this regard, as with everything he did, was the salvation of the children's souls:

Throughout the eighteenth century day and Sunday schools for the poor had to meet the suspicion that, far from helping to control the poor, education might make them resistant to authority and spoil them for their lowly place in the labour market. For the religious people, indeed, the primary hope was that children might be snatched from the devil early, and this was certainly prominent in Wesley's mind. (Rack 1989 : 354)

Revival swept the school at Kingswood in April 1768 (Works III : 319) and again in September 1770. (Works III : 414) On these occasions the boys could be heard praying and calling out to God from inside their rooms. They would gather in voluntary groups for prayer and many found themselves falling down before the Lord in the hall-ways. This is what Wesley was hoping to achieve. Although he had genuine concern for the material needs in society, he longed to see men and women, and in this case young boys, call out to God in repentance and move toward holiness. The school at Kingswood however, did not always flourish. Tyerman (1873 : III 397-398) quotes Wesley from the

Methodist conference minutes of 1783 as saying the following about the state of the school:

Here it was that I proposed to educate a few children, according to the accuracy of the Christian model. And almost as soon as we began, God gave us a token for good... But, at present, the school does not, in any wise, answer the design of its institution, either with regard to religion or to learning. The children are not religious...Neither do they improve in learning.... It must be mended or ended. (These comments also appear in Works XIII : 301-302)

Tyerman (1873 : III 398) says "this was a dark picture; doubtless the result of bad management." Wesley hired new staff for the school and a fresh revival swept over it just twelve months later. In 1786 he said "I went over to Kingswood, and found the school in excellent order", (Works IV : 327) and later he considered the school to be "one of the pleasantest spots in England". (Works IV : 343). Wesley would have no more complaints about the school.

It has already been established that Wesley was committed to ministering to the whole individual, body, mind and soul. In 1783 he published "A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children", (Works XIII : 474-477) in which he sets forth what would today be considered "a child-centred approach to religious education". (Rack 1989 : 353). Not all of Wesley's thoughts on education would be accepted today. His notions that children do not need to play and that they had to be up by four every morning would certainly be rejected. (Works XIII : 285).



### **3.1.4 CARING FOR THE WIDOWED**

Wesley was always aware of the needs and suffering of people around him and he would often apply relevant scriptures to these needs. In commenting on the neglect of some widows in Jerusalem, as recorded in Acts chapter six, Wesley said it was "a manifest breach of brotherly love...a sin both against justice and mercy". (Works VI : 257) It is therefore no surprise that when the needs of widows in Wesley's day became apparent, he did something about it. Wesley had noticed that several widows could not provide for themselves and had no one to take care of them. (Works VIII : 265). This situation tugged at Wesley's heart. In consultation with his stewards, they decided to accommodate the widows in two rented houses, which would be less expensive than caring for them in individual homes, and they would be company for each other. They used the funds from the weekly offerings and the Lord's Supper, and although this put them in debt, Wesley was convinced that the 'Lord who owned the earth and all in it', would provide for them who 'defended the cause of the widows'. (Works VIII : 265). After some time Wesley had to close the house due to increasing operating costs and lack of support.

### **3.3.5 MINISTRY TO THE IMPRISONED**

Wesley's concern for the imprisoned dates at least as far back as his days with the 'Holy Club' at Oxford in the 1730's. In addition to commitments to prayer and helping the poor, the group was also concerned with the state of prisoners and the prisons. Wesley's journals have numerous entries of his preaching to and concern for the prisoners. He and his brother Charles would often meet with condemned prisoners just before their execution in the hope of preparing them for eternity, and they would often accompany them all the way to the gallows, praying and singing on the way. "John also took the

opportunity on at least one occasion to preach to the mob that had gathered to watch the hangings". (Heitzenrater 1995 : 125).

As early as September 1738, Wesley was active in Newgate prison in London (Works I : 158) and in May 1739 he wrote of revival at Newgate prison in Bristol: "All Newgate rang with the cries of those whom the word of God cut to the heart. Two of whom were in a moment filled with joy, to the astonishment of those that beheld them". (Works I : 189). Wesley apparently was reading Scripture and preaching at Newgate every morning, (Works I : 193) and when he was unable to he arranged for others to visit the prison at least once a week. (Works I : 468). He did not always have success with these prison meetings. On one occasion he wrote that he "preached to the condemned malefactors in Newgate; but I could make little impression upon them". (Works II : 302).

Wesley was not just concerned with visiting and preaching to the imprisoned, he campaigned to alleviate the terrible conditions of the prisons and attempted to make the prisons more comfortable for the inmates. In his address on 'Reason and Religion', Wesley condemns the state of prisons like Newgate and Ludgate when he says; "the very place strikes horror into your soul. How dark and dreary! How unhealthy and unclean! How void of all who might minister comfort!...I know not, if...there could be any thing like it on this side of hell". (Works VIII : 173). Wesley also attacked the condition of French prisoners at Knowle in Bristol and on several occasions he organised the collection of linen and clothing for them. (Works III : 23). It is difficult to determine if changes in the state of the prison in Bristol were due to Wesley's influence, but he expressed appreciation for them by writing to the London Chronicle. In his letter he states:

Of all the seats of woe on this side of hell. few, I suppose, exceed or even equal Newgate....so great was the filth, the stench, the misery, and wickedness...how surprised then,

when I was there a few weeks ago!...Every part of it,...as clean and sweet as a gentleman's house,...no fighting or brawling...it is rarely that any one cheats or wrongs another...no drunkenness...nor any whoredom...at any price.  
(Works III : 33-34)

### **3.1.6 CONCERNS ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT**

Wesley encouraged his listeners to be careful about judging those in office (Works XI : 154-155) and that a good quality to look for in a candidate for election, was whether the individual loved God and his country. (Works XI : 196). Wesley had "outspoken loyalty" (Rack 1989 : 373) for the monarchy and was a strong supporter of the Tory party, but he would never withhold blame for poor social conditions where he felt it was warranted. His patriotic spirit did not mean that the country and its rulers were beyond the need for reform and change. He clearly felt that change in some government structures would help alleviate the food problem, thus helping the poor.

The three main causes for the shortage of food and the starving poor were, according to Wesley, "distilling, taxes, and luxury". (Works XI : 57). He wanted to see a total ban on distilling which in his opinion, was causing a shortage of wheat and barley, staple food for the poor. Half of all the country's wheat was being used for the production of that which "destroys not only the strength and life, but also the morals, of our countrymen". (Works XI : 55). As for those who owned and operated distilleries, Wesley considered them to be murderers. (Works VI : 129). Shepherd (1988 : 27) offers some startling facts in this regard:

In 1684 Britain distilled 527,000 gallons of spirits. By 1750 the flow reached eleven million. (For a total population of only five million people!) Of the two thousand houses in St. Giles, London, 506 were gin shops.

Weens (1983 : 41) considers Wesley's crusade against distilling as "second only to his stand against the slave trade". He goes on to say that Wesley's opposition to the sale, trade and use of liquor was on "social, humanitarian, and religious grounds".

Wesley also wanted higher taxes on horses because they consumed too much of the oats crop, higher taxes on men's carriages, a limit on the size of farms so as to avoid monopolisation, (Works XI : 56) and a reduction in the national debt. It wasn't enough to Wesley, to just save souls and preach holiness. He lived as if God expected him to do what he could about the needs of those around him.

### **3.1.7 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR SELF HELP**

Because Wesley was committed to ministering to the total man, when someone suggested that they set up a means whereby the poor and unemployed could help themselves, he was willing to give it a try. In 1740 they introduced a system whereby twelve of the poorest people in the society in London were set up in a small cotton spinning and carding operation. It proved to be a success and "they were employed and maintained with very little more than the produce of their own labour". (Works I : 292).

Wesley also set up a loan fund to help people in need, and for others to start their own business enterprises. The money was collected by Wesley who apparently "went from one end of London to the other, and, in a few days, begged £50" (Tyerman 1873 : I : 550) which helped more than 250 people over a period of one year. (Works II : 17). "There were many needs among the people that the Methodists served, and financial support was sought from every possible source". (Heitzenrater 1995 : 127). They started off lending no more than twenty shillings, but by 1772 they were lending up to five pounds at a time. (Works VIII : 267). At one stage Wesley had up to one hundred and twenty pounds in

the "lending-stock". (Works III : 271). Rack (1989 : 441) recognises this aspect of Wesley's work when he says that Wesley often collected money to help "tradesmen down on their luck". One of the great success stories to come from this scheme was a cobbler by the name of James Lackington, who was loaned money to start a book business:

The well known Lackington, who about the year 1774 was penniless, but who, with the help of Wesley's fund, began a book business, which grew to such immense dimensions, that, eighteen years afterwards, its annual sales were more than a hundred thousand volumes, from which Lackington, the quondam cobbler, realised the noble income of £5 000 a year. (Tyerman 1873 : I : 550-551)

Wesley's goal for those assisted by the loan fund, was that through hard work and honest living they would inevitably lift themselves out of poverty. For this reason Methodists were known to be reliable workers and were often sought by employers looking for new employees.

### **3.1.8 WORDS AND WARNINGS FOR THE RICH**

To Wesley the state of poverty was not due to laziness of the poor, but a product of sin and greed on the part of the wealthy. He was convinced that the love of money could not only destroy an individual but it could also destroy a nation. According to Charles White (1988 : 21) Wesley was convinced that the love of money was the one sure sin which would cause God to withhold revival from His people. The fact that so many did not have enough for their basic needs when there were more than enough resources for the entire world, was an indication to Wesley that there were some who just did not care, and worse still, who were exploiting the poor. This was unacceptable to him. "It was not the sins of the poor but the blunders of those who, by their power and influence, controlled

the system that was responsible for the widespread poverty in the land". (Watkins 1937 : 120).

Wesley strongly encouraged people to take care of themselves and their families, and if a person gained in wealth they were to use at least some of it on some worthy social cause. Wesley believed that man was a channel through whom God met the needs of the poor and the hungry. He had a "practical understanding of the reciprocity of (the) Christian faith and social responsibility". (Outler 1964 : 238). It is to this 'calling' that all Christians ought to respond. Obedience to God meant not only personal holiness, but a desire to see society holy and reformed. In this regard the rich had an obligation before God and before society to give from their wealth, so that the poor could be cared for, children could be educated, homeless people and widows helped. In his sermon on 'The More Excellent Way' Wesley says that "every pound you give to the poor is put into the bank of heaven. And it will bring glorious interest". (Works VII : 37). After preaching to a group of people which included two stage coaches full of 'Gentry', Wesley wrote in his journal "O how hard it is for these to enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Works II : 379), and in his sermon on "The Wisdom of God's Counsel" (Works VI : 331), Wesley has these rather sobering words on riches:

But of all temptations, none so struck at the whole work of God as "the deceitfulness of riches;" a thousand melancholy proofs of which have seen within these last fifty years...And yet I have not known threescore rich persons, perhaps not half the number, during threescore years, who, as far as I can judge, were not less holy than they would have been had they been poor. By riches I mean...him...who has food and raiment for himself and family, without running into debt, and something over. And how few are there in these circumstances who are not hurt, if not destroyed, thereby! Yet who takes warning?

Wesley was extremely concerned that the Methodists who worked hard and lived honestly were accumulating wealth, rather than giving it away. They were not heeding the third of his three fold admonition about money, which was to earn all they could by hard work; save all they could by frugal living; and give all they could so as to store up treasures in heaven. It was a concern which never left Wesley until his death. In the fourteen sermons Wesley wrote in the last two years of his life "he again and again, in the strongest and most affecting language, reverts to this momentous matter" (Tyerman 1873 : III : 636) about the Methodists and their riches. Wesley lived his concern by example because he gave away all the money he could, leaving only enough to live from day to day. He would often say that if he died with more than ten pounds in his possession, he could be considered a thief. Weens (1982 : 39) writes, "believing that money is a good servant but a bad master, Wesley chose to use his own money to serve others. He literally gave away most of his income through the years".

### **3.1.9 MEDICINE**

Wesley never shied away from laying blame where he felt blame was due. No profession was beyond his criticism and reforming spirit, and the medical profession was no exception. He criticised doctors for charging excessive fees and urged them to help the poor, at no cost if need be. He even felt that some doctors were prolonging the suffering of patients rather than curing them speedily, so that they can "plunder his (the patients) substance". (Works VI : 129.).

Because Wesley "was always open to continued refinements in the light of emerging needs" (Heitzenrater 1995 : 182) he sought ways to help the poor medically. For those who could not read complicated medical books Wesley wrote his own called, Primitive

Physic, which was first published in 1747. Here is an extract from the book in which Wesley justifies its usefulness:

If it be said, "But what need is there of such attempt" I answer, The greatest that can possibly be conceived. Is it not needful in the highest degree to rescue men from the jaws of destruction? from wasting their fortunes, as thousands have done, and continue to do daily? from pining away in sickness and pain, either through the ignorance or dishonesty of physicians; yea, and many times throwing away their lives, after their health, time, and substance?  
 Is it inquired, "But are there not books enough already on every part of the art of medicine?" Yes, too many ten times over, considering how little to the purpose the far greater part of them speak. But, beside this, they are too dear for poor men to buy, and too hard for plain men to understand.  
 (Works XIV : 312)

The book underwent several editions in his life time and is still available today. In it Wesley stays true to his desire to minister to the whole person because he includes advice on good diet, correct emotions and a proper relationship with God, as the cure for most ills and the way to stay healthy. (Works XIV : 307 - 318). Again we see Wesley's consistency in not just being a theorist, but also extremely practical. In addition to Primitive Physic he started a number of medical assistance programs for the poor, starting in London. At a Methodist society meeting in London he announced that he would consult with the sick himself. With the help of an Apothecary and a surgeon, he attended to the sick. (Works VIII : 264). Within six months they had seen and given medicine to over five hundred patients. Wesley said that many of them he had never seen before because the service was not only for those in the society. He also notes that many were cured of sicknesses which were previously considered incurable. (Works VIII : 265). Rack (1989 : 361) claims that this practise of "offering amateur medical services to the poor" was common among Anglican clergy of that time, but for Wesley it was also "an



exercise in charity and compassion". (Rack 1989 : 362). Wesley was appalled at the lack of help extended to the sick, especially when compared with the way heathen Indians of North America cared for their sick. His journal entry on February 8th 1753, reflects these feelings when he wrote "O who will convert the English into honest Heathen". (Works II : 279).

### **3.1.10 SLAVERY**

It is difficult to list in order of importance what brought the most pain to Wesley's heart. There is no doubt that the suffering of the poor and the plight of poor children was of tremendous concern to Wesley. The entire practice of slavery also ranks near the top of Wesley's list of social concerns. Weens (1982 :40) says that "Wesley used the sharpest words in his vigorous attack on slavery". The Jackson edition of Wesley's works (reprint 1979) includes a footnote to Wesley's letter to Mr Wilberforce. The foot note, probably written by Mr. Thomas Jackson, refers to Wesley as having a "deep and unabated interest" (Works XIV : 153) in the abolition of slavery, and De Gruchy (1993 : 83) says his "relentless fight against the institution...was a fight he never gave up". Outler (1964 : 85) writes that Wesley's concern with slavery was a "long standing moral" issue in which he was active "throughout his ministry". (Outler 1964 : 85). Tyerman (1873 : III : 115) suggests that Wesley:

**Was one of the first advocates on behalf of the enthralled African that England had, and that sixty years before slavery was abolished in the dominions of Great Britain, he denounced the thing in the strongest terms it was possible to employ.**

In 1774 Wesley published a tract called "Thoughts Upon Slavery" (Works XI : 59-79) which went through several editions and was widely circulated in England and America.

Although it is generally accepted that much of the contents came from someone else's work, Outler (1964 : 86) says it was done as an endorsement of what was written and not as an act of plagiarism. In the tract Wesley puts forward a very systematic argument against the institution of slavery. In response to attempts to justify the practice, Wesley attacks several arguments used to support slavery. He details that the land the slaves were abducted from was not "horrid, dreary, and barren" (Works XI : 60), but that it was fertile, prosperous and good for feeding large herds. (Works XI : 61). The people were quiet, well mannered and they took care of their old and sick and there were no beggars among them. (Works XI : 62, 64). Wesley states that the slaves were not procured by honest means but by fraud and by force. They were either seized in a type of raid on the unsuspecting people, or they were sold by other Africans who had captured them during times of supposed war which were in fact induced by the slave hunters. (Works XI : 65). The notion that parents were selling their own children was refuted as "utterly false". (Works XI : 66). The slaves were not given adequate sleep and food. Wesley was obviously disgusted with the general treatment of the slaves when he wrote the following:

And what can be more wretched than the condition they then enter upon? Banished from their country, from their friends and relations for ever, from every comfort of life, they are reduced to a state scarce anyway preferable to that of beasts of burden. In general a few roots, not of the nicest kind, usually yams or potatoes, are their food; and two rags, that neither screen them from the heat of the day, nor the cold of the night, their covering. Their sleep is very short, their labour continual, and frequently above their strength, so that death sets many of them at liberty before they have lived out half their days. (Works XI : 68)

After presenting such a grim picture of the state of slavery, Wesley attacks the fact that it is a practice protected by law. He says: "I absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of natural justice". (Works XI : 70). Again Wesley shows his

willingness to attack laws and those who make the laws if such laws are contrary to Scripture and reason. To Wesley slavery was inconsistent with mercy, justice and truth and he repudiates the argument that the slaves were needed for the colonies and that they offered wealth and glory to the nation. For Wesley it would be better for the colonies needing the slaves to sink into the ocean forever and he felt that "wealth is not necessary to the glory of any nation; but wisdom, virtue, justice, mercy, generosity, public spirit, love of our country". (Works XI : 73). He also states that:

Better no trade, than trade procured by villainy. It is far better to have no wealth, than to gain wealth at the expense of virtue. Better is honest poverty, than all the riches bought by the tears, and sweat, and blood, of our fellow-creatures. (Works XI : 74)

Not forgetting his ultimate calling to save souls and to spread holiness, Wesley appeals to the slave trader and slave owners to consider their own spiritual states:

May I speak plainly to you? I must. Love constrains me; love to you, as well as to those you are concerned with. Is there a God? You know there is. Is he a just God? Then there must be a state of retribution; a state wherein the just God will reward every man according to his works. Then what reward will he render to you? O think betimes! before you drop into eternity! Think now, "He shall have judgement without mercy that showed no mercy." Are you a man? Then you should have an human heart. But have you indeed? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do you never feel another's pain? Have you no sympathy, no sense of human woe, no pity for the miserable? When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, or the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-creatures, was you a stone, or a brute? Did you look upon them with the eyes of a tiger? When you squeezed the agonising creatures down in the ship, or when you threw their poor mangled remains into the sea, had you no relenting? Did not one tear drop from your eye, one sigh escape from your breast? Do you feel no relenting now? If

you do not, you must go on, till the measure of your iniquities is full. Then will the great God deal with you as you have dealt with them, and require all their blood at your hands. And at "that day it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for you!" But if your heart does relent, though in a small degree, know it is a call from the God of love. (Works XI : 76-77)

In the above admonition Wesley was appealing to every person who had some role to play in the slave trade, from the hunters, traders, owners of vessels, owners of plantations and the law makers. To all of them Wesley said: "Have no more any part in this detestable business". (Works XI : 78). All humans had rights which deserved to be honoured. Where these rights were trampled on by sinful people, Wesley knew God could restore and replace lost dignity and self worth. Of all human beings Wesley says, "liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air; and no human law can deprive him of that right which he derives from the law of nature". (Works XI : 79). He closes the tract with a prayer in which he prays:

O thou God of love, thou who art loving to every man...  
 have compassion upon these outcasts of men, who are  
 trodden down as dung upon the earth! Arise, and help  
 these that have no helper, whose blood is spilt upon the  
 ground like water.... O burst thou all their chains in  
 sunder...make them free, that they may be free indeed!  
 (Works XI : 79)

Wesley's final letter written four days before he died was to Mr. Wilberforce, who was a member of parliament and an active critic of slavery. In support of Wilberforce, Wesley warns and encourages him that although many will oppose his stand against slavery, "if God be for you, who can be against you?" (Works XIII : 153).

### 3.2 WESLEY'S IMPACT ON ENGLAND AND BEYOND

Some writers like Rack (1989 : 360) argue that Wesley's impact on the religious and social scene in England was minimal, short lived and often only in a supportive role, "mostly by his pen". He does concede, however, that Wesley's concern about the poor led "him to practical action" (Rack 1989 : 360), but that this was nothing out of the ordinary in that day and age since "charity was an accepted part of Christian duty". (Rack 1989 : 361). Villa-Vicencio (1989 : 96) contends that Wesley's emphasis on the work ethic did not help the poor, but only played into the hands of the wealthy who benefited from, and even exploited, the hard working Methodists. He also argues that although "Wesley totally rejected the possibility of being a solitary Christian", (Villa-Vicencio 1989 : 97) his emphasis on individual confession and spiritual maturation was detrimental to the saving or reforming of society as a whole. He claims that this impacted the cause of oppressed peoples in other parts of the world who had "ecclesial divisions" (Villa-Vicencio 1989 : 92) imposed upon their culture by missionaries, rather than embracing a broader theological horizon which is needed to take on evils of the day. (Villa-Vicencio 1989 : 102). There are, however, many who believe that Wesley's efforts and the work of the Methodists as a whole, made a significant and lasting impact on England and beyond. W.T.Watkins (1937 : 92), a veteran Church History professor who served at Emory University, gives credit to the early Methodists when he says:

The Wesleyan Revival became the greatest social force in the modern period of history because, as has nothing else, it lifted the common people out of their feeling of inferiority....Wesley had found the supreme word of hope and he translated it into the opposites of the gloom that was hovering over a century.

Hynson (1982 : 27) says that Wesley was an "evangelist-reformer without peer in the eighteenth century", while some even credit the Methodist revivals with being instrumental in keeping the French Revolution out of Britain. Pillay's (1991 : 208) reason for this is that the Methodist movement "addressed itself to the frustrations of the working class". Wesley's positive message of hope and the attainable goal of perfect love was something to strive for in one's spiritual life, and the very practical results of seeing the rewards of hard work and clean living, inspired thousands to look to themselves and their God for the answers to society, rather than to a solution from the government. Wesley's message was not only practical, it was also relevant to the people and their needs. It appealed to the masses who were living in difficult times. Shelley (1982 : 360) says this about Wesley's impact on society:

Wesley continued preaching almost to the end of his days. He died in London, 2 March 1791, approaching eighty-eight years of age. When the burning brand finally went out, he left behind 79,000 followers in England and 40,000 in North America. If we judge greatness by influence he was among the greats of his times.

Wesley's impact and the revival he represents carried far beyond the Methodist Church. It renewed the religious life of England and her colonies. It elevated the life of the poor. It stimulated missions overseas and the social concerns of evangelicals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Although it would be extremely naive to assert that Wesley single handedly led all of England into a period of spiritual restoration, he did impact the lives of thousands of people, who influenced the lives of thousands more. De Gruchy (1993 : 91-92) summarises Wesley's life this way:

He helped as he was able to from his own pocket. He organised and rallied the support of the Methodist societies and encouraged others to make their particular contribution.

He used his skills as a preacher and as a writer, writing tracts and newspaper articles, to make people aware of the plight of the poor and to move them into action. Wesley was not daunted by the prospect of challenging and appealing either to local or national authorities. He was bold enough to argue for changes in legislation and in some cases for the scrapping of legislation.

There is no way of adequately calculating to what extent his work was effective. We do know that Wesley not only ministered to souls, but he also ministered to lives. He stood beside people in their poverty and worked with them to get out of it. His preaching compelled people to search their hearts and to make peace with God, while his social work gave them a way of making their spiritual hopes work in reality. This happened over and over again, in thousands of lives, in thousands of families, in hundreds of communities, across England and North America, and today the impact of his work stretches around the world. Walker (1985 : 605) believed that Wesley "revolutionized the religious condition of the English lower and middle classes". This is Wesley's greatest impact, which will, forever, remain incalculable. Wesley's message of a pure heart and his practical expression of that message took people out of the gutter into a new life, for themselves and their families.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### SANCTIFICATION AND SOCIAL CONCERN: INSEPARABLE FOR WESLEY'S CHRISTIAN

With Scripture as his priority, Wesley used and emphasised the "collective Christian wisdom of other ages,...and ours,...the discipline of critical reason,... (and) the requirements of 'experience'" (Outler 1991 : 28). By emphasising the experiential Wesley was moving his theology from the confines of Anglican tradition to become the liberating good news he loved to preach and see at work in the lives of thousands who flocked to hear him. In this regard Wesley was opening up the way for his emphasis of perfect love for God and perfect love for people, which should not just be a Scriptural ideal, just as it should not remain confined to church tradition. It thrust Wesley and his followers into the world around them, not out of duty, but out of love, and into an inseparable dual ministry. A strong motivating force behind Wesley's preaching on Christian perfection and his emphasis on social involvement, was his understanding that he and the Methodists were not just dealing with earthly matters, but that their work would impact on their eternal lives and the eternal lives of those they came in contact with. A life of perfect love for God and man expressing itself in zealous good works, would help prepare the believer for eternity and encourage those around them to follow. A Christian life which was void of holy living and good works was in danger of losing not only its sanctification, but also of falling from grace altogether.

Wesley's position on sanctification and the Methodist's views of social concern were not just whims or responses to some feeling of benevolence. Their message and actions were a response, at least in their minds, to a divine injunction. This chapter will assess the



motivating force and rationale behind the message and social ministry of Wesley and the Methodists.

#### 4.1 SALVATION, SANCTIFICATION AND GOOD WORKS

Wesley continually struggled with the accusation that his message and practice encouraged the idea of salvation and sanctification by works. Although he emphasised the need to be zealous for good works and the experiential was always important, Wesley never abandoned the Biblical injunction that sinners are saved by faith and faith alone. "Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of justification...None is justified but he that believes". (Works VI : 48). The spiritual journey to and beyond the experience of sanctification, which starts at justification, should have as it's "criteria...loving God and loving (your) neighbour as yourself". (Hulley 1988 : 21). The life of love, discipline, hard work and honest living which Wesley and the Methodists preached and lived was not a means to salvation, nor was it a means to Christian perfection. Both of these works were gracious gifts of God brought about in the heart of a believer by faith. Weens (1982 : 36) says that "holiness always remains a gift of grace, not a merited achievement". This is true, yet Wesley held salvation and holy living in a balance, or it could be said that he dared to synthesise the two. Outler (1991 : 53) explains that "Wesley's real concern with 'perfection' was that it held soteriology and ethics together in vital balance and so signified the fullness and integrity of the Christian life". Wesley's ideal of a Christian was that of a whole person in body and soul, active in society. The Methodist workers could never justifiably only minister to the sinner's soul, and leave the rest of his life untouched:

Theologically, the critical issue for Wesley ...is the tension that exists between salvation by holy living and salvation by faith alone. That is, if salvation is granted as a free gift of grace, apart from our works (and perhaps even in spite of them), then of what value are good works and a disciplined

life? Wesley as a persistently practical theologian, sought to hold these two dimensions together...Redemption is by grace through faith...the resulting new life is expressed in love of God and neighbor(sic). (Langford 1983 : 21-22)

What Langford refers to here, also applies to Christian perfection, because although it is a work of grace brought about by faith, it does not end there. A concern for those struggling in society should be evidenced in a saved person moving toward holiness, and in a person made holy who is then moving on to greater depths of holiness and ultimately to eternity with the Lord. Without reading and understanding Wesley's broad base for Christian behaviour, it is easy to find an apparent contradiction in this area. Rakestraw (1984 : 200) explains:

On the one hand he maintains that faith is the only condition of sanctification, while on the other hand he teaches that repentance and good works are in some sense necessary for sanctification, and even for continuance in justification.

Rakestraw (1984 : 200) goes on to show that there is no contradiction in Wesley's teachings, but that there is "remarkable consistency in his synergistic view of both justification and sanctification". The role that good works play in the process toward and beyond sanctification is one of intention. The believer who is serious about growing and maturing in the Lord will be committed to serving the Lord in motive and in practice. "Herein is the essence of what Wesley called 'Christian perfection'. It is not maturity in knowledge or in attainment, but a 'purity of intention'". (Coleman 1990 : 83). Wesley can be better understood at this point when the phrase "willingly neglect" (Works VI : 48), which he uses in his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation", (Works VI : 43-54) is considered. Wesley says that we need to cease from doing evil and learn to do good, but "if we willingly neglect to do either, we cannot reasonably expect to be justified at all". (Works VI : 48). Although Rakestraw (1984 : 200) rightly points out that "works in

themselves contribute absolutely nothing positively toward our salvation or holiness", he does say that good works are a "faith-response to God's grace-initiative". (Rakestraw 1984 : 200). Wesley would say that if a believer willingly neglects God's grace-initiative in the area of good works, he is in danger of losing his holiness and his justification before God. In this regard, good works are essential.

Hulley (1988 : 28-29) is clear in his explanation on how becoming a Christian, in Wesley's understanding, produces changes which have moral implications and moral characteristics:

It is obvious that for Wesley becoming a Christian means both an inward and an outward change...Such a change has moral implications. Christian morality and holiness, or ethically good behaviour and holy living seem to be equivalents in Wesley's thinking. It must be remembered that for him being morally good by definition is doing God's will.

Works never produce this change, nor do works produce holiness. Instead, good works and an active concern for the needy in society should be a natural outward product of what God has done internally in the life of a believer, by His grace and the believer's faith. As the believer now walks in obedience to God's will, a walk which is evidenced by the fruit of good works, so God moves them closer to full salvation or entire sanctification.

#### **4.2 PRESSING ON**

Wesley makes extensive use of Paul's declaration in Phillipians 3:12-14, that he had not yet obtained perfection, but was pressing on toward it. In one of these many instances Wesley urges the believers to press on, and never to stop moving on in the Lord. He says "I showed the absolute necessity of 'forgetting the things that are behind,' whether works,

sufferings, or gifts, if we would 'press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling'". (Works I : 295). The Methodist's activities were in part, a practical expression of this need to press on toward perfection. Hynson (1982 : 34) says that this "is a dynamic life to be lived, moving, ascending, ...'going-on' to love's perfection". He also says "a static message challenges no one, but this word from Wesley places us on the road to personal and social health". (Hynson 1982 : 34). This road leads to such things as salvation, perfection, and eventually eternity with the Lord. Outler (1991 : 177) recognises this aspect of Wesley's life and message:

Wesley's constant exhortations to his people (were) to grow; to go on growing, from wherever they were on toward their full human potential. This is clearly a part of what he meant by 'Christian perfection' and also why he insisted that it might be sought and expected 'in this life.'

An intricate and inseparable part of the pressing on was the need to be concerned for the less fortunate in society, and that this concern would be evidenced by a concern for good works. "Such a concern demonstrates Wesley's focus on actual character change and its moral and social implications". (Eli 1990 : 69) It was not an addendum to the new life, but a natural expression of it as the believer moves toward heart holiness and moves beyond the experience of entire sanctification, and onto deeper experiences with the Lord. Wesley wanted his workers to hold high God's standards of perfection, and one of the ways to do this was to press on in service to others:

Methodists were expected to live holy lives. Perfection of love was always held before them as the standard--a love that found expression toward God in purity of devotion and toward people in selfless service. Out of such holiness flowed their personal witness and social compassion. (Coleman 1990 : 36)

This 'pressing on' for Wesley and the Methodists resulted in the social reforming spirit for which they are so well known, and to which so much credit is given. They did not respond only out of theological piety. That would have been hypocritical. They responded and worked because of a genuine deep love for God and for people. They willingly helped and gave themselves to all the social needs listed in chapter three. As Wesley and the Methodists pressed on in holiness, so they made an impact on society. This aspect of Wesley's emphasis is even more clear in his prayer for "Monday Mornings". (Works XI : 210). He prays that he would not hold onto the things of the world, nor cling too tightly to that which he was currently involved with, but that his practical work would assist him in pressing toward the goals that God has for him, and others:

In all my passage through this world, suffer not my heart to be set upon it; but always fix my single eye and my undivided affections on "the prize of my high calling." This one thing let me do; let me so press toward this, as to make all things else minister unto it; and be careful so to use them, as thereby to fit my soul for that pure bliss which thou hast prepared for those that love thee.

#### **4.3 IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S COMMANDMENTS**

In Wesley's life, God not only commanded perfection but He also commanded the expression of that perfection in love for one's neighbours. Wesley's words, thoughts and actions were all dedicated to God in a life of obedience, and his love and action among people was a natural expression of his relationship with God. In Wesley's thinking a Christian who did not fully respond to the commandments of God was not a complete Christian. In his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" (Works XI 366-446) Wesley shows how from the age of twenty three he endeavoured to live in obedience to the Lord:

Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil. (Works XI : 366)

There were no half measures with Wesley. He wanted all that God had for him and he would respond to all God commanded of him. Wesley then shows how these early commitments were confirmed by his reading of God's word:

I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion. Hence I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having "the mind which was in Christ," and of "walking as Christ also walked;" even of having, not some part only, but all the mind which was in him; and of walking as he walked, not only in many or in most respects, but in all things. And this was the light, wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as an uniform following of Christ, an entire inward and outward conformity to our Master. (Works XI : 367)

Walker (1985 : 603) says "no man was ever more positive than he (Wesley) that salvation evidences itself in a life of active, strenuous obedience to the will of God". If Wesley was going to love God with all his heart, he also knew that the "love of God requires, even entails, love of neighbor (sic)". (Bence 1983 : 206). God had commanded that He be loved and that our neighbours be loved too, and for Wesley, this love was "the sum of Christian Perfection". (Works VI : 413). If a Christian was to be obedient they had to be active in the world, loving God and serving God's creation. (Works XIV : 321). In a letter written in 1777 Wesley shows his obedience to the commandments of God:

Yet I find time to visit the sick and the poor; and I must do it, if I believe the Bible, if I believe these are the marks whereby the Shepherd of Israel will know and judge his sheep at the great day; therefore, when there is time and

opportunity for it, who can doubt but this is matter of absolute duty? (Works XII : 304)

#### 4.4 IN RESPONSE TO GOD'S CALLING

Wesley was strongly motivated by the realisation that God had called the Methodist movement to spread holiness throughout the land. In a letter to Mr Brackenbury just months before he died, Wesley once again expresses joy at the fact that someone had found "full sanctification", (Works XIII : 9) after which he declares that "this doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up". This is the calling which, according to Wesley, God had given to him and the people called Methodists. Spreading this message would be Wesley's life long passion.

Many scholars would try and separate Wesley's career into compartments such as theologian, preacher, organisational administrator, and social reformer. Any attempt at this does a disservice to the man and his work. Wesley was not an evangelist one day, administrator another and social reformer at some other time. When Wesley says that God has raised up the Methodists to spread holiness throughout the land, he did not infer that there may be other divine callings to which they may have to answer. Wesley and the Methodist movement was not just a social reforming movement, just as it was not just an evangelistic campaign. At times their calling involved saving souls and at other times Wesley recognised that certain social structures had to change, or at least be challenged, so that the Lord's work would not be hindered. To answer the call to spread holiness meant that some people were helped to find financial security before they saw God's hand at work in their lives, while others responded quickly to the message of salvation and a pure heart, and went on to see that a life of holiness really did make a change. Wesley

saw lives change, dignity restored and he saw numerous examples of Methodists carving out a better life for themselves and their families. The message the nameless masses heard from Wesley and the Methodists was that "you are not a nobody, you are a somebody...you can succeed and even excel in the structures of the society as they stand". (Mosala 1989 : 89). Wesley's calling was to show people that they can be someone, in their own eyes and in God's.

The calling of God placed on the Methodists to spread holiness "was two-dimensional; it (was) a response to the Great Commandment" (Langford 1983 : 41) to love God and others. If Wesley and the Methodists were going to be true to the message of sanctification, faithful to the calling to spread the message, and obedient to the two greatest commandments, then being active in society was inevitable. Their practical response to this calling gave life and vitality to the movement and it often revealed the serious lack of concern for the needy in the established church. "Methodism moves beyond a lifeless, formal religion to one worthy of God, and that is love-love of God and love of neighbor(sic)". (Heitzenrater 1995 : 130). This is also evidenced in Wesley's communication with a parish priest. In a letter to the Rev Downes, and in response to Rev Downes' tract, "Methodists Examined and Exposed" (Works IV : 96 - 109) Wesley shows his commitment to ministering to the whole person with the desire to lead them into a life of holiness. Wesley shows that God's calling involved not only the preaching of His word, but also ministering to their individual needs, such as visiting the sick. Wesley seems to be criticising the extent of Reverend Downes' ministry when he says:

What spiritual intercourse exists between you, the Rector of St. Michael, and the people of your parish? I suppose you preach to them once a week, and now and then read Prayers. Perhaps you visit one in ten of the sick. And is this all the spiritual intercourse which you have with those over whom the Holy Ghost hath made you an overseer? In how



poor a sense then do you watch over the souls for whom you are to give an account to God! Sir, I wish to God there were a truly spiritual intercourse between you and all your people! I wish you "knew all your flock by name, not excepting the men-servants and women-servants!" Then you might cherish each, "as a nurse her own children," and "train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Then might you "warn every one, and exhort every one," till you should "present every one perfect in Christ Jesus." (Works IX : 106-107)

Where Reverend Downes may have been doing too little in his ministry, others suggested that a life detached from the world was a means whereby perfection can be attained. Wesley strongly rejects this because perfect love for God and others can only adequately be expressed by a functioning member of society. Tuttle (1978 : 333-334) suggests that Wesley had taken the separation factor out of the quest for perfection and substituted it with his answer to God's call to spread the message of perfection in the world:

Wesley sifted the gold of mystical purification by detachment and countered its extreme quietism with an emphasis on 'the social factor' which taught that the spiritual experience is not an end in itself, but a means of gathering a 'richer harvest of souls'.

#### **4.5 WORKING TOWARD A BETTER WORLD**

It has been established that Wesley believed in the real possibility of the instantaneous experience and the progressive growth of sanctification. Wesley knew that anyone under the grace of God can change and find a better life for themselves. Because "Wesley was an immensely practical man (and) a visionary", (Tuttle 1978 : 345) his theoretical knowledge and practical experience, coupled with his response to God's high calling to spread holiness inevitably led him and the Methodists to make a better world for themselves, and their followers. They "offered the poor a type of faith and religious life

which met their needs". (Niebuhr 1929 : 60). DeGruchy (1993 : 4) captures the heart of Wesley's life and work when he writes the following:

Wesley's ... starting point is not with a clearly defined systematic theology but rather with the basic needs of the people he encounters. Within his understanding of Scriptural holiness his context provides the material for the shaping of his socio-economic approach. This in turn resulted in a functional ethic rather than a theoretical one. Wesley does not merely condemn economic injustice or speak out against the horrors of poverty. He stands alongside the person in the street, rich or poor, employer or employee, and is concerned with developing a viable, workable and relevant socio-economic approach.

Runyan is quoted by Mosala (1989 : 88) when he says what the new life meant to so many who were touched by the work of the Methodists:

It was indeed good news for the poor of the land--the miserable masses of uprooted people crowding into the new industrial and mining centres, caught in the crisis of the birth of modern industrial capitalism--helpless victims of social anomia. They were not merely accepted by God but they could be made anew--given an intrinsic, measurable, effective worth and power. They could become the conscious and active subjects of a new life. Their works counted, their will was set free. In a society for which achievement was the meaning of life, here was realm of the highest possible achievement, accessible to everyone through faith.

Their work was to improve the world around them and "their disciplined efforts to live the Christian life had resulted in a cleaner, more educated, upwardly mobile congregation in many of the Methodist preaching-houses". (Heitzenrater 1995 : 217). Although Wesley was concerned with Christians who did not give all they could to help those in need, and contrary to his "belief that perfect love would eliminate the need to pursue private

possessions", (McEllenney 1994 : 147), the Methodists were "accumulating wealth and wearing fine clothes". (Heitzenrater 1995 : 217). Watkins (1937 : 92) recognises that these changes were not only material, but spiritual too when he says "the Methodist message turned the rabble into sons of God and in the end left religious people with no use of any such term. For Methodism there was no rabble". They had been lifted with the help of God and the message of full freedom in Christ, out of their spiritual and social poverty. They were given a self worth and personal dignity. Their individual worlds had significantly changed for the good and they knew that at least in God's eyes, one forgiven and sanctified heart was as good as the next one, regardless of their station in life. The rich at times found the Methodist doctrines to be "repulsive... perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks", (Niebuhr 1929 : 61), and the fact that the Methodists could consider that the rich had as sinful a soul as "the common wretches that crawl on the earth" (Niebuhr 1929 : 61) was unacceptable. "Methodism gave birth to an inner conviction and outer confidence which had serious implications at the level of social behaviour...The poor of Methodism refused to 'know' or accept their social location in life". (Villa-Vicencio 1989 : 95).

Although "transformation remained the theme of" (Shepherd 1988 : 31) Wesley's theology, transformed or changed lives did not mean that the social order would automatically change too, even though it was Wesley's "firm belief that the social restoration would result from the spiritual renewal of individual souls". (Villa-Vicencio 1989 : 97-98). A better world could be achieved, one soul at a time, only as the Methodists were "active in the world, performing acts of charity, attending to the economically disadvantaged, transforming urban blight through industry, frugality, and education". (Bence 1983 : 206-207). Keefer (1990 : 17) says:

Methodism could not wait until better methods were available. It attacked social problems as it best knew how, that is, by religious methods. Looking back one might adjudge those methods simplistic, but that does not mean they were not without effect.

Outler (1991 : 176) says the result of Wesley's work was that "a whole host of men and women were very greatly aided by him in their search for ...'mental health' and 'social adequacy'".

#### 4.6 A THEOLOGY OF HOPE AND RESULTS

There are some who have criticised Wesley's emphasis on individual conversion and holiness because of his apparent neglect of really challenging the sins of the day, and the need to lift the standards of all the poor, not just those who responded to the religious message. Niebuhr's (1929 : 72) criticism of Wesley and Methodism was that it "failed to become a popular movement, (and) it was too individualistic". It is true that for Wesley, it was "the soul that finally is saved, sanctified and perfected". (Villa-Vicencio 1989 : 97). However, the accusation that this occurred in the soul "rather than the person as a whole" (Villa-Vicencio 1989 : 97), and that Wesley neglected the whole man in his effort to see the soul perfected is groundless. Wesley was always interested in the whole person. These critics hold that Wesley fell short of having a significant social impact on England as he could have done, had he so chosen. It needs to be pointed out that John Wesley was not a humanistic reformer. Sanctification was not, in Wesley's mind, a man-made state therefore real social change could not occur, but for God's sanctifying work through believers. The Methodist movement and later the church, was never intended to just perform some "civic function". (Douglas. On Humanism 1974 : 490). Wesley was not merely a humanist because humanists are "independent of reliance on or assistance from any supernatural power, to solve all of his problems and attain the goal of inevitable

universal perfection". (Carter 1992 : 227). Wesley believed that all people had to turn to God for individual salvation, and that it was only through the grace and love which God has for His children that any kind of perfection, be it individual, social or universal, can be achieved.

Wesley believed that this salvation was worked out with God on an individual level and not on a corporate or broad social level, because Wesley had seen how when an individual is truly saved and made perfect, the individual's world around him or her is also saved and made perfect. The problem with a theological answer to man's social needs, without a challenge to personal and individual responsibility before God, is that it produces humanistic reformers, dependent upon their own strength and ingenuity, and not on an eternal God before whom we must all individually, stand in judgement one day. Wesley never intended to lead a group of people into a mass social reform movement, which is why Niebuhr (1929 : 66) recognises that Methodism was "much more of a religious and less of an ethical movement". Had Wesley set out to lead a purely ethical or political movement, the criticism against him would be justified or, on the other hand, he may have done things differently. But this was not his intent. Although his "theology and ethics are integrated", (Hulley 1988 : 2), his main intent was always to save souls and spread holiness. His work never took away the need of a personal walk with God, and what is more, it was only as those who have a personal walk with the Lord band together, that real social change can be effected. In this sense Wesley preached and taught a theology of hope and change, not a human system of hope and change. Keefer (1990 : 10) rightly points out that although "Methodism slowed the rate of social change, *(by being individualistic and not politically aggressive)*, it ultimately assured its success by providing a method for peaceful change which was more in keeping with the British mind". (Italics added). Wesley's theology of hope, if believed, lived and propagated, would bring about the change which society needed.

It was Wesley's strong Arminian position of individual choice and the right to exercise free will, which added to the success of his ministry. For hundreds of years before the Reformation, the self determination of the peasant was virtually non-existent. They were uneducated and locked in a rigid class system with a domineering church, which strongly legislated the means of grace. Although the Reformation had delivered many from the iron grip of the Roman Catholic Church, Calvinism told them that only a predestined group would and could be saved. God had arbitrarily decided their eternal destiny, and He could not be moved to change. Wesley preached a message and lived a life of hope. With all the enthusiasm and fervour he could muster, Wesley told the peasants that every last one of them could be saved. He told them that their sins could be forgiven and that their hearts could be cleansed. In a very depressed socio-economic climate Wesley gave the common people hope.

His success in education, feeding, funding and building showed his hearers in practice what he had preached to them in theory. That they, with God's help, can rise above their situation in life, social, economic and spiritual, and find something better for themselves and their families. This is the great message of Arminian Holiness. Thousands accepted it and tried it, and found it to be true. The message of hope was not static, nor was it bound by rigid church laws or tradition. It was a message which transforms, changes and renews:

Sanctification as holiness implies a transformation that is not an end in itself, but a transformation that in its own turn seeks to transform. It is not a set of objective moral standards as much as a restored relationship out of which moral transformation emerges. There is no merit involved, but there is renewal that comes out of a restored personhood. (Eli 1990 : 74-75)

Wesley and the Methodists led their part of England in a wonderful journey that lifted thousands of people into respectability, and which helped fashion a social conscience which is still alive in Methodism today, and to some extent, in the wider holiness movement. Outler ( 1991 : 185) captures the entire life and message of Wesley and the Methodists when he says: "I am more convinced than ever that the basic substance of the Wesleyan view of the incredible journey from the *barely* human to the *truly* human to the *fully* human is one of the richest of all available options."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A WESLEYAN HERITAGE

The Methodist-holiness heritage today is widely diversified in theology, ethics, social involvement and liturgy. It could be said that the splits started with Wesley and Whitefield going their separate ways back in the 1700's. This concluding chapter, however, is primarily concerned with the Methodist-holiness heritage as it developed in North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and then particularly the holiness movement. The use of the word 'Wesleyan' will refer to all those groups who hold to a heritage emanating from John Wesley and the Methodist movement, unless its context indicates usage of a particular organisation so named.

Although Wesley never wanted the movement to become a church separate from the Church of England, the Wesleyan Methodist Church was formally constituted shortly after his death in 1791. Unfortunately, "before the decade was out the Methodist New Connexion hived off in protest". (Latourette 1997 : 1028). The splits just kept on occurring particularly in America, as the decades unfolded "yet everywhere it preserved common characteristics which went back to John Wesley--zeal in preaching, especially to middle and lower classes, tightly knit organisation, and emphasis upon education and social service". (Latourette 1997 : 1029). Niebuhr (1929 : 71), shows how these common characteristics of the Methodist movement were beginning to fade away as the church grew into the nineteenth century by saying the church moved "from a church of the poor to a middle-class church which, with its new outlook, abandoned the approach to religion which made it an effective agency of salvation to the lower classes in the century of its founders".



The earliest split in America occurred when the "African Methodist Church, later the African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized (sic) in 1816." (Latourette 1997 : 1251). This church consisted almost entirely of African-Americans, many of whom had been slaves in the American south.

By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century the Methodist Episcopal Church had grown to be the largest national institution in America, apart from the government, and as a result it "was increasingly becoming a part of the establishment and was finding it difficult to maintain its status as an agency of change". (Caldwell 1992 : 32). Slavery became a critical issue in the church. After several unsuccessful years of attempting to rid the church of its support of slavery, a large group of clergy and laymen led the first of a series of withdrawals from the church in 1842. Those who left the church started publishing a periodical called "The True Wesleyan" in which they declared their commitment to be anti-slavery, to support the temperance movement and that "not only would the traditional message on Christian holiness be expounded but also the revival of it which was then being kindled would be reported and promoted". (Caldwell 1992 : 41). In June 1843 the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America was formally organised with "the major distinguishing characteristic of the new body (being) 'radical reform and living piety'". (Caldwell 1992 : 47). In the January 7th 1843 issue of "The True Wesleyan", it appeared as if the periodical was quoting Wesley when it stated, "the real moral reforms of the age, though in a sense subordinate to vital godliness, are nevertheless so closely allied to it, that the advancement of the latter is essential to the progress of the former". (Page 2).

The Free Methodist church also developed as a split from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1860 citing "worldly practices of the church", (Watkins 1937 : 85) as the cause for their departure. This group committed itself to strongly uphold the Wesleyan teaching of

sanctification and Christian perfection. In October 1895 the Church of the Nazarene was organised in Los Angeles, America, as a result of the leadership of Phineas Bresee and Joseph Widney. Bresee, who is popularly considered to be the founder of the Church of the Nazarene, was a former Methodist preacher whose "concern for men's social needs was to remain a primary passion through his life" (Smith 92 : 1962), and Widney was a respected physician and successful real estate developer. (Smith 104 : 1962). One of the reasons given by Bresee for a new denomination "was that the machinery and the methods of the older churches had proved a hindrance to the work of evangelizing the poor". (Smith 110-111 : 1962). Although it did not come about as a result of any single significant break from the Methodist church, it strongly upheld a Wesleyan heritage and adhered to Wesleyan teachings. The early organisers considered the church a "denomination where the poor would be welcomed and entire sanctification would be preached". (Manual : Church of the Nazarene : 1993 : 18). These three holiness bodies represent three of the largest in the Wesleyan tradition.

As the Methodist family grew by numerical growth and through splits, so differences emerged in understanding and expression of Wesleyan theology particularly in the twentieth century. There were some groups who grew more concerned and active socially and began to neglect the need of individual spiritual change and inner purity while emphasising participation in the sacraments, even to the point of attaching soteriological significance to them, while the other side of the Methodist heritage upheld the emphasis on the experience of conversion and sanctification, and neglected social concerns. Sanctification began to be viewed by the former group as little more than love in action, which gave their social concerns a theological justification. The latter group saw social concerns as contributing nothing to a person's spiritual life and therefore ignored, or at best, gave a social emphasis scant consideration. Hynson (1982 : 33) draws very strong

and clear lines in this regard, which may inaccurately portray either side as having totally abandoned part of their heritage. He says:

The Wesleyan heritage moved along these twin tracks in Wesley's era and in much of the 19th century. The anti-slavery crusade was sparked by the revolutionary spirit of perfect love...The prominent anti-slavery voices in Methodism...were themselves persuaded that faith becomes active in works of love. The Wesleyan heritage pushed these evangelical themes apart during much of the last century. One part of the church amplified faith without concern for social ethics, while the other stressed ethics with minimal attention paid to faith (justifying faith).

### **5.1 WESLEYAN METHODISM**

Hynson (1982 : 31) expresses these thoughts with regard to the way some segments of the Methodist heritage have strayed from true Wesleyanism:

The Methodist heritage has too often strayed from Wesley's biblical foundations. Forgetting the cruciality of faith, the ethics of love and good works has been exalted. It has sought to raise the structure of sanctification without the ground of justification by faith alone.

Wesley always held that no salvation and no holiness were possible except by faith in the grace of God and the work of Jesus Christ. Wesley believed that man was sinful and incapable of attaining any level of acceptable spirituality before God, except through the individual yielding of his or her total life to God, and that such a yielding must bring about not only righteousness, but also holiness. This was impossible to achieve through any amount of good works or social reform. The individual must stand before God in their own sinful state totally apart from any social ill or reforming initiative, so that when God has forgiven sin and cleansed the heart, the believer is moved toward the necessity of good

works as a natural outflow of a renewed and personal relationship with God. Wesley enlightens us on this point:

By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and, by consequence, all holiness of conversation. (Works VIII : 47)

In 1968 a merger occurred between the Methodist Church in America and the Evangelical United Brethren, to form the United Methodist Church, giving the new church "approximately 11 million members and making it one of the largest Protestant churches in the world." (Book of Discipline : The United Methodist Church :1992) The opening sections of the Book of Discipline make it clear where the church stands regarding Wesley's social and theological conscience. Under the section entitled "Mission and Service" (1992 : 46) it states: "Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor (sic), a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world". Their social reforming spirit is even more evident under the section "General Rules and Social Principles". (1992 : 48):

Our struggles for human dignity and social reform have been a response to God's demand for love, mercy, and justice in light of the Kingdom. We proclaim no *personal gospel* which fails to express itself in relevant social concerns, we proclaim no *social gospel* that does not include the personal transformation of sinners.

It is our conviction that the good news of the kingdom must judge, redeem, and reform the sinful social structures of our time.

It is indicative of the body's strong social stand that these statements appear before their Articles of Religion which contain statements on sanctification which appear to be similar to that of their Wesleyan counterparts in the holiness movement.

## 5.2 WESLEYAN HOLINESS

Certain segments of the Wesleyan heritage have upheld Wesley's strong emphasis on personal conversions and individual experiences of sanctification, yet have allowed Wesley's strong reforming spirit to grow cold. They contend that society can not be reformed except through the work of God in individual salvation and sanctification. The need to respond to crucial social issues has to a large extent been left to the political arena and government agencies. This apparent abdication of social responsibility may have been encouraged by the increased involvement of government in such issues, particularly in Western civilisation. Harris (Taylor ed 1983 : 490) writing for the Beacon Dictionary of Theology on the subject of "Social Holiness" says:

While traditionally holiness people have not minimised the importance of the political process, their major energies have been expended in evangelism. This reflects their realistic view of human sinfulness, which provides no basis for trust in social reform alone, apart from the sanctifying influence of the gospel.

Hynson (1982 : 32) notes that this tendency in the holiness movement to avoid social issues is due to an inability on their part to maintain the strong love aspect in Wesley's theology, and to uphold the fact that his position was never just a point of theology, but it was dynamic and applicable to the needs of his day:

The holiness movement, tracing its lineage to Wesley, has frequently failed to emphasize or define sanctification as love. Instead there has been a strong tendency toward a scholastic definition. Wesley's view is generally dynamic, and personal or relational. (Hynson 1982 : 32)

It is true that many twentieth century holiness organisations who hold to their Wesleyan theological heritage with a strong religious passion, do not embrace the social side of their heritage in the same way. When the evangelical holiness movement was confronted with the serious social issue of the civil rights question in America, the official publication on the history of the Wesleyan Church, Reformers and Revivalists, stated that "the church took a 'wait and see' stance towards the civil rights revolution". (Caldwell 1992 : 304). The history book for the Church of the Nazarene states that their church formulated an official response to the civil rights movement in that it condemned racism, (Purkiser 1983 : 289), but the text fails to detail any other steps the body took to address the issue in a practical way. Although most holiness and Wesleyan church groups would have statements in their official church policy manuals concerning social issues, they are broadly recognised as being somewhat distant from meeting the basic needs of the lower income groups in society other than leading them to a conversion experience. Holiness churches in America are glaringly absent from inner city ministry where the most urgent needs of twentieth century society exist. Instead they are most active in the suburbs among the middle and upper classes.

Donald Dayton, (1976 : 2) a Professor of Theology and Ethics at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, who still maintains his membership in a holiness Church, expresses his reaction to the response of the holiness movement to the civil rights issue while he was a student at a holiness/Wesleyan college. In the Prologue of Discovering an Evangelical Heritage he writes:

Campus life was circumscribed by cultural patterns and ethical mores called 'prudentials' at my college. These included the traditional evangelical prohibitions against drinking, smoking, dancing, card-playing, and theatre-going. Our lives were largely bound up with testing the limits of these prohibitions. While other students responded to calls for civil rights workers or took to the streets to protest Vietnam, we fought our administration over whether the yearbook could picture male swimmers without T-shirts, struggled for the right to watch TV in the lounge on Sundays, and wondered if the Christian should attend theatre (legitimate or cinema) or read twentieth-century literature.

Dayton (1976 : 4) goes on to say that he discovered "much to my surprise" that his own denomination was a product of one of the greatest and most significant social issues of American history, namely the abolition movement of the 1800's.

### **5.3 FAITHFUL TO OUR CALLING: IN TUNE WITH OUR HERITAGE:**

It is no indictment on those in the Wesleyan/holiness movement today that "the most significant prerequisite for church membership is an experiential one--the experience of conversion". (Grider 1982 : 44). This would have been true for Wesley too. What is not in keeping with a true Wesleyan heritage is the abdication of social responsibilities, particularly in the face of glaring miscarriages of justice and obvious accounts of immense suffering. Instances like Nazi Germany, the civil rights issue in America and Apartheid in South Africa have needed the outspoken and active voice of those who hold to Wesley's conviction that God's grace can change a sinful heart and root out the sinful nature. Wesley would probably have agreed with Villa-Vicencio (1989 : 93) when he says "our identity as Methodists dare not remain established in captivity to the past, but it may well be that our future cannot be forged in isolation from the past". If Wesleyans are to be true to their heritage they must never allow their theology or their social concern to

remain inactive, but must be ready to give a defence for their faith at any time, even if it entails challenging social evils. Grider (1982 : 51) explains the need for Wesleyan theology to be continually open to respond to new challenges in a dynamic way when he says:

Theology cannot say simply the same old things it was saying in an earlier time, for in that case it had just about as well say nothing at all...If the gates of hell construct new and divergent bulwarks against the church's terrible onslaught against sin, theology moves to where the battle is on and there declares God's counsel.

Wesleyan theology must keep moving toward that goal which God has for all his children. It must strive for perfect love for God and man, and must allow that love and the pursuit of it, to be expressed in our daily lives, in a tangible way. Wesley would probably have agreed with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who is quoted in Apartheid is a Heresy (De Gruchy 1983 : 79), as saying "not to act, and not to take a stand ...seems to me a contradiction of love". Keefer (1990 : 12) says:

Our age abounds in information and technology, but it lacks godly conscience, Christ-like compassion, and Spirit-enabled commitment. These were the things in which Wesley and his people excelled. And I think they were the key to their social influence. If we are to be faithful to our age, then we must bring the riches of our heritage to our social responsibility, using whatever tools our age affords us that have moral integrity. The ingroups of our culture will not always approve of our agendas nor our choice of methods. And for that we will suffer their censure, as did Jesus in His day and Wesley in his. Yet both (Jesus and Wesley) served many well by serving God most of all. That is what faithfulness to one's age meant then, and it is what it means now. And by the eternal standard, that is the ultimate assessment of social influence.



Because theology will always remain man's interpretation of what God has revealed, it must remain open to constant scrutiny, judgement and realignment in light of modern circumstances, but never detached from its Biblical moorings, just as those who claim to be Wesleyan cannot detach themselves from their historical moorings. If Wesleyans cannot hold to the theological and practical aspects of Wesley's position on sanctification, they will need to re-evaluate their attachment to his heritage and their personal use of the term, Wesleyan.

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