

**The Wesleyan Way
to
Spiritual Formation**

Christian Spirituality in the Letters of John Wesley

by

Wesley D. Tracy

March, 1987

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years a resurgence of interest in Christian spirituality and spiritual formation has occurred. Many spiritualities are being practiced and promoted ranging from neo-traditional to the bizarre. Coetaneous with the revival of concern about spirituality has been a resurgence of scholarly and popular interest in Wesley studies, both within and outside Wesleyan denominations. An attempt is made in this dissertation/project to bring these two resurgencies into creative synthesis.

The Need for the Project

Several needs and problems converge to make this study strategic. In view of the recent proliferation of spiritualities the need to understand the formative spirituality of one's own faith tradition as an orientation to meaningful ministry in current times is vital. Further, it is particularly appropriate to study John Wesley's approach to spiritual formation and the practice of spirituality because Wesley was so successful in those arenas and because serious inquiry into these areas is so scant. Wesley has been studied as an evangelist, a moralist, an educator, and a theologian. Most scholarly efforts in the last fifty years have been aimed at understanding Wesley's theology or at gaining theological respectability for Wesley in terms of systematics. The call to study Wesley's spirituality entails the need to study Wesley's letters. For it is in the letters that we find Wesley behaving as a spiritual guide, explaining and applying his ideas about spiritual formation. Some three thousand Wesley letters exist, but since less than one third of the letters are

included in the standard sets of Wesley's works the letters are a largely untapped source. The letters of Wesley provide the principal primary source for this study.

Instrumentally, this study speaks to three problems relating directly to the ministry of the author of this project. The continued viability of the Church of the Nazarene may depend on a rediscovery of its Wesleyan heritage. In recent decades a fundamentalist leavening has restricted the Wesleyan spirit. Hopefully, this project will contribute to the "re-Wesleyanizing" of the Church of the Nazarene. Historically the Church of the Nazarene has concentrated on evangelism, but has so neglected spiritual formation and disciple making that the majority of those brought in are eventually lost to the church. This stark reality emphasizes the need for the students at Nazarene Theological Seminary, where the author of this project teaches, to understand, experience, and own their Wesleyan heritage of spiritual formation and thereby to become better Christians, better ministers, and better spiritual guides. More than academic proficiency is needed to make whole Christians and adequate ministers. This need was illustrated by the comment of a student in the course which this project created: "Academically I feel middle-aged, but spiritually I feel like a teenager."

The Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this dissertation/project is to participate in meeting the needs and solving the problems cited in the preceding paragraphs. Certainly this project cannot meet all the needs or solve all the problems. It is hoped, however, that the course developed and taught at Nazarene Theological Seminary based on John Wesley's formative insights and spiritual practice assisted both students and teacher in

becoming better ministers, and better stewards of the Wesleyan faith tradition. At this writing the discussion about making this course a continuing part of the curriculum has been promising.

The expected outcomes of this project also includes the development of publishable materials which can help re-Wesleyanize the Church of the Nazarene. At this writing it is known that an article by this student on Wesleyan spirituality will appear in The Preacher's Magazine (Fall 1987), a professional journal for pastors of five Wesleyan denominations. The Book Committee of Beacon Hill Press, a publishing concern of the Church of the Nazarene has accepted this student's written proposal for a book on Wesleyan spirituality to be published in late 1988.

The Limits and Scope of the Project

The eight volumes of Wesley letters edited by John Telford comprise the principal primary source for this project. Telford's collection contains 2690 letters. Some one hundred other letters discovered since Telford's last edition in 1961 also were studied. The letters comprise the arena for our search. Other Wesley writings such as sermons, journals, essays, and hymns are certainly vehicles of Wesleyan spirituality, but the letters form the boundary for this inquiry.

Another cluster of primary sources is the works on the spiritual life which John Wesley himself read and then reprinted for Methodist use. Wesley's A Christian Library originally published 1749-1755 in fifty volumes provides most of these sources.

In order to probe the current trends in spirituality, five representative spiritualities were studied. The works of sixteen writers are represented in this part of the study.

Noting the fluidity of key definitions in various spiritualities, two working definitions guided this study.

1. Spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation is that dynamic process through which Jesus Christ becomes the shaping power of one's life. The indwelling Christ graciously restores the image of God to one's being, at all levels of personhood, forming Christ in us and enabling the person to more and more experience and express, in both being and doing, Christ's Spirit. Spiritual formation is received through faith nurtured in devotion, fellowship, and worship, and appropriated through commitment, discipline and self-forgetful service.

2. Christian Spirituality.

In this project "Christian spirituality" is broader than spiritual formation. It is the appropriate practice of the Christian life as taught in the Christian scriptures and modeled by Jesus of Nazareth. It has to do with the attitudes, beliefs, exercises, disciplines and practices through which Christians integrate the spiritual and sensible realities into a Christ-like life. Though interiority is very important, so are neighbor and nature. Christian spirituality is energized by prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace; appropriated as persons daily respond in faith to God's call thereby growing in grace, Christ-likeness and Christian perfection; and is generally enhanced through private devotion, self-denial, confession, Christian conference, worship, the Eucharist, and living for others.

Methodology of the Project

This dissertation/project rests on the foundation of previous educational experiences in the Doctor of Ministry and Doctor of the Science of Theology programs at San Francisco Theological Seminary. My D. Min. dissertation/project was about Adam Clarke, a younger colleague of John Wesley. The three In-Parish projects in the STD program had to do with Wesley. The first concerned Wesley as educator. Then I studied the influence of social conditions on Wesley's theology (this included a study in England of British newspapers 1738-1791). The third In-parish Project dealt with sanctification in the sermons of John Wesley. From this background the present dissertation/project emerged.

The direct work on this project began with the study of the pertinent literature. The "Design" committed this student to a vigorous program of reading in four areas.

1. The eight volumes of Wesley's letters.
2. Spiritual formation and spirituality in the current writings of representative Wesleyan writers.
3. Current trends in Christian spirituality and spiritual formation.
4. Christian spirituality in general.

This reading was done and a bibliographic essay of 306 pages was written, submitted, and approved.

Item "4" in the preceding list was most challenging. The literature was so vast that a lifetime of study could hardly master it. Therefore a rationale that would purposefully narrow the scope and give direction to the reading was developed. The idea of reading all the works on spiritual theology that John Wesley read was considered. A survey of his Journal revealed what he read over most of his ninety-one years. Wesley was such a voracious reader that not all those works could be read within the time limit for completing a dissertation. Further, many of those works are not available.

It was then decided to focus most of the reading regarding general spirituality on works which John Wesley not only read but reprinted for his followers.

Wesley abridged and reprinted hundreds of works for Methodist use. One memorable publishing project was A Christian Library published in fifty volumes from 1749 to 1755. Most of the works reviewed in Chapter I come from this collection.

The primary value of reading what Wesley reprinted is that one

thereby finds which works truly impressed and influenced Wesley and hence Methodist piety and spirituality in general. By comparing the original work (when it is available) with Wesley's abridgement we can note just which parts of a work influenced Wesley and which did not. But Wesley refined his choices even further. Beside each paragraph that Wesley considered to be of special value to his people he printed an asterisk. All the first editions of Wesley's reprints and abridgements contained asterisks of emphasis. This student had the "asterisk" information on only five of the works reviewed in Chapter I.

Probing historical Christian spirituality through Wesley's reading list proved helpful. Not only did the student gain exposure to many works on spirituality, but the project was made more distinctly Wesleyan in nature. Further, the sources of many of Wesley's ideas about spiritual formation and spirituality were revealed.

After the basic reading was completed and the bibliographic essay submitted a thematic analysis was made of the eight volumes of the letters. A topical concordance of the letters was constructed. Some one hundred-fifty terms or concepts relating to spirituality were traced through the letters and catalogued.

The next step was to sort out the research and write a document that could serve as a textbook for the new course which was a part of this project: "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation." The 306-page bibliographic essay, "A Survey of the Literature for the Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation: Christian Spirituality in the Letters of John Wesley" was considered to be volume one of the textbook. It was "required reading" for the class members. Chapters I, XI, and XII in this dissertation represent condensations of the bibliographic essay. The remaining

chapters in this document comprised the second volume of the textbook.

A syllabus for the course was developed along with lesson plans which aimed at giving about sixty percent of the course to mastering the content and forty-percent to Wesleyan devotional exercises.

The course was then taught during January 1987. The class met two and one half hours per day, three days per week, Jan. 5-28. Students were given a pre-test which aimed at informally measuring perceived spiritual strengths and needs. The same instrument was used as a post-test at the end of the course. The concluding chapter in this document cites the details of this and other evaluation exercises.

The last step in the methodology had to do with publishing materials derived from this project. Steps assuring publication as required in the "Design" have been taken and are described in the foregoing section, "Purpose of the Project."

Other Considerations

Part I of this document is largely descriptive. So little has been done with Wesley's letters that their content needs to be revealed. Therefore, a rather thorough description of the spirituality presented in them seemed necessary. It would be inadequate to simply affirm that certain practices or principles are to be found in Wesley's letters. In light of the fact that Wesley has been abusively "proof-texted" to "prove" the biases of many writers documenting the principal assertions of the project with multiple examples was demanded. Thus Part I is primarily descriptive. Part II, especially Chapter XIII is more interpretive.

The sequence of this document is as follows. Part I, The Spiritual Formation of John Wesley and its Expression in His Teaching on Christian

Spirituality in His Letters, examines the formative literature Wesley read and reprinted; nine dimensions of spirituality derived from the letters are presented. In Part II, *Trends and Goals of Spiritual Formation and Christian Spirituality Today* surveys representative Wesleyan writers, and provides a look at the current climate of Christian spirituality in America and Britain. It poses the question: "How does the Wesleyan tradition fit in?" Chapter XIII is this student's attempt to sketch the shape of a distinctly Wesleyan spirituality and to make suggestions for further study. The concluding chapter represents an attempt to evaluate the project, particularly the course of study the project created.

Attention is given to inclusive language. Generic male terms are avoided. Gender pronouns, when used are alternated (his, her -- she, he) so as not to indicate status. In a historical inquiry like this, however, most of the primary sources quoted contain male oriented terms. There seemed to be no way to amend this when so many hundreds of sources are quoted. Given names of female persons are used to avoid designations derived from the female's relationship to a male. The first names of several of Wesley's female correspondents are, however, unknown. In those cases the terms used in the primary sources (e.g. Lady Maxwell, Miss March, Mrs. Bennis) are used.

The references follow Turabian's fourth edition. For citing the many individual letters, Turabian requires only the publication facts plus volume and page number. Since, however, when Wesley said a certain thing is sometimes as important as what certain thing was said, the date (month, day, year) is added to the footnotes of the letters, unless such information is given in the text.

PART I

THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF JOHN WESLEY AND ITS
EXPRESSION IN HIS TEACHINGS ON CHRISTIAN
SPIRITUALITY IN HIS LETTERS

CHAPTER I
A SURVEY OF THE LITERATURE
WHICH HAD FORMATIVE INFLUENCE ON JOHN WESLEY

As preamble to the examination of the letters of John Wesley an investigation of the works on spirituality which had formative influence on him is appropriate. The spirituality contained in the letters is a unique synthesis of ideas Wesley found in the works surveyed in this chapter.

Several formative forces helped shape John Wesley. Surely the influence of devout parents and the force of oppressive social realities helped shape the personality and theology of John Wesley. The limits and scope of this project, however, prescribe that this chapter focus on the formative influence on Wesley made by the many books he read on Christian spirituality. The literature surveyed in this chapter is selected from those works which Wesley not only read, but reprinted for his followers. Most of the works treated in this chapter were included in A Christian Library which Wesley published in fifty volumes between 1749 and 1755. A second edition was issued in 1772 or 1773. A third edition bound in thirty volumes appeared in 1819. The references to A Christian Library in this chapter are to the 1819 edition.¹

¹ The full title of the collection is A Christian Library Consisting of Extracts From and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity Which Have Been Published in the English Tongue.

Patristic Spirituality

In A Christian Library Wesley reprinted works of four patristic authors: Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Saint Polycarp and "Macarius the Egyptian."

Clement of Rome

Wesley, in 1733, read William Whiston's The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles in Greek and English. Wesley thought that in this work he had direct access to the devotional practices of the early church. However, the work is spurious. The Trullan Synod rejected the work in a.d. 692.² Wesley was apparently not aware of the inauthenticity of the work. He copied a number of the prayers it contains into his personal hand written prayer manual.³

A few years after reading the Apostolic Constitutions Wesley read Thomas Deacon's Compleat Collections of Devotions. Deacon relied heavily upon the Apostolic Constitutions. These two sources influenced Wesley when he developed his prayers and devotions which he put in the hands of nearly all Methodists.

The Apostolic Constitutions is organized into eight sections or books. In books seven and eight Wesley believed he had a treasure of the early church. Bits and pieces of it show up in Wesley's prayer manual, his "Prayers for Families," and "Prayers for Every Day of the Week," although he did not reprint the work itself. From Clement's works Wesley reprinted only the Epistle to the Corinthians. It is a general work on the Christian life advising against pride, foolishness,

² J. Steven Harper, "The Devotional Life of John Wesley 1703-1738." (Ph.d. dissertation, Duke-University, 1981), p. 157.

³ The appendix of Harper's dissertation contains a photocopy and transcription of Wesley's prayer manual.

youthful lusts and anger. It encourages Christian service, humility, patient suffering, growth in grace, unity, and resurrection hope.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote his six epistles while being carried under guard to Rome to face martyrdom in the first decade of the second century. In these documents Wesley truly found a window which opened onto the spiritual life of the primitive church. Ignatius was just two generations from Jesus.

In his letters to the Ephesians, Romans, Magnesians, Trallians, Smyrnaeans, and Philadelphians, Ignatius addresses the following themes which reappear in Wesley's own devotional writings.

1. Christian fellowship. Faithfulness to worship, the sacrament and fellowship were important to Ignatius. He told the Ephesians, "When ye frequently come together, the powers of Satan are destroyed, . . . by the concord of your faith."⁴

2. Christian love shown in unity. The believers at Smyrna were exhorted to "labour with one another; contend together, run together, suffer together, sleep together, and rise together."⁵ The Ephesians are encouraged to be as "fitly joined together as strings to a harp by whose concord and harmony of love, Jesus Christ is sung."⁶

3. Love of enemies. "Be ye meek at their anger, humble at their boasting, return your prayers for their blasphemies . . .,"⁷ Ignatius

⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, "Epistle to the Ephesians," A Christian Library, 3rd ed., edited by John Wesley (London: T. Blanshard, 1819), 1:36 (hereafter cited as CL).

⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, "Epistle to the Smyrnaeans," CL, 1:58.

⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, "Ephesians," CL, 1:33.

⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, "Smyrnaeans," CL, 1:35.

told the Smyrnaeans.

4. Serve the weak. "Let not the widows be neglected," Ignatius advised, "be thou, after God their guardian" and "overlook not the men and maidservants."⁸

5. Perfect love. Ignatius shares with the Trallians his search for "incorruptible love"⁹ and counsels the Ephesians that "perfect faith . . . and love . . . are the beginning and end of life"¹⁰

6. Steadfastness in devotion and holiness. The believers at Ephesus are urged to be "full of God, full of Christ, full of holiness."¹¹ The Smyrnacans were to "stand firm as a beaten anvil."¹²

Saint Polycarp

Saint Polycarp is represented in A Christian Library through his "Epistle to the Philippians." It is a missile of general pastoral advice. I do not find Wesley deriving any unique or major element of spiritual guidance from Polycarp. However, general themes that Wesley emphasized do appear in Polycarp: love to all, mercy for widows and orphans, renouncing the world, patient suffering, and prayer and obedience.

"Macarius the Egyptian"

During Wesley's century fifty homilies by Macarius the Egyptian became popular. The homilies are probably not the original work of

⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, "Epistle to the Trallians," CL, 1:48.

¹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, "Ephesians," CL, 1:41.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 35.

¹² Ignatius of Antioch, "Smyrnaeans," CL, 1:57.

Macarius. It is believed that Macarius merely adapted some works of the Cappadocian Fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa) and presented his revised editions as homilies to a community of ascetics.

John Wesley published in A Christian Library extracts from twenty-three of the "Homilies." These extracts have one common theme: Christian perfection. Wesley pointed to this source again and again in defense of his doctrine of Christian perfection.

In Wesley's letters of spiritual guidance we find him urging, coaching and explaining the way of perfection repeatedly. This dwarfs most other themes in the letters. Therefore, a look at the theme of perfection in Macarius is very much in order. Some of his teachings follow.

1. Believers have a natural desire for and need of purity and perfection. A person may see a bird flying and wish he or she too could fly, "just so a man may be willing to be pure, and without blame . . . but he has not wherewithal to compass it . . . unless he receive wings."¹³ Let us therefore "beseech God that he would give us the wings of a dove."¹⁴ This is the natural desire and need of the awakened believer, and this must not be ignored for perfection is required.

2. Perfection is available in this life. "Unless the soul shall in this world receive the sanctification of the Spirit through much faith and prayer . . . it is unfit for the kingdom of heaven."¹⁵

3. Perfection is preceded by self-denial though it is wrought by grace. Heavenly riches are "purchased only with labour, and pains, and trials, and many conflicts." But the obtainment of them "is owing to the

¹³ Macarius the Egyptian, "Homilies," CL, 1:78.

¹⁴ Ibid. ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 123.

grace of God."¹⁶ The seeker must then "by habitual violence esteem himself as nothing,"¹⁷ and do "righteous works without number" including if necessary "masceration of the body." Still such a soul "demeans itself . . . as if it had wrought nothing at all."¹⁸

4. Perfection usually includes a fiery encounter with the Holy Spirit which purifies the soul. The soul that has renounced the world . . . and received the heavenly fire . . . is . . . set free from all the corruptions and the affections." At this point the "things of the world appear . . . as impertinent superfluties."¹⁹ Sin is rooted out and man receives the original formation of Adam in his purity."²⁰ The sincere seeker then may expect an entire redemption from sin, and the darkness of the affections: that being purified by the Spirit, sanctified in soul and body, it may be made a vessel clean prepared for the . . . residence of Christ . . . the pure habitation of the Holy Spirit.²¹

5. The purifying encounter with the Spirit leads to a Spirit-filled life of holiness. "As a stone in the bottom of the sea is every way surrounded with water; so are those cleansed by the Spirit every way drenched with the Holy Spirit and made like Christ."²² The lives of these sanctified ones are "blameless, spotless and pure"²³

Any Wesley scholar can show that for better or for worse, John Wesley swallowed Macarius whole. His sermons, doctrines and letters are filled with "Macarius-like" phrases, maxims, and advice.

The contribution of the patristic writers to Wesleyan spirituality

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

²⁰ Ibid., p.-110.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 91-92.

²² Ibid., p. 100.

²³ Ibid., p. 101.

contains the elements of perfection, love, fellowship, self-denial and care for the weak.

The Spanish Mystics

Three Spanish mystics impressed Wesley deeply enough to be placed on the "required reading" list for Methodists. They were Miguel de Molinos, Blessed John of Avila, and Gregory Lopez, the Mexican hermit.

Miguel de Molinos (1640-1697)

Molinos was born in Spain and educated at Rome. After the publication of his book The Spiritual Guide he became a renowned spiritual director. Eventually he was tried by the Inquisition and condemned to life in prison. John Wesley first read The Spiritual Guide as a student at Oxford in February of 1735.

Wesley published a thirty-six page edition of The Spiritual Guide in A Christian Library. Though Wesley deleted much of what Molinos taught, one thing he retained was Molinos' doctrine of self-mortification. God can bless a person "once the soul is mortified, and desires wholly to deny its appetites . . . and is willing to die heartily to its passions and its own ways."²⁴ Therefore, "the seven-headed beast of self-love must be beheaded," for "thou wilt never arrive at this happy state until thou art purified from . . . self-esteem."²⁵ The self is treacherous, Molinos says and counsels "Thou shalt never be hurt by men or Devil, but by thyself, thy own pride and passions . . . for thou art the greatest devil of all to thyself."²⁶ It follows then that, "If thou wouldst be

²³ Ibid., p. 101.

²⁴ Miguel de Molinos, "The Spiritual Guide Which Leads the Soul to the Fruition of Inward Peace," CL, 23:98.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 87-88. ²⁶ Ibid., p. 95.

blessed, learn to despise thyself"27 The requirement is to seek "to annihilate one's self in all respects."²⁸

Molinos also impressed Wesley with his teaching that humility was the only true road to happiness. Humility, and therefore happiness, is to be attained through self-abnegation.

Wesley also preserved Molinos' teaching on purity and perfection which Molinos saw as two sides of the same coin. Only the purged soul could be perfected and "swallowed up in a sea of love."²⁹ Therefore "resolve to mortify thy senses" and God will "set his hand to purging the evil inclinations, inordinate desires . . . self-love, pride, and other hidden vices."³⁰ Besides self-mortification God uses two instruments for purifying the believer's heart: "the bitter waters of affliction" and the "fire of an inflamed love."³¹

Another concept that Wesley preserved was Molinos' teaching that the Christian who found his or her all in God could face the direst calamities with peace and tranquility. Wesley's letters and journal show us that he tried to adopt this approach to a certain extent. He regarded every trial as coming from God to eventuate good.

Wesley was instructed by Molinos that the true Christian must love the Creator and not the creature. This applied not only to earthly honors, pleasure, and wealth, but to persons also. No person was to become the object of inordinate affection. Even the death of a child or spouse must not upset the "detached" saint for very long. Wesley got this idea of detachment from Molinos, Fenelon, De Renty, and Henry Scougal, and he parroted it all his life.

²⁷ Ibid. ²⁸ Ibid., p. 87. ²⁹ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 74. ³¹ Ibid., p. 88.

Don Juan D'Avila (1500-1569)

Don Juan (or Blessed John) of Avila was a popular preacher and spiritual guide. He was tried by the Inquisition for exaggerating the dangers of wealth, and thus closing the gates of heaven to the rich. His Spiritual Letters was published after his death. Various editions appeared in 1620, 1631, 1755 (in Wesley's A Christian Library), and in 1904.

Wesley's edition of the Spiritual Letters stresses self-knowledge, self-abasement, loving the Creator more than the creature, suffering as a means to holiness, adoration of Christ, and divine love. Love, however, is the dominant theme.

Following is a sampling of sayings from Blessed John:

Self-knowledge: "No man ever saw God unless he first saw himself . . ."³²

Self-abasement: In this world one should "love tears, solitude, humility and repentance."³³

Loving the Creator rather than the Creature: "Glutting the eyes with tears [when a loved one dies] . . . only adds sin to pain."³⁴

Suffering as a way to holiness: "Discomfit us here in all things so that we might enjoy thee."³⁵

Adoration of Christ: "O thou Jesus of Nazareth, how sweet is the odour of thee, which awakes in us . . . desires of eternity . . ."³⁶

Divine love. ". . . what shame covers my face, and what sorrow seizes upon my heart, who having been so much beloved by thee, yet loves thee so little . . ."³⁷

³² Don Juan D'Avila, "Spiritual Letters" CL, 23:392.

³³ Ibid., p. 378. ³⁴ Ibid., p. 410. ³⁵ Ibid., p. 387.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 404. ³⁷ Ibid.

Gregory Lopez

During his voyage to America in 1735 Wesley read The Life of Gregory Lopez. Lopez was a Spaniard who determined to live out one phrase of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." He became a hermit in Mexico at age twenty. He gave all his possessions to the poor, slept on the ground, fasted, and mastered the works of St. Teresa. His religious life included contemplation and a vigorous ministry to the sick and poor. This balance of acts of piety and acts of mercy appealed to Wesley, it was to become his own code.

Though Wesley called Lopez a "good and wise, tho' much mistaken man,"³⁸ Wesley saw in him that all of life, whether contemplation or helping the needy, could express continual prayer. Wesley cites the prayer-life of Lopez to several of his correspondents. To Philothea Briggs he recommended "a close, uninterrupted communion with Him, as Gregory Lopez experienced, and not a few of our brethren and sisters now live."³⁹

From the Spanish mystics Wesleyan spirituality absorbed an emphasis on self-denial, self-knowledge, Christian perfection, purity of heart, perfect love, love of Creator with detachment from creation, suffering as a purifying agent, continual prayer, and service to the needy.

French Spirituality

No fewer than seven French authors on spirituality and spiritual formation found their way into A Christian Library. Only the briefest look can here be taken at each.

³⁸ John Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, 14 vols., ed. Thomas Jackson, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1978), 1:395.

³⁹ John Wesley, The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M. 8 vols., ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1960) 5:293 (hereafter cited as Letters).

Anthioniette Bourignon (1616-1680)

Wesley included Bourignon's work "Solid Virtue" in volume 21 of A Christian Library. He lived to regret it because of Bourignon's extreme subjectivity and bizarre interiority. Some of Wesley's followers were confused by "Solid Virtue." Wesley found himself disclaiming the woman and her work. In 1781 he told one of his confused disciples, Ann Loxdale, that she herself had "experienced more of the life of faith . . . than ever she [Bourignon] did in her life."⁴⁰

Marquis Gaston Jean-Baptiste De Renty (1611-1649)

Wesley first read De Renty's biography in 1729. Later Wesley abridged it and published it in A Christian Library. De Renty's influence on Wesley was profound. De Renty's balance of contemplation and action deeply impressed Wesley. De Renty gave himself to prayer and meditation, yet vigorously ministered to the poor and the sick. He gathered his followers in small groups for spiritual instruction, sharing and strategizing for service. Some scholars, Michael Henderson for example, say that De Renty's organization of small groups was the direct parent of the Methodist class and band meetings. Wesley was strongly influenced by De Renty's sense of divine assurance of salvation. De Renty labeled it an "experimental verity." Wesley seems to have been overwhelmingly convinced that De Renty's model of detachment from the creature was ideal. De Renty was so detached from earthly creatures that he said he could have danced and sung as his wife lay dying had propriety allowed it. Wesley took this as lofty spirituality and all his life touted De Renty as the superior model of detachment.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Letters, 7:67.

⁴¹ For example, see the letter to Adam Clarke, Letters, 8:253.

Pierre Poiret (1646-1719)

Pierre Poiret published in French: Les Principes de la Religion et da la Vie Chreitiene appliques a l' Education des enfans, et applicables a toutes sortes des personnes. It was used first in the Jansenist schools at Port Royal. This work was destined to become the very heart of Christian education for Methodist children. Wesley abridged and translated the book under the title Instructions for Children. It received almost universal use among Methodists.

The Instructions contain fifty-eight lessons under these headings

- I. God, Creation, Man, sin, Redemption, Heaven and Hell
- II. God and the Soul of Man
- III. How to Regulate our Desires
- IV. How to Regulate our Understanding
- V. How to Regulate our Joy
- V. How to Regulate our Practice⁴²

Jean Duvergier de Hauranne (1581-1643)

Hauranne, better known as Abbe 'de Saint-Cyran was one of the founders of the Jansenists. He wrote Lettres Chreitiene et Spirituelles in 1638. Wesley read a 1672 version of the work done by one Robert Arnauld d' Andilly. Wesley was smitten by the work and announced that it was "next to the Holy Scriptures" in spiritual value."⁴³ Wesley translated, and edited his own version of the work and called it Christian Instructions. Wesley's edition consisted of some four hundred advices.

⁴² See Frank Baker, ed., John Wesley's Own Choice: The Heart of True Spirituality 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, Zondervan, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 45-47 for the fourteen passages in the Instructions which Wesley thought were particularly important.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 51.

Most of these advices appeared in the fourth volume of Sermons on Several Occasions. Sixty-four appear in "Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection" and sixty-three of them appear intact in what may be the most often read of Wesley's writings: "A Plain of Christian Perfection."⁴⁴ Several scholars see Hauranne's work as a chief source of Methodist piety.⁴⁵

In the first editions of Christian Instructions Wesley printed asterisks by one hundred four passages. The themes most frequently treated in these passages include the following. (1) There is more to the Christian life than conversion — spiritual formation is essential. (2) Prayer must permeate the Christian's life and being. (3) Christians need spiritual fellowship and guidance. (4) Submission of the self is important. (5) Christian perfection or perfect love is the believers goal. (6) Christians must grow in love to God and humankind.⁴⁶

Jacques Joseph Duguet

The 1773 edition of Wesley's Works contained two items derived from Letters on Morality and Piety by Jacques Joseph Duguet. Wesley's "Instructions for Members of Religious Societies" came directly from Duguet's work. This work apparently had a significant influence on Wesley, but more in a confirming sort of way because Wesley had already established one of the most remarkably successful systems of religious societies when he first read Duguet sometime after 1760. The second Duguet essay Wesley published was titled (by Wesley) "Directions to Preserve Fervency of Spirit."

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 51-54.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Note Baker's citation of the New Catholic Encyclopedia (p. 51) and Jean Orcibal (p. 54).

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 55-66.

Duquet seems to have been helpful in Wesley's work as a spiritual guide. He refers to Duquet's works in letters to Elizabeth Ritchie, Nancy Bolton, and Mary Bosanquet. The dominant themes in Duguet's works include the grace of God, self-examination, detachment from worldly honors and pleasures, and self-abasement.

Francois Fenelon (1651-1715)

Two works of Archbishop Fenelon are included in A Christian Library. Two letters to the Duke of Burgundy are reprinted, but the more important work is "Pious Reflections," Wesley's title for his abridgement of Fenelon's Explications of the Maxims of the Saints Regarding the Interior Life.

This work by Fenelon presents three themes: love for God and human-kind, self-denial, and the positive uses of suffering. It is a mistake to slavishly fear God, Fenelon believed, for this hinders Christians from discovering "the tenderest of fathers."⁴⁷ A healthy horizontal love also appears, "The love of God loves its friends without views to self-interest, and so loves them patiently with all their faults."⁴⁸ There is a hint in Wesley's Fenelon that God is not at war with our humanity. He excuses us from the austerities of the ancient hermits, but self-mortification soon revives. Jesus, according to Fenelon, "annihilated" himself. Therefore all serious believers must do the same. Fenelon assures us that "though He can save us without sufferings He will not."⁴⁹

Brother Lawrence (1611-1691)

Nicolas Herman (Brother Lawrence) spent thirty years in a Carmelite

⁴⁷ Francois Fenelon, "Pious Reflections," CL, 23:37.

⁴⁸ Francois Fenelon, "Letters to the Duke of Burgundy," CL, 23:6.

⁴⁹ Fenelon, "Reflections," CL, 23:50.

monastery in Paris. Abbe' Joseph de Beaufort collected Herman's writings and published them the year Herman died. Wesley extracted from de Beaufort's work five of Lawrence's letters and several "conversations with Brother Lawrence," and published them in volume twenty-three of A Christian Library. It was Herman's skill in practicing the presence of God in all kinds of life situations that caught Wesley's eye. Herman's continual communion with God endorsed what Wesley had found in Molinos, De Renty, and Lopez on the same theme.

Wesley found in the French writers themes which he also found in many writers of various eras: self-denial, love for the Creator but detachment from the creature, Christian perfection in holiness through grace and suffering, continual prayer, assurance of salvation, loving service to the needy, and the need for Christian conference and fellowship. One distinct contribution of the French was materials for the spiritual formation of children.

Puritan Spirituality

Wesley reprinted more than twice as many pages from Puritan authors as from any other group. Wesley gave high praise to the Puritans in the "Preface" to the Puritan works in A Christian Library. "They breathe the same spirit of the holy martyrs," Wesley declared.⁵⁰ Further, "they exalt Christ" and are "mighty men in the scriptures" and tear up "the very root of Antinomianism."⁵¹ But the "peculiar excellency" of the Puritan writers, Wesley asserts, is in the realm of spiritual formation -- "building us up in our most holy faith."⁵²

Eight representative Puritan authors which Wesley published will be

⁵⁰ John Wesley, CL, 4:105. ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 107. ⁵² Ibid.

briefly reviewed with regard to their specific counsel on spiritual formation.

Isaac Ambrose

Isaac Ambrose injected a certain sternness into Methodist piety. His work "The Practice of Sanctification, Exemplified in the Believer's Privileges and Duties" is a fierce treatise on eight dimensions of self-denial: denial of corruption and concupiscence, the natural self, special gifts, worldly profits, worldly pleasures, honor, praise and reputation, denial of our life in Christ, and denial of the very grace of God.⁵³

In the other work of Ambrose which Wesley published, "Looking Unto Jesus"⁵⁴ an altogether different view is presented. In this work Ambrose is conquered by the love of Jesus.

O love more deep than hell! O love more high than heaven! the brightest of the seraphims that burn in love are but as sparkles to that mighty flame of love that burns in the heart of Jesus.⁵⁵

We see Ambrose extolling both sides of a paradoxical theological tension: self-denial and divine love for the self. Theological concepts in tension was the primary arena for the development of Wesleyan thought. Perhaps it is the overwhelming debt to love that makes self-denial so desirable for Ambrose.

Richard Baxter

Richard Baxter is represented in A Christian Library by "The Saint's Everlasting Rest."⁵⁶ This book made significant contributions to

⁵³ Isaac Ambrose "The Practice of Sanctification, Exemplified in the Believer's Privileges and Duties," CL, vol. 8, pp. 3-88.

⁵⁴ Isaac Ambrose "Looking Unto Jesus, or the Soul's Eyeing of Jesus as Carrying on the Great Work of Man's Salvation," CL, 8:89--9:102.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 8:321.

⁵⁶ Richard Baxter, "The Saint's Everlasting Rest," CL, 22:1-353.

Methodist spirituality. The idea of the joy of the spiritual life is recurrent. Spiritualized phrases such as "pleasant fruit," "relished meats," and "daily delight" punctuate the work.

Intertwined with the theme of rhapsodic joy is a ruthless self-discipline seldom found even among Puritans. One's own heart must be regarded as a backward servant, a stubborn ox, or a lazy horse.⁵⁷ Lest the would-be saint become "a lazy self-deluding hypocrite," he or she must "chide," "command" and "use violence" against the natural heart. One must "let the spur be never out of its side"⁵⁸ In a chapter written for "the use of the weak" Baxter urges

If thy heart draw back, force it to the work; if it loiter spur it on; if it step aside, command it again; if it would slip away, and leave the work, use thine authority. Keep it close to the business till . . . thou hast pleaded thyself from a clod to a flame, from a forgetful sinner to⁵⁹ a mindful lover, from a lover of the world to a thirster after God.

Although Wesley reprinted Baxter, he never used his fierce language self-abnegation.

A most significant contribution by Baxter to A Christian Library is his method of Bible study, prayer, and meditation called "soliloquy." One begins by reading a passage of scripture. Soliloquy proceeds through the following steps:

(1) The Use of Information. Here the person praying preaches the text to himself or herself after the manner of the "most affecting heart-melting minister." The sermon to oneself should follow this homiletical pattern: explain the text to yourself, confirm the text by comparing it with other scriptures, then "apply it."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Richard Baxter, The Saint's Everlasting Rest, ed. William Young (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1909), pp. 391-392.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 394. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 399-400. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 350-1.

(2) The Use of Examination. Examine your heart on the subjects the text raises, "discover thy neglect, and . . . chide thy heart . . . So far as . . . thou hast been faithful . . . turn it to encouragement."⁶¹

(3) The Use of Dehortation. "Admonish thy heart . . . Take thy heart as to the brink of the bottomless pit, force it to look in, threaten thyself" ⁶²

(4) The Use of Consolation. Rejoice in the comfort, hope, and love that will come from mended ways.

(5) The Use of Exhortation. The worshipper is to write down the duties that "soliloquy" raises. The heart must promise to obey: "write down this promise, show it to thy heart the next time it loiters."⁶³

From this prelude of "soliloquy" the soul is now ready for adoration, and praise to God. The reader is urged to picture the biblical scene -- in the mind, not in "icons as the Papists." Baxter tells the reader to step into the scene as "the apostles' fellow-traveller," to hear the "songs of Moses and the Lamb," standing "by Abraham" or hearing the Lord say, "come ye blessed of my Father" or "Stand in the room of Stephen."⁶⁴

Robert Bolton (1572-1631)

"A Discourse on True Happiness" by Robert Bolton found its way into Wesley's A Christian Library. Bolton was convinced that true happiness could never be attained except by "purenness of heart, holiness of life, and constancy in a course of sanctification."⁶⁵ These three emphases, .

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 351. ⁶² Ibid., p. 352. ⁶³ Ibid., p. 353.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 362-363.

⁶⁵ Robert Bolton, "A Discourse on True Happiness," CL, 4:243-330.

of course, were the heart of Wesley's spirituality.

Wesley also reprinted Bolton's "General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God." The "general directions" included: faithfulness to holy duties, avoidance of idleness, finding time for solitary seasons, carefulness about the company one keeps, discipline of the heart and the passions, and keeping a tender conscience.⁶⁶

Thomas Goodwin

In "The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth" the love of God in Christ is accented. Goodwin declares that the Incarnation "hath forever fitted his heart by experience to be in our very hearts and bosom." Indeed "our miseries are let into his heart and . . . stir up kindly affections."⁶⁷

"Christ the Object and Support of Faith" is a Christological rationale for salvation through faith in the redemptive acts of God in Christ. It is standard evangelical orthodoxy.⁶⁸

The third work, "A Child of Light Walking in Darkness" is by far the most important for Wesleyan spirituality. From this document Wesley picked up a concept that appears in hundreds of his letters of spiritual guidance: "evil reasoning." Wesley reprints sixteen chapters of this work which deal primarily with Goodwin's teaching on this subject.

Goodwin declares that a child of God may enjoy inner assurance for a while, but the time will come when it seems that God has deserted the

⁶⁶ Robert Bolton, "General Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God," CL, 4:351-430.

⁶⁷ Thomas Goodwin "The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth," CL, 6:426.

⁶⁸ Thomas Goodwin, "Christ the Object and Support of Faith," CL, 6:315-388.

believer and a "dark night of the soul" ensues. At such times one tries to bring the "fallen" faculties of reason to bear on the situation. At this point Satan enlists the aid of the believer's remaining inner sinfulness. Together they lead the Christian to "false and fearful conclusions against themselves."⁶⁹ Satan knows just how to raise "hideous apprehensions and desperate conclusions [about] a man's own state."⁷⁰ He has a lot of experience at forging "false reasonings," after all, "he is a student of five thousand years standing who hath lost no time."⁷¹ The accuser finds our "corrupt reason . . . ready to invent strong arguments to confirm those sad fears and darkened apprehensions."⁷²

When carnal reason, is joined by "corrupt affections" guilt "like waves of the sea, . . . overflow in our consciences."⁷³ Goodwin affirms, "There are in the best of us humours enough which if they be stirred in our consciences, may alone cast us into these burning fits of trouble and distress."⁷⁴ Satan uses this turmoil to cover "our graces from view." For when carnal reason and Satan threaten damnation "our corruptions float in our consciences, whilst the graces that are in us lie covered under them out of sight. . . ."⁷⁵

Apparently the concept of "evil reasoning" was commonly and generally taught among the early Methodists. Wesley repeatedly warns his correspondents about "evil reasoning" without explaining the term, apparently assuming that they already understood it. Wesley found in Thomas Goodwin a tool that he would use often in spiritual guidance.

⁶⁹ Thomas Goodwin, "A Child of Light Walking in Darkness," CL, 6:242.

⁷⁰ Ibid. ⁷¹ Ibid., p. 252. ⁷² Ibid., p. 243.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 246. ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 246-7. ⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 246.

John Owen

Wesley published five works by John Owen. The one that had the most relevance for Wesleyan spirituality was "Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."⁷⁶ At the foundation of this work is the affirmation that the sanctified believer will experience communion with each member of the blessed Trinity. This researcher has found no reference to this phenomena in any writers other than Owen, De Renty, and Wesley. Several of Wesley's most devout correspondents tell of communion with each member of the Trinity. Wesley confesses that for a while he believed that all those who had been entirely sanctified experienced this. He later decided that experience did not verify the hypothesis.

John Preston (1587-1628)

John Preston was a Puritan who tried to find a middle ground between the Calvinistic and Arminian doctrines of sanctification. His tolerance of Arminianism may have influenced Wesley to reprint "The New Covenant, or the Saint's Portion."⁷⁷ This treatise presents a doctrine of sanctification which Wesley repeats in detail in his writings.

Henry Scougal (1690-1678)

Henry Scougal died at age twenty-seven, but by that time he had already served as a pastor, a Professor of Philosophy and had written a short book which would have a powerful impact on Puritan piety and, through the Wesley's, on Methodist spirituality. The treatise was The

⁷⁶ John Owen, "Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," CL, 10:407--11:122.

⁷⁷ John Preston, "The New Covenant, or the Saint's Portion," CL, 6:33-43.

Life of God in the Soul of Man. Susanna Wesley gave it to her sons John and Charles. It became the "textbook" of Wesley's Holy Club at Oxford. Charles passed the book along to a classmate named George Whitefield. Whitefield said the book led him to "true religion." Wesley's edition of the book went through seven printings between 1742 and 1808.

Scougal's ideas about spiritual formation and piety were introduced into the Methodist bloodstream with little or no editing. The following five dominant themes in Scougal became dominant themes for Wesley.

1. Overcoming selfishness. Sin is primarily a matter of inordinate selfishness. The remedy involves consecration, resignation, mortification, and renunciation of the created in favor of the Creator. Scougal avoids (as Wesley does) calling for annihilation of the self. "Our natural affections are not wholly to be extirpated and destroyed, but only to be moderated and overruled" ⁷⁸

2. Constancy and self-discipline. Constancy was to be attained by daily self-examination, by the instituted means of grace, by acts of charity and devotion, by prayer and meditation, by shunning sin and resisting temptation, by regarding all persons as bearers of God's own image, and by learning from our failures.

3. Spiritual formation as restoration of the image of God. For Scougal and Wesley salvation, to a great degree, was a matter of restoring the image of God to the sin-stricken soul. Scougal used precise spiritual formation language to describe this salvific process. The mission of the Christ was to "recover . . . and restore the image of God." ⁷⁹ The

⁷⁸ Henry Scougal, The Life of God in the Soul of Man, ed. William S. Hudson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1948), pp. 34-35.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

image of God in humankind, though "sullied and defaced," is not "altogether erased, some lineaments at least do still remain."⁸⁰

Wesley repeats this, perhaps with a more Arminian slant than Scougal intended.

Scougal's favorite way to speak of the restoration of the image of God is to say that Christ is formed in us. "True religion," he says "is . . . the very image of God drawn upon the soul . . . it is Christ formed within us."⁸¹ Again, in describing those who have received the divine life principle he says, "they who are endued with it may be said to have . . . Christ formed within them."⁸² Scougal writes a model prayer which includes a petition that "Christ be formed within me."⁸³

Scougal also describes this process as copying, writing, engraving, and imprinting the image of God upon the soul.⁸⁴ These descriptors appear often in Wesley.

4. Christian Perfection. The themes of purity, holiness, perfect love, and Christian perfection are treated by Scougal and Wesley in much the same way. Wesley adds entire sanctification to this word cluster and uses the terms almost interchangeably. Scougal says, "Perfect love is a kind of self-dereliction . . . a kind of voluntary death . . . the lover dies to himself, and all his own interests . . . minding nothing but how he may please . . . whom he loves."⁸⁵ This self-transcending love expells sin from the soul while forming the soul in the image of Christ.

5. The Centrality of Love. Love was a central theme for Scougal, as well as for Wesley. For Scougal it is the love of God that brings one to renounce the world and selfishness in favor of the God of love. It is

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 88. ⁸¹ Ibid., p. 30. ⁸² Ibid., p. 34.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 47. ⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 39, 53, 92. ⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

love that expells sin from the soul. Love, not mere duty, motivates acts of piety and mercy.

Love for God produces love for all persons. God who has stamped his image upon all persons, has a "very dear and tender regard" for each one. Therefore, "the meanest and most contemptible person whom we behold is the offspring of heaven, one of the children of the Most High."⁸⁶ It is God's will that we "embrace" even the most contemptible person "with a sincere and cordial affection."⁸⁷ Wesley, "God's steward for the poor" continually stressed this kind of love. Scougal helped move him in that direction.

Richard Sibs (1577-1635)

Under the heading "Extracts from the Works of Richard Sibs D.D." Wesley reprinted four of Sibs' books in A Christian Library, three of which relate to this project. The first is "The Fountain Opened, or the Mystery of Godliness Revealed."⁸⁸ In this document Sibs attempts to unravel the mystery of supra-rational religious experience. Christianity is seen as a religion of the heart expressing itself in faith. When true faith is active a revelatory and radical grace is given which unveils the mystery of godliness.

Another work by Sibs is "The Nativity of Christ."⁸⁹ With the Incarnation as background Sibs makes a pastoral plea that persons avoid the mistake of those who "lift up their sins above the mercy of God in Jesus

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 87-88. ⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 88.

⁸⁸ Richard Sibs, "The Fountain Opened, Or the Mystery of Godliness Revealed," CL, 6:53-101.

⁸⁹ Richard Sibs, "The Nativity of Christ," CL, 6:102-128.

Christ."⁹⁰ Any person no matter how wretched can find mercy in Christ.

"A Discovery of the Near Union and Communion Betwixt Christ and the Church and Consequently Betwixt Him and Every Believer" is another pastoral work by Sibs which Wesley reprinted. The accent of the work is the love which Christ has for the individual members of the church. Therefore, "Let us oft think of this nearness between Christ and us, and not be discouraged for any sin and unworthiness in us."⁹¹ Sibs urges the readers to treasure their "communion with Christ, and esteem nothing more than his love, because he esteems nothing more than ours."⁹²

How deeply was Wesley influenced by the Puritans? He was so deeply influenced by them that if no one had invented the monicker, "Methodist," the label "Puritan" would have served well enough.

German Spirituality

Three German authors were reprinted by Wesley: John Arndt, August Hermann Francke and Thomas a' Kempis.

John Arndt

In Arndt Wesley found a mix of Reformed theology, sacramentalism and pietism. This combination served Wesley well in his formative years when he was almost swept away by mysticism. Wesley published forty chapters of Arndt's True Christianity in A Christian Library.⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

⁹¹ Richard Sibs, "A Discovery of the Near Union and Communion Betwixt Christ and the Church and Consequently Betwixt Him and Every Believer," CL, 6:149.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ John Arndt, "True Christianity," CL, 1:133-466.

Justification by faith and love to God and neighbor are the dominant themes in Wesley's edition of Arndt. Prayer, sanctification, repentance, and the conquering of self-love emerge as secondary themes. Arndt also gives ten rules to help the pilgrim toward perfect love.⁹⁴

August Hermann Francke

Wesley gave the Methodists an abridged edition of Nicodemus, Or a Treatise on the Fear of Man. Francke believed that "the fear of man is become the epidemical distemper of our teachers."⁹⁵ And many preachers "find it hard to give up their darling reputations and suffer reproach with the people of God."⁹⁶ The cure is to recognize the deceitfulness of our people-pleasing hearts and to develop self-denial. The practicality of such a tract for the much persecuted Methodists is obvious.

Thomas a' Kempis

Wesley first read the Imitation of Christ in 1725. He published 120 editions of his own abridgement of the work under the title The Christian's Pattern. For the last sixty-five years of his life Wesley carried it, along with his Bible, everywhere he went.

Thanks to Frank Baker's careful research in the early editions we know which parts of the work influenced Wesley the most. Wesley printed an asterisk by 268 paragraphs.⁹⁷ In examining the asterisked passages

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 242-246.

⁹⁵ August Herman Francke, "Nicodemus, Or a Treatise on the Fear of Man," CL. 29:462.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 466.

⁹⁷ Frank Baker, John Wesley's Own Choice, 2:21-41.

one discovers that the most meaningful themes for Wesley had to do with self-abasement, resignation, love, cross bearing, detachment from and renunciation of this world in favor of heavenly things. About one third of all the asterisked passages deal with such themes.

The seeker after perfection must "love to be unknown, and of no account."⁹⁸ One should "rejoice at slanders . . . for the love of Jesus maketh a man despise himself."⁹⁹ Therefore, do not think "thou hast profited anything unless thou esteem thyself inferior to all."¹⁰⁰

After renouncing self one must renounce both the comforts and creatures of this world. "Esteem all comfort vain which proceedeth from any creature . . . He that cleaveth to a creature shall fall when it falls."¹⁰¹ "See thou learn to forsake thy intimate and beloved friend for the love of God."¹⁰²

Cross bearing is an important part of the Christian life. "Christ chose to suffer and be despised; . . . If thou suffer nothing, how wilt thou be the friend of Christ?"¹⁰³ Wesley often repeated a saying by a`Kempis, "If thou bear the cross willingly, it will bear thee."¹⁰⁴

Many of a`Kempis' sayings on love were preserved by Wesley for the Methodists. "Love feeleth no burden, weigheth no pains, desireth above its strength; complaineth not of impossibility, for it thinketh all things possible."¹⁰⁵ Wesley liked a`Kempis' prayer for love: "Enlarge me in love, that with the inward mouth of my heart I may taste how sweet it is to love, and to be melted and swim in thy love."¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Anglican Spirituality

Many Anglican persons and works influenced John Wesley. Works such as the Book of Common Prayer, the Westminster Confession, and Homilies of the Church of England certainly had their influence. Of all the Anglicans who helped form Wesley's spirituality there can be almost no doubt that Jeremy Taylor and the non-juror, William Law, influenced him most.

Jeremy Taylor

The student is at once alerted to Taylor's influence on Wesley by such statements as this:

In the year 1725 . . . I met Bishop Taylor's "Rules and Exercises for Holy Living and Dying." . . . I was exceedingly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God . . . every part of my life (not some only) must . . . be a sacrifice to God."¹⁰⁷

Wesley's sermons, essays, and letters are loaded with quotations, and allusions to Taylor. For example, Taylor is quoted in A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, parts of Taylor's liturgical prayers appear in Wesley's personal prayer manual, his Prayers for Families, and Prayers for Every Day of the Week. Wesley's sermon on "Wandering Thoughts," is simply an amplification of Taylor's treatment of this topic in Holy Living. Further, the young Wesley adopted for personal use Taylor's method of prayer and self-examination.¹⁰⁸

Taylor's Holy Living features these guidelines.

1. Seek purity of intention. In this teaching Wesley found the specific type of perfection that is available to human beings.

¹⁰⁷ John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," Works, 11:366.

¹⁰⁸ J. Steven Harper, "Devotional Life," No. 1, p. 110.

2. Faithfully use the appropriate forms of prayer. Taylor composed prayers for "all estates of people" and presented them in Holy Living at a time when the Book of Common Prayer had been outlawed.

3. Fast according to the special days of the Christian calendar. Taylor lists fifteen rules for fasting.

4. View self-denial as a seed yielding perfection. If arrogance causes a swelling of spirit one has only to daily recall his or her "foulest sins" and most "shameful disgraces" and the attitude of self-abasement is restored.¹⁰⁹

⁵ Seek humility as the jewel of the Christian religion. Taylor gives fourteen "means and exercises" for obtaining and increasing humility, fifteen "signs" of humility, nine considerations against pride, and nineteen "acts or offices" of humility.¹¹⁰

6. Serve the unfortunate. Taylor lists thirty-three works of mercy which the sincere Christian might do. Included are feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, forgiving debts, teaching the ignorant, and redeeming "maidens from prostitution."¹¹¹

7. Faith, Hope, Love, Modesty and Bible study are also to be pursued.

The person who rejects such spiritual advice and who lives without sanctifying grace will be like the man who "roasts himself in the fire that he may quench his thirst with his own sweat."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Jeremy Taylor, The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living, ed. Thomas S. Kepler (New York: World Publishing Company, 1956), p. 124.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 110-131. ¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 260-293.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 31.

William Law

Two of Law's works that powerfully influenced the Wesley brothers were A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life and A Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection. These works so influenced John Wesley in the sermon "On God's Vineyard," that he declares Law to be the father of the Methodist revival. After Wesley had abridged and distributed nearly forty editions and versions of A Serious Call and Christian Perfection (including German and French translations) Law turned full heartedly to the mysticism of Jakob Boehme. One of Wesley's longest letters was a furious fifty-eight page missile to Law denouncing his mentor's embracing of Boehme. Law is urged to spew out "Tauler and Behmen" and to "renounce, despise, and abhor all the high-flown bombast, all the unintelligible jargon of the mystics" and return to the religion of the Bible.¹¹³

Law's early writings had been a close companion of the young Wesley before his Aldersgate experience. Law was a part of Wesley's problem. Wesley perceived in Law a sequence of sanctification as the way to justification. Wesley read in Law a works righteousness of self-denial and mystical ascent leading to Christian perfection. When at Aldersgate justification by faith alone became an existential reality for Wesley he at once pounced on Law. He complained that Law had taught him salvation by self-discipline and perfection through "a law by which a man cannot live."¹¹⁴

Frank Baker has gleaned from Wesley's reprints of Law all of the "asterisked" passages.¹¹⁵ In Christian Perfection seventy-eight

¹¹³ Letters, 3:332. ¹¹⁴ Letters, 1:239.

¹¹⁵ Frank Baker, Wesley's Own Choice, Vol. 1.

passages were so marked by Wesley they surely show what Wesley wanted the Methodists to learn from Law about the spiritual life. Here are the major themes which appear.

1. Prayer. Forms and hours of prayer are acceptable but more is needed, for that prayer which "openeth the gates of heaven stops not at forms and manuals of devotion, but is a language of the soul. . . ."116

2. Self-examination and Self-denial. The noble spirit that God planted in man is now fallen and is trapped in the sepulchre of the body. To revel in earthly pleasures and worldly pursuits is to be as mad as the one who is "tied to a bed of straw" yet "fancies himself a king."117

3. Holy Tempers. Christlike affections and tempers must replace sinful and bodily lusts.

4. Use of Time. "To talk of 'spare time' is to talk of something that never did or never will belong to any Christian."118

5. Happiness. To seek happiness in anything but holiness is like a legless man seeking comfort in a pair of "painted shoes."119

6. Perfection. Law exhorts his serious readers to "labor after perfection." The term labor appears again and again in Law's description of Christian perfection. Apparently he believed it was a state of grace to be attained, not obtained.

In A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life Law continues most of the themes found in Christian Perfection. Prayer, holy tempers, happiness, self-denial and perfection reappear along with some new themes. The chanting of psalms as a devotional exercise is briefly

116 Ibid., p. 36. 117 Ibid., p. 32. 118 Ibid., p. 34.

119 Ibid., p. 33.

treated. The education of children is firmly stressed. Education is seen as "reason borrowed at second hand, which is, as far as it can, to supply the loss of original perfection."¹²⁰ This and other statements on education we find Wesley quoting verbatim.

Of the 215 passages in A Serious Call which bear Wesley's asterisks 12 of them have to do with women's rights. This is a new theme in Law. Law condemns a form of education of females which denies them access to the arts and sciences, and turns them over "to the study of beauty and dress, and [then] the whole world conspires to make them think of nothing else."¹²¹ Parents seem to hope only that their daughters will have "a fair skin, a fine shape, dress well and dance to admiration."¹²² Men see these women as "gawgaw creatures" and "painted dolls" who exist to "allure and gratify" male passions. Women should, Law says, "consider that they are abused, and injured and betrayed."¹²³ It may be to Law's credit that women were so highly valued as leaders in the Wesleyan movement.

Helping the oppressed, conspicuous by its absence in Christian Perfection, appears several times in A Serious Call. Law condemns those who adorn themselves with diamonds, and gild their chariots with gold "whilst the widow and the orphan, the sick and the prisoner want to be relieved."¹²⁴ Law asserts that, "If . . . you don't spend your money in doing good to others, you spend it to the hurt of yourself."¹²⁵ This idea Wesley quoted and amplified often.

The contribution made by Anglican spirituality to Wesleyan devotion can be described as the gift of orthodox Christian spirituality with a

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 88. ¹²¹ Ibid., p. 93. ¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 94. ¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 50. ¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

blend of the Catholic doctrine of holiness and the Protestant doctrine of grace. An extra seasoning of mystical perfectionism was added, however, by William Law.

American Spirituality

Five works of Jonathan Edwards appear in Wesley's A Christian Library. The one that pertains directly to the inquiry of this project is his "Treatise on Religious Affections." Wesley introduces the work with the warning that it contains "much deadly poison" but also "wholesome food." The wholesome food was Edward's premise: "True religion in great part, consists in Holy affections."¹²⁶

Human affections are not mere animal passions. Rather they are "the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the will"¹²⁷ acting in concert with the "fervent exercises of the heart."¹²⁸ All this relates to the doctrine of assurance which was very important to Wesley.

Edwards warns that "prejudice against holy affections has a tendency to destroy . . . religion. And for persons to despise and cry them all down is the way to shut all religion out of their own hearts."¹²⁹ Edwards proceeds, in Wesley's version of the treatise, to present ten signs which persons frequently use to test affectional religion, but which really prove nothing. This is followed by nine signs of "truly gracious and holy affections."

Gregory S. Clapper summarizes the teachings of Edwards and Wesley on the centrality of heart religion by saying that it was "simply that if you are not humbly filled with love and joy about what God has done for

¹²⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "Treatise on Religious Affections," CL, 30:310.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 311. ¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 312. ¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 318.

you, then you have not really heard the gospel and are not really a Christian."¹³⁰

Having traced Wesley's tutors whom he revered and repeated a description of Wesley's spirituality could be made at this juncture. This task, however, will be postponed until the letters have been examined, noting how Wesley implemented what he learned from his tutors.

¹³⁰ Gregory S. Clapper, "True Religion and the Affections: A Study of John Wesley's Abridgement of Jonathan Edwards' Treatise on Religious Affections," Wesleyan Theology Today, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), p. 417.

CHAPTER II

SPIRITUAL FORMATION THEORY IN THE LETTERS OF JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley knew that without purposeful plans, structures and activities for spiritual formation the effects of revival would soon disappear. George Whitefield, for example, neglected these matters, when comparing the results of his work with Wesley's nurturing of converts he moaned, "This I neglected and my people are a rope of sand."¹

Wesley, as he instructed Mary Bishop, saw that the task was "not only to bring souls to believe in Christ, but to build them up in the most holy faith."² Wesley was convinced, as he said in a letter to Adam Clarke, that "to retain the grace of God is much more than to gain it: hardly one in three does this."³ Such concern kept Wesley busy with follow-up work. To his brother, Charles, he wrote that he could not make a certain journey for "I must go round and glean after G. Whitefield . . . The bands and Society are my first care."⁴ In 1748 Wesley again wrote Charles this time about a journey he must make, "I must . . . make another journey into the country. Our Societies there already consist of 350 members. But they are most of them raw, undisciplined soldiers, and,

¹ J. McTyeire, A History of Methodism (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1904), p. 204.

² Letters, 5:344, Nov. 4, 1772.

³ Letters, 8:249, Nov. 26, 1790.-

⁴ Letters, 1:352, April 21, 1741.

without great care, will desert to their old master."⁵ He urged his preachers to always "follow the blow" of preaching by organizing classes, bands and prayer meetings.⁶ Wesley preferred that his preachers not even preach in an area where the Methodists had no society, "I expect little good to be done in such places."⁷

To serve the cause of spiritual formation Wesley created societies, classes, bands, penitent bands, love feasts, watchnights, schools of several sorts and a vigorous publishing program. Most of these concerns will be treated in this document at some point. Attention in this chapter will be given to Wesley's paradigms for spiritual formation and his descriptors for various aspects of spiritual formation.

Wesley's Paradigms and Stages of Spiritual Formation

The Ordo Salutis

Wesley's master model of spiritual formation is the ordo salutis, the order of salvation. It serves as father and mother to all of the other paradigms in this chapter. It has the following components.

1. Atoning Grace. Wesley traces all possibility of spiritual life to Christ the Second Adam who atones for the devastation brought on humankind by the failure of the first Adam. As Wesley explains in a letter to John Mason atoning grace stays the sentence of death passed on Adam's posterity.⁸ Atoning grace, Wesley believed, did away with the guilt (but not the fact) of original sin for all persons.

⁵ Letters, 2:142, April 16, 1748.

⁶ See letter to Joseph Benson, Letters 6:77.

⁷ Letters, 6:221, March 10, 1776.

⁸ Letters, 6:239, Nov. 21, 1776. See also Works 8:277-278.

2. Prevenient Grace. Prevenient, or preventing, grace is a gift of God to all persons. It is irresistibly given to everyone. "No man living," declares Wesley, "is without some preventing grace."⁹ Prevenient grace is God initiating the call to salvation which human beings actively receive. It is in no sense dependent on humankind. Persons cannot earn it, nor can one choose not to have it. Preventing grace brings the first dawn of light concerning God's will and the sense of having sinned against that will. In some way it enables one to respond positively to God's call to salvation. In a sermon "On Working Out Your Own Salvation" Wesley said, "God works therefore you can work: Second, God works therefore you must work If he did not work it would be impossible for you to work."¹⁰

3. Justifying Grace. Prevenient grace brings one to the door of justifying grace. Upon hearing the gospel here the repentant sinner receives pardon for sin and acceptance with God on the basis of Christ's atonement. No good work is meritorious, but justification occurs when the penitent trusts Christ. Final justification is acquittal for Christ's sake at the Judgment. Wesley's doctrine of justification is the classic Protestant doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

4. Sanctifying Grace, Christian Perfection, Holiness, Entire Sanctification, Perfect Love. Wesley himself claims that he uses all the terms cited in the foregoing heading to mean the same thing. Many books have been written on Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. Unfortunately in many of them the doctrine has been torn from its broader theological

⁹ Works 6:511.

¹⁰ Letters, 6:239, Nov. 21, 1776.

context and made into a theological provincialism. With such treatment it loses its developmental dimension, its "stageness" and is made to stand alone as a victim of the human penchant for codifying. Too many writers and preachers have made of it a formula to serve neurotic searches for salvific certainty.

For Wesley there was no doubt that according to scripture, reason, and experience sin remained in the heart of the justified, regenerated believer. It no longer reigned as it once had, but it did remain cleaving to everything the Christian thought, said, or did. Prayerful self-examination revealed, Wesley believed, pride, self-will, inordinate affections and unholy tempers even in the regenerate. Wesley further believed that scripture, reason, and experience proved that the removal of this inbred sin was God's will and God's gift in sanctifying grace. This was Christian perfection. It was gained through faith by God's sovereign grace. It could be received; it could be lost.

The negative side of sanctification was the cleansing of all inward and outward sin. This Wesley believed the scriptures clearly teach. He found this verified in experience. Jenny Lee related her spiritual state to her spiritual guide John Wesley who wrote, "He has purified your heart. He has saved you from pride, anger, desire."¹¹ To Jane Barton he bore this happy affirmation, "It is exceeding certain that God did give you the second blessing, properly so called. He delivered you from the root of bitterness, from inbred as well as actual sin."¹² To Ann Bolton he said, "You are encompassed with ten thousand mercies; and the greatest of all is, 'Christ in a pure and spotless heart.'"¹³

¹¹ Letters, 4:183, June 7, 1762. ¹² Letters, 6:116, Oct. 8, 1774.

¹³ Ibid., p. 281, Sept. 27, 1777.

The positive side of sanctifying grace was the filling of the cleansed heart with love. In a 1762 letter to Charles Wesley John explained, "by perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart and the whole life."¹⁴ The whole process is described in a letter to Thomas Maxfield as "love excluding sin."¹⁵ When divine love excludes sin, Wesley believed, the image of God was again restored to the human heart. God's greatest gift must be the believer's greatest goal as Rebecca Ingram was told.

I am glad to find your love does not grow cold, nor your desires after all the mind that was in Christ. Now is the time to regain the whole image of God, wherein you was created. O be satisfied with nothing less.¹⁶

5. Growth in Perfection. Even those who received sanctifying grace were expected to grow, for there were, Wesley believed, many degrees of perfection. Further, he said, there is no perfection that does not admit of continual increase.

Perfection was, for Wesley, a relational affair and was dependent upon a moment by moment cleansing by the Holy Spirit. There was no "stocking up" on holiness. Without moment by moment application of the atoning, cleansing blood the most holy would become devils the next moment. Further, there is no perfection, Wesley said, which is not heir to "a thousand infirmities." No one is more aware of this than those perfected in love, and none more aware of their constant need of Christ.

6. Glorification. The last stage in the ordo salutis is glorification, that is, heaven. Wesley is not very precise in his teaching about heaven. It is, however, the great good that makes all suffering,

¹⁴ Letters, 4:87, Sept. 1762. ¹⁵ Ibid., p. 192, Nov. 2, 1762.

¹⁶ Letters, 8:134, April 24, 1789.

discipline, and labor on earth worthwhile.

Natural, Legal, Evangelical Stages

In his 1746 sermon "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption" Wesley described three states of spiritual formation: the natural state, the legal state, and the evangelical state or state of love. The natural human is spiritually dead, neither fears nor loves God, walks in darkness without spiritual discernment, and thinks himself or herself to be morally free. Therefore the natural person neither fights nor conquers sin. The legal human has been spiritually awakened, fears God, but finds no spiritual peace. She or he sins unwillingly in a Romans 7 type of struggle. Wesley's "legal man" represents a stage of transition from sinner to true Christian. The evangelical human is truly a child of God, is made perfect in love to God and man, enjoys true peace, and knowingly commits no acts of sin. He or she fights and is more than conqueror. These stages Wesley said are not static, but dynamic and in the same person the stages are often "mingled together." Probably Wesley meant that the first two stages are often "intermingled" in one person for the natural state and the evangelical state appear to be mutually exclusive.

This paradigm is rarely mentioned in the Letters, therefore it will be pursued no further here.

Babe, Young Man, and Father Stages

Wesley borrowed a three-part paradigm of spiritual formation from the Johannine literature. He uses babes, young men and fathers to mark three stages in spiritual maturity. He explains this scheme to Joseph Benson while speaking of assurance.

A babe in Christ (of whom I know thousands) has the witness sometimes. A young man (in St. John's sense) has it continually. I believe one that is perfected in love, or filled with the Holy

Ghost, may be properly termed a father. This we must¹⁷ press both babes and young men to aspire after -- yea to expect.

To Mary Bosanquet, who believed she had received then lost sanctifying grace, Wesley explained, "The moment any are justified, they are babes in Christ, little children. When they have the abiding witness of pardon, they are young men."¹⁸ The "father" level is "much more, even salvation from inward sin which above five hundred in London received."¹⁹ Wesley assured the despondent woman that she could "receive it again."

Wesley was sure that most Christians remained in that vulnerable state of "babe in Christ." This put them to risk. To Lady Maxwell, Wesley said, "Your mind is as yet exceeding tender. You are weak as an infant; your bones are not knit; you are not able to hear."²⁰ To his colleague John Fletcher he confided when speaking of the Church of England, "the generality of believers in our church . . . are certainly no more than babes in Christ; not young men and much less fathers."²¹

Wesley's concern was not to determine the status of each person so that spiritual chevrons could be awarded for swaggering display. Far from it, his concern was pastoral, and related to spiritual formation. We see this in Wesley's letter to Mrs. Moon about the tragic falling away of converts in the society at Potto.

They had not proper help. One just saved from sin is like a newborn child, and needs careful nursing. But these had it not. How few

¹⁷ Letters, 5:229, March 16, 1771.

¹⁸ Letters, 5:175, Jan. 2, 1770. ¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 14, June 22, 1766.

²¹ Letters, 6:221, June 1, 1776.

are nursing fathers! How few cherished them as a nurse her own children! So that the greater part were weakened, if not destroyed, before their sinews were knit, for want of that prudent and tender care which their state²² required. Do all you can to cherish them that are left

Almost and Altogether Christians

When Wesley wrote to Richard Locke, October 4, 1770 saying, "I . . . hope you will not rest till you are not only almost but altogether a Christian"²³ Richard no doubt knew exactly what Wesley meant. Harriet Lewis also understood Wesley when he wrote to her on April 2, 1789 observing, "you seemed to be just the same, . . . as desirous now as you was (sic) then to be not almost but altogether a Christian."²⁴

Near the beginning of the Wesleyan revival (July 25, 1741) Wesley preached a sermon at Oxford called "The Almost Christian." Wesley spelled out his distinction between "almost Christian" and "altogether Christian." This paradigm of the Christian life caught on and Wesley used it decades later with no need for further explanation.

What Wesley termed an almost Christian was not someone "almost persuaded" as to the truth of the Christian faith. Rather the almost Christian was a person eagerly trying to live by "that godliness which is prescribed in the gospel of Christ."²⁵ Such a person "does nothing which the gospel forbids."²⁶ No swearing, Sabbath breaking, adultery, idle words, or drunkenness mars this person's life. Further,

²² Letters, 5:77, Jan. 24, 1768.

²³ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁴ Letters, 8:127.

²⁵ John Wesley, "The Almost Christian" E. H. Sugden, ed. John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), p. 31.

²⁶ Ibid.

the almost Christian does not return evil for evil, but is active in reproving wickedness, instructing the ignorant, confirming the wavering, comforting the afflicted and awakening the spiritually dead. The almost Christian attends church, receives the sacrament, worships reverently, engages in prayer, and is motivated by "sincerity, . . . a real inward principle of religion from whence these outward actions flow."²⁷

Therefore, when Wesley tells Harriet Lewis and Richard Locke that they are "almost Christians" he is saying that they have "a real design to serve God, a hearty desire to do His will . . . a sincere view of pleasing God in all things."²⁸

When such a Christian is graced by God with the love and faith portrayed in I Corinthians 13 he or she becomes "altogether a Christian." The new experience of love, Wesley says, "purifies the heart . . . from pride, anger and desire . . . from all 'filthiness of the flesh and spirit.'"²⁹ The heart is filled with a "love stronger than death both to God and to all mankind."³⁰ Even one's enemies will be truly loved and the Christian will be "glorying to spend and to be spent" for others, able to bear reproach for Christ -- whatever the "malice of men or devils" inflicts. This is "love expelling sin" and "faith working by love."³¹

This two-part paradigm is seen by some as being generally analagous to the justified Christian and the sanctified Christian. Others say it relates to the sincere but self-righteous believer and the believer justified by faith alone. Almost without exception, Wesley uses it in terms of growing in grace or going on to perfection. To Lady Maxwell he wrote, "I have a very tender regard for you and an earnest desire that you

²⁷ Ibid., p. 33. ²⁸ Ibid. ²⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

³⁰ Ibid. ³¹ Ibid.

should be altogether a Christian."³² He proceeds to commend her on her exemplary external life and her fear of God but tells her, "This is only the beginning of wisdom. You are not to end here; fear shall ripen into love."³³ Wesley refers Mary Bishop to Miss Owens with the admonition: "Encourage one another to be altogether Christians."³⁴ To Elizabeth Ritchie, age 21, Wesley wrote, "You are just rising into life; and I would fain have you not almost but altogether a Christian."³⁵

Occasionally this paradigm was expressed as "half a Christian and altogether a Christian." Wesley's niece, Sarah Wesley, was urged "not to be half but an whole Christian."³⁶ This was to be done by letting "all that mind be in you that was in Christ."³⁷ Freeborn Garretson, one of Wesley's preachers, was urged to let none of his people "rest at being half a Christian."³⁸ Rather they were to move into the "altogether" category by going "on to perfection" aspiring after full sanctification as attainable now by simple faith."³⁹

Faith of a Servant; Faith of a Child

Closely related to the almost-altogether paradigm was another two-part scheme: faith of a servant; faith of a child (usually Wesley said "son"). Wesley claimed that during his "almost Christian" stage before Aldersgate his faith was that of a servant. By that Wesley meant that he attempted to fulfill the demands of the law and achieve reconciliation with God through intense exertion of the will prior to discovering true evangelical faith. After his discovery of full salvation by grace alone

³² Letters, 4:260, Aug. 17, 1764.

³³ Ibid., pp. 260-261.

³⁴ Letters, 5:163, Nov. 22, 1769.

³⁵ Letters, 6:84, May 8, 1774.

³⁶ Letters, 7:78, Aug. 4, 1781.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 276, June 26, 1785.

³⁹ Ibid.

he claimed the faith of a son.

This paradigm shows up several times in the Letters. In his second letter to Ann Bolton, Wesley says, "He loves you. And He has already given you the faith of a servant. You want only the faith of a child."⁴⁰ Two years later he writes, "I am glad you are still waiting for the kingdom of God: although as yet you are rather in the state of a servant than of a child. But it is a blessed thing to be even a servant of God!"⁴¹ To Alexander Knox, a man who suffered from epileptic seizures, Wesley wrote: ". . . a servant of God. This is your state. You are not yet a son, but you are a servant"⁴² This paradigm appears to be a parallel of the almost-altogether concept.

Wesley's Descriptors for Various Aspects of Spiritual Formation

Several terms, metaphors and descriptors became characteristic of the way Wesley spoke of the process of spiritual formation.

Go on to Perfection

Wesley constantly urged believers to go on to perfection. Since this is treated in our consideration of the ordo salutis and since it is treated more fully in a separate chapter, we simply note here that Wesley consistently taught that there are degrees of perfection and all Christian perfection admits of continual increase.

Renewal of the Image of God

For Wesley the end of salvation (short of glorification) was the restoration of the image of God in the soul of humankind. He recruited a

⁴⁰ Letters, 5:86, April 7, 1768.-

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 207. Nov. 16, 1770.

⁴² Letters, 6:272-273, Aug. 29, 1777.

number of scriptural concepts such as "the indwelling Christ," "Christ in you" and "Christ formed in you" to express this soteriological vision. Ann Foard, in her pursuit of perfect love, was told by Wesley, "When you believed you had the pure love of God, you was (sic) not deceived The Lord is increasing in you sevenfold."⁴³ Mrs. Pawson was urged to remember that even those who had tasted pure love "should continually grow in grace, in the image of God."⁴⁴ "To recover the whole image of God" was to be the "continual care" of Elizabeth Morgan.⁴⁵

Becoming Established in the Faith

Many of Wesley's correspondents were counseled to become "established" or "steadfast" in the faith. One Mrs. Douglas met some Christian friends for Christian conference and Wesley hoped "it would be the means of establishing her forever."⁴⁶ Jane Hilton was warned that the "powers of darkness are at work to move you from your steadfastness." Wesley advised, "Inasmuch as your grace is as yet young and tender" [you have] "need of every possible Help."⁴⁷ Both Mrs. Fuller and William Black⁴⁸ received letter-prayers that God would "establish, strengthen, and settle" them. Ann Bolton read the happy affirmation that God has "established your soul in His pure love and given you the abiding witness of it."⁴⁹

⁴³ Letters, 4:214, June 3, 1763.

⁴⁴ Letters, 8:184, Nov. 16, 1789.

⁴⁵ Letters, 6:381, Feb. 20, 1780.

⁴⁶ Letters, 5:19, July 8, 1776.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 97, July 9, 1768. ⁴⁸ Letters, 7:165, 183.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 24, June 22, 1780.

Growth in Grace.

The most frequent descriptor of progress in spiritual formation was the phrase "growth in grace." The metaphoric use of growth frequently compared the Christian with a plant in a garden. Miss March was told in November, 1760, "you are a tender sickly plant."⁵⁰ Lady Maxwell was described as "a tender, sickly plant, easily hurt by any rough blast."⁵¹ Mrs. Barton read at Wesley's hand about the good seed sown in hearts which must be "carefully watered."⁵²

Philothea Briggs is advised that growth in grace is sometimes "no more perceptible . . . than the growth of a tree."⁵³ Ann Bolton read this description of her spiritual state, "Your soul is still a watered garden, as a field which the Lord hath blessed."⁵⁴

Neither gardens nor souls can be put on hold. "You cannot stand still," Wesley wrote to John Trembath, "You must go forward or backward."⁵⁵ Ann Loxdale was told "you seem to be only a babe . . . and therefore need to go forward continually [and] grow up in Him that is our Head."⁵⁶ Samuel Furly was encouraged to believe "you can be stronger every day than the other."⁵⁷ The believer was to "expect to receive more every moment, grace upon grace . . . till your soul is all love."⁵⁸ Thus Methodists were expected to "Grow in grace every hour, the more the better" and to, "Use all the grace you have [and] expect all the grace you

⁵⁰ Letters, 4:109, Nov. 11, 1760.

⁵¹ Ibid., Sept. 22, 1764.

⁵² Letters, 7:194, Nov. 6, 1783.

⁵³ Letters, 5:331, July 22, 1772.

⁵⁴ Letters, 8:158, Aug. 1, 1789.

⁵⁵ Letters, 4:102, Aug. 17, 1760.

⁵⁶ Letters, 7:80, Aug. 15, 1781.

⁵⁷ Letters, 3:158, Feb. 3, 1756.

⁵⁸ Letters, 4:242-3, May 13, 1764.

want."⁵⁹

One should not invest Wesley's stages of grace with technical content found in the "stages" taught by modern developmentalists such as Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Erik Erikson, and James Fowler. Wesley's "stages" are, however, analogous to some of the discoveries and claims of developmental science. Some conclusions can be drawn from an examination of the stages of the spiritual life as represented in Wesley's paradigms and descriptors.

1. All spiritual progress through the stages is energized by grace, is by divine initiation, and is wrought through the response of faith.

2. Entrance into any succeeding stage is through the door of moral and spiritual crisis.

3. Every result achieved in any stage is always preserved by God in the succeeding ones.

4. Normally the spiritual life may be seen as an upward continuum.

5. However, the stages are dynamic, progression and regression may occur.

6. Codifying these stages, creating criteria for ranking them, or pseudo-scientific formulas for reaching some stage will drain the paradigms of their usefulness.

How was spiritual formation to occur? Wesley believed it would happen by way of the instituted means of grace and the prudential means of grace. The instituted means of grace are prayer, Bible study, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian conference. The prudential means of grace included all the arts of holy living that common sense recommended. Much of the remainder of this project deals with the importance Wesley placed on the prudential and instituted means of grace.

⁵⁹ Letters, 5:65, Oct. 14, 1767.

CHAPTER III

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION IN THE LETTERS

A spiritual director, according to Alan Jones, is "God's usher."¹ This usher practices the "art of arts," spiritual guidance. God's usher needs to be both "loving and learned." He or she should be characterized by love, tender respect, holiness, detachment, and theological competence. She or he should possess the gift of discernment, much patience, must practice frankness and honesty and be available to the Holy Spirit.²

Kenneth Leech describes the spiritual director as a "soul friend." This title is derived from the language and lore of the ancient Celtic saints who taught that "anyone without a soul-friend is a body without a head."³ Leech summarizes the qualities of the good spiritual director in six statements.

1. A person possessed by the Spirit.
2. A person characterized by holiness of life and closeness to God.
3. A person of experience--in prayer and life.
4. A person of learning--particularly in the scriptures and the patristic writings.

¹ Alan Jones Exploring Spiritual Direction (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), p. 80.

² Ibid., pp. 77-79.

³ Kenneth Leech, Soul Friend (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 50.

5. A person of discernment who can read the signs of the times and the writing on the wall of the soul.

6. A person who gives way to the Holy Spirit."⁴

These roles and qualities, along with the ones cited by Gilbert Shaw, Henri Nouwen, Augustine Baker, and Gregory Carlson,⁵ rather accurately describe John Wesley's spiritual direction in the Letters.

John Wesley and Spiritual Direction

Wesley stressed group spiritual direction as we shall see in the chapter on Christian conference. But he also believed in one-on-one spiritual counsel both as a director-directee relationship and as mutual guidance between two persons. He was convinced that spiritual guidance was essential. He repeatedly warned his people, both fledglings and veterans, that they could not keep warm alone. "I believe there is no saint on earth whom God does not teach by man"⁶ he told the much married but much reformed Sarah Ryan. To Mary Bosanquet he wrote, "You have need of a steady guide, and one that knows you well."⁷ His letter to Ann Bolton, July 8, 1785, shows Wesley's idea of both the necessity of a spiritual guide, and the qualities he expected in a good spiritual guide:

My Dear Nancy, - It is undoubtedly expedient for you to have a friend in whom you can fully confide that may be always near you or at a small distance, and ready to be consulted on all occasions. The time was when you took me to be your friend; and (to speak freely) I have loved you with no common affection. I 'have loved you' - nay, I do still; my heart warms to you while I am writing. But I am generally at too great a distance, so that you cannot converse with me when you would. I am glad, therefore, that a good Providence has given you one whom you can more easily see and correspond with. You may certainly trust her in every instance; and she has both understanding, piety and experience. She may therefore perform those offices of friendship which I should rejoice to

⁴ Ibid., pp. 88-89.

⁵ See Chapter XII in this project.

⁶ Letters, 5:17, June 28, 1766. ⁷ Ibid., p. 187, Mar. 26, 1770.

perform were I, near you. But wherever you can, give me the pleasure of seeing you.

The utter urgency of having spiritual guides, or companions on the way as Wesley called them, is seen in a letter to Frances Godfrey. He addresses her as "my dear Fanny" and says, "It is a blessed thing to have fellow travellers to the New Jerusalem. If you cannot find any you must make them; for none can travel that road alone."⁹ Even wealthy bankers like Ebenezer Blackwell needed a spiritual guide, "I am fully persuaded," Wesley wrote, "if you had always one or two faithful friends near you who would speak the very truth from their heart and watch over you in love, you would swiftly advance" ¹⁰ Hundreds of such examples are to be found in Wesley's correspondence.

Early in the Methodist revival Wesley found the role of spiritual guide forced upon him. "In every place people flock to me for direction in secular as well as spiritual affairs," Wesley wrote to a friend, "and I dare not throw . . . this burthen off my shoulders" ¹¹ It was a role that Wesley came to value, a role he willingly, even eagerly claimed. "I am . . . desirous to help you forward who are in the morning of life," ¹² he wrote to the young Ann Bolton. After urging Elizabeth Morgan to seek to "recover the whole image of God" Wesley added, "If I can in any degree assist you in this, it will be an unspeakable pleasure" ¹³ To Peggy Dale he said, "I do not see how you could possibly

⁸ Letters, 7:278. ⁹ Letters, 8:158, Aug. 2, 1789.

¹⁰ Letters, 3:94-95, July 20, 1752.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 216, May 28, 1757.

¹² Letters, 6:9, Jan. 15, 1773.

¹³ Ibid., p. 381. Feb. 20, 1780.

avoid . . . loss without a free intercourse with me both in writing and speaking."¹⁴

Most of the persons whom Wesley served as spiritual director by mail were devout women, frequently new converts. The direction carried on over the years by correspondence could hardly have been conducted on in person. Wesley traveled almost constantly and was simply not available. Further, the intimate and personal relationship carried on by letter could hardly have been conducted in long individual sessions without being criticized as violations of Christian propriety. But occasionally Wesley would have one or more of his directees accompany him on a journey as he made his regular visits to the societies. Sometimes it would be a preacher who needed rest such as Robert Carr Brackenbury in 1782,¹⁵ or a seeker of perfect love such as Mary Cooke in 1786.¹⁶

Characteristics of John Wesley's
Spiritual Guidance as Found in the Letters

Affection

The first quality one notices in Wesley's letters is his unabashed love and affection for his correspondents. His language sounds a lot like Paul's words to the Thessalonians: "With such yearning love we chose to impart to you not only the gospel of God but our very selves, so dear had you become to us" (I Thess. 2:8 NEB). To Peggy Dale Wesley says, "I thought it was hardly possible for me to love you better than I did But your artless, simple, undisguised affection exceedingly increased

¹⁴ Letters, 5:9. April, 1766.

¹⁵ Letters, 7:113, March 9, 1782.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 318, Feb. 23, 1786.

mine."¹⁷ To Mrs. Bennis he writes, "I think of you every day; indeed, I do not know that I ever loved you so well as since I was at Limerick last."¹⁸ To Ann Bolton: "I cannot tell you how much I love you; you are exceeding near and dear to me."¹⁹ Of Elizabeth Baker he asks: "What is that sympathy that often unites our hearts to each other?"²⁰ Miss Clarkson is told: "I love you because I believe you are upright of heart and because you are a child of affliction."²¹ To Ann Loxdale, with whom Wesley had corresponded but never met, he writes: "Your heart seems to be just as my heart. I cannot tell that I ever before felt so close an attachment to a person I had never seen. Surely it is the will of our gracious Lord that there should be a closer union between you and yours in tender affection, John Wesley."²² "I have always loved you since I knew you," Wesley tells to Mrs. Knapp, but lately more than ever, because I believe you are more devoted to God and more athirst for his whole image."²³ William Holland is told, "Our Lord . . . has given us to each other, that we may strengthen each other's hands in Him."²⁴ "Excuse me if I write just as I feel," Wesley said to Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher. "I have not for a long season felt so tender an affection for you as I have done in reading your last [letter]. I love you much for

¹⁷ Letters, 5:62, Aug. 27, 1767.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150, Sept. 18, 1769.

¹⁹ Letters, 8:9, Sept. 18, 1787.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181, Oct., 29, 1789.

²¹ Letters, 7:56, Apr. 5, 1781.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 59, Apr. 19, 1781.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 52, Mar. 25, 1781.

²⁴ Letters, 2:115, Feb. 6, 1748.

Wesley's openness could take the form of confrontation or rebuke when the occasion demanded it. John Trembath who neglected his study was "candidly" told "whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty superficial preacher."³²

To a correspondent identified only as an Irish Lady Wesley gives the following food for thought, "Should you not earnestly strive and pray against thinking highly of your own understanding or attainments in religion?"³³ He confronts his friend, convert, and counselee Sarah Ryan by charging,

You seem to think too highly of yourself, and (comparatively) to despise others . . . you appear to be above instruction . . . you appear to think . . . that none understands the doctrine of Sanctification like you . . . you appear to undervalue the³⁴ experience of almost every one in comparison of your own.

There was, however, a reciprocity of openness in Wesley. He allowed his people to be open in their confrontation of him. He gave guidance, but also received and sought it at the hands of his directees. When Wesley's harsh words about certain mystical writers offended Henry Brooke the latter confronted Wesley with his "excess." Wesley responded to Brooke in these words.

Dear Harry, your letter gave me pleasure and pain too. It gave me pleasure because it was written in a mild and loving spirit; and it gave me pain because I found it had pained you, whom I so tenderly love and esteem. But I shall do it no more: I sincerely thank you for your kind reproof; it is a precious balm -- and will, I trust, in the hands of the Great Physician, be a means of healing my sickness. I am so sensible of your real friendship herein that I cannot write without tears. The words you mention were too strong

³² Letters, 4:103, Aug. 17, 1760.

³³ Letters, 5:140, June 227, 1769.

³⁴ Letters, 5:17, June 28, 1766.

and they will no more fall from my mouth.

My dear Harry, cease not to pray³⁵ for your obliged and affectionate brother. John Wesley.

To Emma Moon he confessed, "I often feel a feebleness of soul, a languor of spirit, so that I cannot as I would press forward toward the mark . . . help me forward, my friend, by your prayers."³⁶ In responding to his banker friend Ebenezer Blackwell, Wesley said

. . . you do well to warn me against 'popularity, a thirst of power and applause, . . . against an affected humility, against sparing from myself to give to others from no other motive than ostentation.' I am not conscious to myself that this is my case. However, the warning is always friendly . . . always seasonable, considering how³⁷ deceitful my heart is and how many the enemies that surround me.

Repeatedly, Wesley models the proper way to receive spiritual direction. The unlearned Sarah Ryan gave guidance to him. Wesley said to her, "I cannot think of you without thinking of God . . . you bring me straight into His presence."³⁸ Jane Bisson, Elizabeth Ritchie, Joseph Benson and Mrs. Crosby are among those who served Wesley as spiritual guide. Reciprocal openness throughout the ranks was one of the secrets of the success of early Methodist spirituality.

Commendation and Encouragement

John Wesley was quick to commend his people for any sort of progress in the Christian life. Sarah Ryan is commended and Wesley promises to

³⁵ Letters, 7:174, Apr. 21, 1783.

³⁶ Letters, 4:195, Nov. 5, 1762.

³⁷ Letters, 3:103, June 27, 1753.

³⁸ Letters, 4:4, Jan. 20, 1758. See also Sarah Ryan's letter to Wesley, Letters, 8:240.

challenge "whoever warns me against trusting you."³⁹ Arthur Keene is commended for being a good school master, and for helping "poor Robert Hide."⁴⁰ Zachary Yewdall was commended "for being exceedingly wary with respect to marriage."⁴¹ Elizabeth Briggs was commended for trying and failing but was told "angels can do no more"⁴² than you have done. Mrs. Pywell was commended for solving an interpersonal problem,⁴³ as was Thomas Rankin,⁴⁴ while Alexander Hume received praise for getting good out of Mr. Crook's preaching.⁴⁵ Alexander Knox was commended for "still setting your face heavenward;"⁴⁶ Elizabeth Morgan for studiously "redeeming the time;"⁴⁷ Joseph Benson for erecting a new preaching house and for the "divine presence" which marked the opening service;⁴⁸ Thomas Roberts for giving up his fiance;⁴⁹ Mrs. Rogers for "increasing in the way of holiness;"⁵⁰ Samuel Bardsley for spiritual leadership;⁵¹ Adam Clarke for winning converts in the channel islands;⁵² Richard Rodder for being trustworthy;⁵³ and Henry More for integrity and dependability.⁵⁴ It seems that Wesley could find something commendable in almost everyone to whom he wrote.

Wesley was quick to encourage his correspondents with exhortations that a God was ready to help them. When Peggy Dale thought she was on her death-bed Wesley wrote to her about his prayers that she would have "many years to glorify Him in the body before He removes you to the world

³⁹ Letters, 4:4. 20, 1758.

⁴⁰ Letters, 7:222, 257.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 271.

⁴² Letters, 6:133.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 178.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 327.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 335.

⁴⁸ Letters 8:30.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 115.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵² Ibid., p. 146.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 180.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 215.

of Spirits. The comfort is, that life or death, all is yours, seeing you are Christ's."⁵⁵ Miss March was urged, "Dare to believe! Look up and see thy Saviour near."⁵⁶ Wesley wrote to Ann Bolton, "Many of your sufferings, perhaps the greatest, are now past. But your joy is to come! Look up, my dear friend, look up! and see the crown before you."⁵⁷ Jenny Lee who wrote to Wesley about perfection was cheered on, "You have faith: hold it fast. You have love: let it not go. Above all you have Christ! Christ is yours! He is your Lord, your love, your all."⁵⁸ To Jane Hilton, a new Christian in great temptation, Wesley wrote, "Christ is yours; and He is wiser and stronger than all the powers of hell. Hang upon Him . . . lean on Him with the whole weight of your soul."⁵⁹

Accountability

Wesley strongly believed that it was the duty of Christians to hold each other spiritually accountable. One reason he broke away from the Moravians was that he met in their societies himself "full of sin" and was not once reprov'd. As we shall see in a later chapter, the mutual accountability that occurred in the classes and bands was a powerful factor in the success of Methodism. But we see Wesley calling his correspondents to accountability as well. Edward Thomas had been expelled for conduct unbecoming a Methodist. Wesley wrote to reinstate him: "I am sincerely glad that you are convinced you went too far and I love you the better

⁵⁵ Letters, 4:319.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 270.

⁵⁷ Letters, 8:251, Dec. 15, 1790.

⁵⁸ Letters, 4:183, June 7, 1762.

⁵⁹ Letters, 5:87, July 13, 1768.

for having the courage to acknowledge it."⁶⁰ In behalf of Philothea Briggs, Wesley wrote to Miss March, "You have need carefully to encourage what is of God in her and tenderly to reprove what is of nature."⁶¹

We see the accountability factor at work repeatedly in Wesley's twenty-nine year correspondence with Ann Bolton. On March 30, 1771 Wesley told Damaris Perronet that he had examined Ann Bolton carefully and found in all her actions "sanctity and love." He added, "I marked her every word and almost every meaning; but could find nothing to reprove."⁶² However, on August 25, 1771 Wesley wrote warning Ann, "Do not spend too much time at once in any company. An hour . . . is . . . enough."⁶³ September 16 of the same year Wesley is alarmed that Ann has not returned his letters. "Nancy, Nancy! Why do you forget your friends? Why do you tempt me to be angry? . . . Do not delay to write."⁶⁴ On November 7, 1771 he writes "I want a particular account of your inward and outward health."⁶⁵ By January 29, 1772, Wesley is writing urgently:

Nancy, Nancy! What is the matter? Not a line yet! Are you trying whether I can be angry at you? Or are you fallen into your old temptation, and so care not whether I am pleased or displeased? You give me concern. I have many fears concerning you. Tell me without delay how your soul prospers.⁶⁶

On July 6, 1772 things are much better. Wesley writes, "I do not observe anything to reprove in the account you now give me."⁶⁷ By December 5, 1772 Wesley tells his directee, "Perhaps I shall find faults in you that others do not; for I survey you on every side. I mark your every motion and temper, because I long for you to be without spot or blemish."⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Letters, 8:162. Aug. 29, 1789.

⁶¹ Letters, 5:267, July 13, 1771.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 275.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 301.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 278.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 325.

⁶² Ibid., p. 233.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 287.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 349.

By February 18, 1773 Wesley was able to say to Ann, "I do not find any fault in you at present; only I am afraid you are not careful enough of your health."⁶⁹ On December 12, 1773 he writes saying to Ann, "I want to find you exactly right in all things. I wish you to be wise and good as an angel!"⁷⁰ Perhaps Wesley's hopes were too high for Ann Bolton -- or anyone else. But the principle of spiritual accountability to a soul friend is strikingly demonstrated in this case and in several others in the Letters.

Discernment

Wesley did not approach discernment of spirits in the way of the mystical prayer masters. He sought to be guided by scripture, reason, experience and prudence. His basic stance is seen in his February 24, 1786 letter to Elizabeth Ritchie.

My dear Betsy, - It is doubtless the will of the Lord we should be guided by our reason so far as it can go. But in many cases it gives us very little light and in others none at all. In all cases it cannot guide us right but in subordination to the unction of the Holy One. So that in all our ways we are to acknowledge Him and He will direct our paths.

I do not remember to have heard or read anything like my own experience. Almost ever since I can remember I have been led in a peculiar way. I go on in an even line, being very little raised at one time or depressed at another. Count Zinzendorf observes there are three different ways wherein it pleases God to lead His people: some are guided almost in every instance by apposite texts of Scripture; others see a clear and plain reason for everything they are to do; and yet others are led not so much by Scripture or reason as by particular impressions. I am very rarely led by impressions, but generally by reason and by Scripture. I see abundantly more than I feel. I want to feel more love and zeal for God.⁷¹

The dimension of discernment pertaining to affectivity was handled with caution uncharacteristic of Wesley. He consistently told his spiritual directees that precise discernment could come only by the unction of

⁶⁹ Letters, 6:18.

⁷⁰ Letters, 7:319.

⁷¹ Letters, 7:319.

the Holy Ghost and not from human counsel. Thus Wesley refrained from making a clear discernment of Mrs. Bennis' "sudden emotion," advising her to "pray against it."⁷² He would not judge one correspondent's inordinate drowsiness as either "natural" or "diabolical."⁷³ He counsels Miss March that only believers under the "unction of the Holy One are thereby enabled to discern his [Satan's] devices . . . and to distinguish them from the influences of the good Spirit, how finely soever they are disguised."⁷⁴ He adds that she has "been enabled by the grace of God to discover Satan even with his angel's face, and to stand firm"⁷⁵

In his correspondence with Philothea Briggs Wesley attempts to deal with discernment at the level of subjective affectivity. At age nineteen Briggs young disciple fell into self-accusation for which Wesley, in his first letter to her, recommended "the most mild and respectful expressions for pleading her conscience."⁷⁶ Two years later Wesley tells her, "There is a danger of . . . mistaking the voice of the enemy or of [one's] own imagination for the voice of God."⁷⁷ Discernment comes "not by any written rule, but only by the unction of the Holy One."⁷⁸ Her task is to act by Christian prudence, simplicity and godly sincerity. That same month Wesley answers another letter from Miss Briggs and coaches her about assurance of salvation and about an "impression" she had received. Wesley labeled the impression as a probable temptation from the enemy and warned that her "temperament is "both lively and unstable, and your passions are naturally strong."⁷⁹ In July Wesley is counseling her that right and

⁷² Letters, 6:56, Dec. 1, 1773.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 110.

⁷⁴ Letters, 5:147, Aug. 12, 1769.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 128, Feb. 25, 1769.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 241, May 2, 1771.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 253, May 28, 1771.

wrong tempers are often divided by an almost imperceptible line. Philo-
 thea's problem is self-approbation. Wesley advises that in her case
 "self-approbation is not pride . . . not sin, though it must occasion a
 degree of pleasure."⁸⁰ In August Philothea is in spiritual depression.
 Wesley writes to her about her over-active imagination and warns, "Satan .
 . . very well knows whereof we are made, and always attacks us on the weak
 side." He adds, "but these and a thousand clouds passing over your mind
 prove nothing as to your state of heart. . . . be devoted to Him, and it
 is enough." Beware of evil reasoning and "look for the answer of your
 prayer."⁸¹ In October Wesley counsels her again about assurance and
 being "sealed by the Spirit."⁸² Two days later, sensing her strife,
 Wesley again writes her about her health and about salvation by grace
 alone, and not frenzied good works.⁸³ In March of the following year
 Philothea is having trouble over "useless words or thoughts." Wesley
 tells her that even a Christian may thus be plagued and while wandering
 thoughts should lead her to "humiliation before God" she should not feel
 condemnation. These thoughts "are not your own and you may boldly say
 'Go, go, thou unclean spirit; thou shalt answer for these and not I.'"⁸⁴
 In April Wesley warns Briggs about impetuous and uneven affections. He
 prays for her to be more calm and steady.⁸⁵ The following month "Phil-
 ly" is advised against seeking a perfection "too high" for humankind. She
 is urged not to cast away her confidence because of self-accusation, that

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 266, July 13, 1771.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 273, Aug. 14, 1771.

⁸² Ibid., p. 280, Oct. 4, 1771.

⁸³ Ibid., Oct. 6, 1771.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 313. March 25, 1772.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 316, April 12, 1772.

is, through "voluntary humility."⁸⁶ A few months later Briggs is struggling over the difference between temptation and sin. Wesley says that this is generally plain to all that are "simple of heart." But in some cases the unction of the Holy Spirit is required to make proper discernment. In "Philly's" case, however, it is self-accusation. In a one-paragraph letter, Wesley again tells her "Voluntary humility, calling every defect a sin, is not well-pleasing to God."⁸⁷ A few months later Philothea is suffering from a lack of a feeling of love for others. Wesley instructs her that doing is ten times better than feeling.⁸⁸ By April Briggs is entangled in the problem of discerning or judging whether or not certain other members of the society are truly saved from all evil tempers. Wesley writes that it is "exceeding hard to judge of others . . . yea, it is hard to judge of ourselves -- nay we cannot do it without the anointing of the Holy One given for that very purpose."⁸⁹ In the remaining letters Philothea seems to be more stable. Wesley does warn her against mystical elements in Guyon and Fenelon,⁹⁰ and counsels her about "constant communion" with God,⁹¹ but is finally able to write in 1774 "Go on, trampling sin and Satan, and praising Him who hath put all things under your feet."⁹²

In such matters as career decisions, choice of mates and whether or not to move to another city, Wesley was frequently consulted by persons hoping to find the will of God. Wesley firmly believed that walking in

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 317-8, May 13, 1772.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 24, Apr. 8, 1773.

⁸⁸ Letters, 6:18, Feb. 20, 1773.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 24, Apr. 8, 1773.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 39, Sept. 8, 1773.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 45, Sept. 29, 1773.

⁹² Ibid., p. 98, July 13, 1774.

the Spirit included validation by the community of calls to service, marriage etc. Both Hannah Ball and Mary Bishop consulted Wesley about their school teaching careers.⁹³ John Valton consulted Wesley several times about whether or not to become a Methodist preacher. The result was a long and successful ministerial career for Valton. The poison of Wesley's own failed marriage seeped into his counsel to those considering matrimony. Most of the time Wesley opposed the proposed matches. Three of Wesley's female correspondents whom he had counseled against marriage found their way to the altar within a few months of Wesley's death. Some marriages he reluctantly approved, but only with warnings that marriage was a spiritual hazard, especially for preachers. A few marriages he enthusiastically approved.

In the foregoing sketch of Wesley as a spiritual director in the Letters we see him demonstrating skill in the classic role of the spiritual director cited at the beginning of this chapter. Further, apart from the extremely ascetic activities, the articles on "Spiritual Direction" and "Discernment" in the Westminster Dictionary of Spirituality read like descriptions of John Wesley at work.⁹⁴

Spiritual direction as a function in the practice of Christian spirituality must be included in some form in any modern spirituality that would be truly Wesleyan. In the case of Wesley himself one sees spiritual direction in its classic form. Spiritual direction as practiced throughout early Methodism, however, took the form of mutual spiritual guidance. This form will be explored in the next chapter.

⁹³ Letters, 5:273 and 6:258

⁹⁴ Gordon Wakefield, ed. Westminster Dictionary of Spirituality (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 114-116.

CHAPTER IV

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE IN THE LETTERS

Christian conference was Wesley's way of speaking about various sorts of purposeful interaction between Christians whether person-to-person or in small groups. It is to Wesley's ingenuous scheme of education and nurture through Christian conference that the spectacular success of early Methodism is commonly and correctly ascribed. In this chapter this "instituted" means of grace will be examined, particularly as it emerges from the Letters.

Societies, Classes, and Bands

The formative structures for which Wesley are best known is his system of societies, classes, and bands. Wesley designated his organization as the "connexion." This was an appropriate label, for the societies, classes and bands were interconnecting systems which held the Methodist movement together. To be a member of a class and a society was mandatory and membership in a band was strongly urged.

Wesley's "connexion" was geared for discipling converts, ministering to the spiritual needs of the members, and operating as a social service agency for the poor. The Methodist organizations were Wesley's answer to the plague of what he called "fugitive preachers" who held revivals and moved on, leaving the new converts to shift for themselves.

The Methodist Society

The society was the basic organization in Methodism. It included all the Methodists in a given locality.¹ It was the umbrella group-- classes and bands were sub-divisions of the society. Both members and visitors might attend. Wesley defined the society as:

a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another, in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.

The society had regular meetings on Sunday evenings. Its format was the most formal of the Methodist meetings. The meetings consisted of scripture reading, hymn singing, exhortations, lectures and preaching. All this took place in simple meeting halls with no musical instruments, no class-stratified pews, and with men and women seated separately. The education that went on here was didactic rather than dialogical. Methodist doctrine was proclaimed, taught, explained and applied.

A different sort of society meeting was held on a weekday morning at 5:00 A.M. This meeting was for members only. It was held before the work shifts in the factories, and mines. These meetings became a school which developed social responsibility as well as personal character. In these services Wesley and his preachers spoke on industry, sloth, dependability, cleanliness, thrift, and the sacramental nature of work. The first Methodist hymn-book contained a song called "Before Their Going to Work." The first verse offered this challenge:

¹ David Michael Henderson, "John Wesley's Instructional Groups" (Unpublished Ph.d. Dissertation, Indiana University, 1980), p. 105.

² John Wesley, Works, 8:269.

Let us go forth, 'tis God commands;
 Let us make haste away;
 Offer to Christ our hearts,³ and hands,
 We work for Christ to-day.

Two other meetings of the society deserve mention: the Love-feast and the Watchnight. The Love-feast began with a meal of bread and water and was followed by extemporary testimonies. It was a service of praise to God and to Methodism⁴ The Watchnight was a joyous celebration held once a month on Saturday night as near the full moon as possible so members would have moonlight by which to travel. Wesley was criticized for this "objectional institution" as Southey called it. Wesley's response was that sinners were being saved and therefore it would be preserved.

Of particular importance was the organizational structure of the society. The society itself was accountable to the Conference. Within the society the system for ministry and accountability began with the traveling preacher. He was not usually an ordained Anglican priest, but had been commissioned by the Conference to care for a circuit. Usually several traveling preachers served the same circuit.

Local preachers assisted the circuit-riding preachers. They were tradesman who stayed in one place. They were, "in absence of the minister, to feed and guide, to teach and govern the flock: to expound every morning and evening, [and to] visit the classes once a month."⁵

Stewards were appointed as financial officers. Their primary duty was to distribute goods to the poor. Wesley gave them a job description

³ Quoted by Henderson, p. 124. ⁴ Henderson, p. 129.

⁵ Wesley, Works, 8:275-298.

containing eleven duties and seven rules.⁶ The stewards were to distribute aid in a Christlike spirit, "Give none that ask relief an ill word or ill look," Wesley said. "Do not hurt them if you cannot help them."⁷

Trustees were appointed who carried the legal responsibilities for the society's properties. The deeds were so worded, however, that the trustees were responsible not only for the buildings but also for the orthodoxy of the doctrine preached therein.

The Class Meeting

The first rung of the Methodist leadership ladder was that of the class leader. Usually anyone who became a steward, trustee, or preacher had first served as a class leader. The class meeting is often hailed as Wesley's greatest gift to the world. Some say it civilized the revolution-ripe laboring class. Dwight Moody declared it to be the greatest tool for training converts ever devised.

The society was subdivided into classes of about 12 persons each. Every society member was required to join a class which met weekly. The meetings provided a more or less democratic forum where ideas and issues could be discussed. Such a forum was "unavailable anywhere else in Hanoverian England, for free expression in an accepting environment by people from widely differing social backgrounds."⁸ While many Methodist functions separated the sexes, the class-meeting was open to women and men. Women became successful class leaders, some went

⁶ Albert C. Outler, John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 144-146. Also, Henderson, p. 117.

⁷ Cited by Henderson p. 119.

⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

on to become preachers. The class-meeting was the most significant opportunity for religious leadership by women in Britain at that time.

The class-meeting itself provided an arena for Christian koinonia. A typical meeting would start with the singing of a hymn. Then the class leader would share the status of her or his own spiritual life. Answers to prayer, spiritual progress and the like were reported as well as were temptations, failures, or sins. Following the leader's example, others would then share their needs and blessings. In this context healing and spiritual growth were accelerated.

The class leader was the key. She or he had to meet no training requirement other than a demonstration of faithfulness, and of having earned the respect of those he or she led. The class leader was to visit "each person in his class . . . to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort as occasion may require; and to receive what they were willing to give toward the relief of the poor."⁹

The class emphasized strict accountability. One could not function as a member of a class without a quarterly ticket which was received in the following manner. Every class was visited quarterly by Wesley or one of the leading preachers. Each member was interviewed personally. If the interviewee had a good testimony and had missed no more than three of the previous quarter's meetings, he or she would receive a new ticket. If the person did not qualify she or he could no longer be a card-carrying Methodist.

David Michael Henderson cites several elements of the class meeting which made Methodism succeed:

⁹ John Wesley, Works, 8:270.

1. It furnished the environment in which cognitive concepts could be experimentally or experientially tested.
2. It served as a purging or pruning instrument to keep "dead wood" out of the society.
3. It was a training ground for leaders.
4. It was a point of entry capable of incorporating large numbers of new people quickly.
5. It forced 100% mobilization and participation of the membership.
6. It gave every member a voice in the affairs of Methodism.
7. It allowed people to practice speaking their inner feelings.¹⁰

In the Arminian Magazine Wesley stated the purpose of the classes.

The particular design of the Classes is, --to know who continue members of the Society; to inspect their outward walking; to inquire into their inward state; to learn what are their trials; and how they fall by or conquer them; to instruct the ignorant in the principles of religion; if need be, to repeat, to explain, or enforce, what has been said in public preaching.

To stir them up to believe, love, obey; and to check the first spark of offense or discord.

To inquire whether they now believe; now enjoy the life of God. Whether they grow therein, or decay; if they decay what is the cause; and what the cure.

Whether they aim at being wholly devoted to God

Whether they take up their cross daily; resist the bent of nature; oppose self-love in all its hidden forms, and discover it, through all its disguises.

Whether they humble themselves in everything. Are willing to be blamed and despised for well-doing. . . .

How they conquer self-will,

How they improve their talents

Whether they have a clear, full, abiding conviction, that without inward, complete, universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord.¹¹

The Bands

Besides being a member of the society, and a class, a Methodist serious about pursuing Christian perfection might also become a member of a Methodist Band. At the beginning of the Methodist movement the band

¹⁰ Henderson, p. 161.

¹¹ Article in Zion's Herald (Boston: Nov. 30, 1825), 3:1. It was designated as a reprint from an earlier issue of the Arminian Magazine. Cited by Henderson, p. 163.

was second only to the society in significance. Later the class meeting became more popular but Wesley always thought the best spiritual work was done in the bands. A band was a group of four to six persons who met together and shared their spiritual journeys in "close conversation."

The bands were organized according to one's sex, age, and marital status. The group environment was characterized by ruthless honesty and frank openness in which persons sought to bring to perfection every aspect of Christian living, particularly inner affections, intentions, emotions and attitudes. These Christians sought closer union, Wesley said, and they wanted to pour out their hearts without reserve. The rules for the Bands written by Wesley were as follows:

The design of our meeting is to obey that command of God, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another that ye may be healed" (James 5:16).

To this end, we intend:

1. To meet once a week, at the least.
2. To come punctually at the hour appointed
3. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing and prayer.
4. To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
5. To end every meeting with prayer suited to the state of each person present.
6. To desire some person among us to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order . . . ¹²questions . . . concerning their state, sins, and temptations.

Wesley designed some starter questions to be used in each meeting.

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret? ¹³

¹² John Wesley, Works, 8:272-273.

¹³ Ibid.

Candidates who wanted to participate in a band were screened closely. Some were admitted on a trial basis only. Each candidate was solemnly asked questions like these:

1. Have you the forgiveness of sin?
2. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?
3. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
4. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, . . . ?
5. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you?
6. Do you desire that, in doing this, we should come as close as possible; that we should cut to the quick, . . . ?
7. Is it your desire and design to be, on this and all other occasions, entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your¹⁴ heart without exception, without disguise and without reserve?

Wesley felt that in the bands he had discovered the heart of primitive Christian spirituality. Though critics thought such a deep level of sharing was somewhat scandalous, Wesley thought the bands scriptural and useful. Very high levels of trust, confidence and accountability were born in the band meetings.

The Select Society

The Select Society was composed of hand-picked persons selected to membership in this the most "elite" Methodist group. Only the most faithful were invited. The Select Society had no rules, and no order of service. It had no official leader. Open discussion of everything from Christian perfection to Methodist polity was acceptable.

The Penitent Bands

John Wesley was very realistic about backsliding. Some converts were repeatedly recaptured by their old sins. He organized the Penitent Bands for the sincere backsliders who as yet lacked the discipline to forsake

¹⁴ Ibid.

their sins and stay on the path to perfection. Wesley saw that, "They wanted advice and instructions suited to their case; . . . I separated them from the rest and desired them to meet me apart on Saturday evenings."¹⁵

Wesley's system of societies, classes, bands, select societies and penitent bands was probably the most efficient organization, religious or otherwise, in eighteenth century England. To the person interested in spiritual formation this model of discipling converts, teaching believers, and developing leaders is a marvel. George Whitefield, one of those "fugitive preachers" after whom Wesley gleaned, observed, "My Brother Wesley acted wisely--the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."¹⁶

Christian Conference in the Letters: Small Groups

The classes and bands are mentioned constantly in Wesley's letters. Everything from statistical reports, discipline, leadership problems and spiritual growth in the bands concerned Wesley. In 1741, in the early stages of the Methodist revolution, John Wesley set his priorities. He wrote in a letter to his brother that he was behind in producing books and writing his journal because his small group work came first--"the bands and the Society are my first care."¹⁷ The work of the classes and particularly the bands remained a matter of urgency throughout his life. In a long letter to the Bristol societies Wesley says,

Let all of you who have faith meet in band without excuse or delay . . . make it a point of conscience never to miss without an absolute necessity If you constantly meet your band, I have no doubt you will constantly meet your class; indeed, otherwise you are not of our Society.¹⁸

¹⁵ John Wesley, Works, 8:259-260.

¹⁶ McTyeire, History, p. 204.

¹⁷ Letters, 1:352, Apr. 21, 1741.

¹⁸ Letters, 4:272-3, Oct. 1764.

Edward Jackson a traveling preacher in the Dales circuit was urged, "You cannot be too diligent in restoring the bands. No Society will continue lively without them. But they will again fly in pieces if you do not attend to them continually."¹⁹ Band meetings were so important that not even the prayer meetings were allowed to interfere with them.²⁰ Even emigrating to America did not exempt one from small group meetings. Emigrant Henry Eames was advised by Wesley to find some "companions on the way" as soon as he got to America. "I suppose you gladly entered the Society as soon as one was formed, and that you never willingly neglect any opportunity of meeting your brethren."²¹

Several of Wesley's most trusted correspondents were asked to create, revive or supervise bands. Mrs. Bennis was dispensed to Waterford with advice to "be not idle there. You should gather up and meet a band immediately . . . meet a class too The more labour the more blessing."²² Later Wesley reminds her, "You are not sent to Waterford to be useless . . . make up a band if not a class or two. Your best way would be to visit from house to house."²³ Mrs. Smyth is told to gather a specific group of four persons to form a band.²⁴ Ann Bolton is charged to "meet all the women of the Society either in band or class." Wesley added, "You was formerly the nursing mother of the Society They have pined away like orphans since you was [sic] removed from them."²⁵

¹⁹ Letters 7:47, Jan. 6, 1781.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 324, Apr. 13, 1786.

²¹ Letters, 5:332, Aug. 3, 1772.

²² Ibid., p. 322, June 16, 1772.

²³ Letters 6:68, Jan. 18, 1774.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 283, Oct. 28, 1777.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 297, Jan. 24, 1778.

The bands, classes and their leaders were supervised with an eye to usefulness and discipline. The traveling preachers were to meet regularly with the class and band leaders. John Mason was advised, "It is of great use to meet the leaders of the bands in Liverpool. This should never be neglected."²⁶ The leaders were sometimes corrected. Preacher Duncan Wright was reproved for using the band meeting as a time to exhort.²⁷ Some preachers tried to take over the leadership of the bands. John Cricket did this and Wesley wrote him, "I positively forbid you or any preacher to be a leader; rather put the most insignificant person in each class to be the leader of it."²⁸ This was to be done even if no more than three persons could be attracted by the lay leaders. The leaders were not allowed to rule with a heavy hand as the leaders of the Leeds Society discovered when they started expelling members. Wesley denied them the power to expell anyone without his permission.²⁹

But discipline of members was not neglected by Wesley or his preachers. In such an important enterprize standards were important. "Prating in the bands" was not tolerated, but speaking "humbly and modestly the words of truth and soberness"³⁰ was to be the rule. Members were to talk about "no absent person, but simply of God and their own souls."³¹ John Mason was advised to "be exact in every part of discipline, and give

²⁶ Letters, 5:312, Mar. 22, 1772. Sunday afternoon was suggested as the meeting time.

²⁷ Letters, 7:94, Nov. 24, 1781.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 166, Feb. 10, 1783.

²⁹ Letters, 4:49, Dec. 9, 1758.

³⁰ Letters, 5:20, July 9, 1766.

³¹ Ibid., p. 324, June 20, 1772.

no ticket to any that does not meet his class weekly."³² Jonathan Coussins, and Thomas Wride were given the same advice.³³ John Valton is given advice regarding Sister Pitt who had the annoying habit of telling on the housetops what was said in band meeting. "Unless Sister Pitt be convinced of this sin, I will expell her [from] the Society the first time I come to Bath. I must do justice if the sky falls."³⁴ Wesley did not shrink from discipline. He once expelled sixty-four members from one of the larger societies in one visit.

It was common for Wesley to refer to a class or band those persons whom he served as spiritual guide. Mary Stokes, endangered by mysticism, is advised, "Keep close to your class, your band, to your old teachers; they have the words of eternal life."³⁵ Philothea Briggs is told to "meet with them that meet on a Friday, and speak in God's name without fear or shame."³⁶ Divinity student Samuel Furly needed more than a university education. Wesley advises him to continue meeting a small group each evening and to "begin the meeting with close examination of each other's progress for the day past."³⁷ Eight days later Wesley writes again and recommends that the group members "read the closest and most searching books you can, and apply them honestly to each other's heart."³⁸ Jane Cock is advised to speak freely with Adam Clarke and other friends and to "meet in band."³⁹ Thomas Rutherford is told to

³² Letters, 7:247, Nov. 3, 1784.

³³ Ibid., p. 259, 291.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 347, Oct. 29, 1786.

³⁵ Letters, 5:335, Aug. 10, 1772.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 241, May 2, 1771.

³⁷ Letters, 3:207, Nov. 26, 1756.

³⁸ Ibid., Dec. 4, 1756.

³⁹ Letters, 8:128, April 7, 1789.

see that Sister Cox "immediately meet in a lively band."⁴⁰ Wesley's niece Sarah Wesley is counseled to meet in Mrs. Boon's class.⁴¹ Mrs. Woodhouse is told that she has suffered loss spiritually due to the lack of Christian conversation such as a band could provide.⁴² Miss March is warned that some of the people in the band she is to visit will be earnest and some slack.⁴³ Hannah Ball is invited to visit a society in Watlington with the promise that she will receive personal improvement, since iron sharpens iron. She is also urged to keep the select society going.⁴⁴

Others received similar reference to resort to small group meetings. Kitty Warren who was seeking a "deeper change" is urged to make full use of all the means of grace "especially of meeting in band."⁴⁵ Ellen Gretton who became a sort of local preacher is counseled that it is Wesley's hope that "there shall never be wanting a little company of you to watch over one another in love."⁴⁶ When Ann Bolton's zeal appeared to wax cold and she was suffering illness and temptation Wesley stormed:

From the time you omitted meeting your class or band you grieved the Holy Spirit of God, and He gave a commission to Satan to buffet you; nor will that commission ever be revoked till you begin to meet again I exhort you . . . who tenderly love you . . . [to] begin again without delay. The day after you receive this go and meet a class or a₄₇band. Sick or well, go! If you cannot speak a word, go

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 197, Jan. 22, 1790. ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 239, Oct. 5, 1790.

⁴² Letters, 4:240, Apr. 23, 1764.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 181, May 13, 1762.

⁴⁴ Letters, 7:153, Dec. 1, 1782.

⁴⁵ Letters, 6:319, Sept. 8, 1778.

⁴⁶ Letters, 8:246, Nov. 4, 1790.

⁴⁷ Letters, 8:246, Nov. 4, 1790.

Christian Conference in the Letters: Person to Person

One form of Christian conference has gone nearly unnoticed in Wesley circles. One looks in vain among current Wesleyan writers for a serious appraisal of the person to person spiritual guidance which was practiced in early Methodism.

In the Letters we see Wesley repeatedly bringing together two persons, "twin souls" as he sometimes called them, each to help the other on the Christian way. Sometimes a babe in Christ is referred to a "father" for the implied purpose of spiritual direction, but many times spiritual peers are joined together for explicit spiritual watchcare and companionship. Thus we see that beyond the societies, classes, and bands (which usually get all the attention) an additional level of vital Christian conference functioned. It is reasonable to assume that Wesley and other Methodist leaders practiced person-to-person spiritual guidance in many instances which have never been recorded. In the case of person-to-person conference there is nothing official to report, no heads to count, no reports to make to the annual Conference. This significant practice functioned informally. Its value and influence is perhaps only hinted at in the Letters. It can also be identified in the journals of many early Methodists in which are recorded many profitable conversations. For example, Mary Bosanquet wrote, "The more I conversed with Mrs. Ryan, the more I discovered the glory of God breaking forth from within, and felt a strong attraction to consider her the friend of my soul."⁴⁸ Wesley was ever at the task of helping persons find a soul friend.

⁴⁸ Quoted by Telford, Letters 4:4.

Let us observe at this form of Christian conference in the Letters. Five times in his correspondence with Dorothy Furly Wesley referred her to "soul friends." In June of 1757 he referred her to "a poor, queer old woman in Bristol . . . with whom it might do you good to talk Her name is Elizabeth Edgecomb."⁴⁹ A few months later he put her in touch with Sarah Crosby with the hope that she would be "a blessing to your soul" and "again bring the promise of holiness near."⁵⁰ In 1759 Dorothy was urged to talk with Cornelius Bastable, "an uncommon monument of the power of grace."⁵¹ Later Wesley advised her to "converse frequently as well as freely with Miss Johnson."⁵² Still later Dorothy was commended for conversing with "Miss Ritchie. Dorothy is to "do her all the good you can, and incite her to exert all her talents"⁵³

Mrs. Woodhouse who corresponded with Wesley for sixteen years was once told, "I doubt you have but few near you with whom you can converse to any real advantage."⁵⁴ He tried to fill that void to a certain extent. He, at another time, referred her to Richard Condy whom Wesley recommended by saying, "I seldom converse with him but he does me good."⁵⁵ At another time he recommended "free intercourse between you and Sister Hutton" as an "unspeakable service" to tried friends.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Letters, 3:219, June 18, 1757.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 221, Sept. 6, 1757.

⁵¹ Letters, 4:71, Aug. 19, 1759.

⁵² Ibid., p. 225, Dec. 15, 1763.

⁵³ Letters, 6:233, Oct. 1776.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 107, Aug. 13, 1774.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 252, Jan. 21, 1777.

⁵⁶ Letters, 5:146, Aug. 5, 1769.

Peggy Dale, as yet a babe in Christ was referred to Miss Lewen with the directive to "speak to each other, not only without disguise, but without reserve."⁵⁷ In 1769 Miss Dale was urged to rely on unnamed "affectionate, wise, and pious friends deeply experienced in the way of God."⁵⁸ At another time Peggy was sent to help "poor Molly Straliger," for whom Wesley was "often afraid."⁵⁹ Lady Maxwell was urged to make friends with the "Miss Dales" (Peggy and her sister). "You and they," says Wesley, "have drank into one Spirit. Miss Peggy is one of the holiest young women I have any knowledge of"⁶⁰

There are many more such examples. Sarah Wesley was referred twice to Miss Johnson,⁶¹ also to Nancy Sharland,⁶² and to "Sister Boon, a loving simple hearted woman." Sarah was told to "be a follower of her as she is of Christ."⁶³ Sarah was also referred to the woman who would care for Wesley on his death bed, Elizabeth Ritchie.⁶⁴ Miss March was asked to converse with Miss Thornton at the first opportunity who "will have more need of a faithful friend now than ever."⁶⁵ Miss March was referred in 1774 to Miss Johnson and Miss Newman as suitable spiritual

⁵⁷ Letters, 4:307, July 5, 1765.

⁵⁸ Letters, 5:136, May 20, 1769.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 45, Mar. 29, 1767.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 49, June 4, 1767.

⁶¹ Letters, 7:54, 58.

⁶² Ibid., p. 39.

⁶³ Letters, 8:239, Oct. 5, 1790.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 87, Sept. 8, 1788.

⁶⁵ Letters, 5:147-8, Aug. 12, 1769,

friends.⁶⁶ She was also sent to aid the troubled Philothea Briggs.⁶⁷ Later Miss March was to serve as friend to Molly Pennington.⁶⁸ Three times Mrs. Bradburn is referred to her "twin soul" Elizabeth Ritchie.⁶⁹ Brian Bury Collins is to be helped by Mr. Hicks, he in turn is to encourage Robert Brackenbury.⁷⁰ Hester Ann Roe is to make friends with Miss Yates and Elizabeth Ritchie,⁷¹ and Mary Bosanquet is also to counsel with the latter.⁷² Mary Stokes is to reach out to Molly Jones,⁷³ and to find consolation in the spiritual conversation of Sally Flower.⁷⁴ Ann Bolton profited from being with Sister Iles, "a jewel" in Wesley's words.⁷⁶ Ann Bolton was to befriend Ally Eden who had gone against the counsel of her best friends and made a wreck of her life. Wesley instructed, "She has need of comfort; so we will not reprove her."⁷⁷

⁶⁶ Letters, 6:92, June 17, 1774.

⁶⁷ Letters, 5:267, July 13, 1771.

⁶⁸ Letters, 7:300, Nov. 16, 1785.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 33, 46, 199.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 23, 113.

⁷¹ Letters, 6:217, May 3, 1776.

⁷² Ibid., p. 147, Mar. 23, 1775.

⁷³ Letters, 5:230, Mar. 17, 1771.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 236, Apr. 4, 1771.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 216, Dec. 29, 1770.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 275, Aug. 25, 1771.

⁷⁷ Letters, 6:26, May 2, 1773.

Person-to-person Christian conference appears throughout Wesley's Letters.⁷⁸ Who can measure the positive effect of this mutual spiritual guidance that went far beyond typical care? The societies, classes, and bands, along with person-to-person care, produced deep mutual loyalties, unusual understanding, constant encouragement and comfort, and on-going accountability among these "companions on the way."

⁷⁸ Other letters in Telford's collection which speak of person-to-person Christian conference include: Vol. 3:86, 94; Vol. 4:243, 245, 251; Vol. 5:25, 142, 218, 223, 273, 276, 278, 279, 303, 315, 341; Vol. 6:79, 222, 269, 345, 353; Vol. 7:17, 131, 156, 200, 304, 357, 374; Vol. 8:5, 47, 48, 57, 79, 86, 127, 128, 160, 217, 229.

CHAPTER V

PRAYER, FASTING, AND DEVOTIONAL READING

Several kinds of prayer became characteristic of Wesley's people: private prayer, meditation, forms of prayer, and prayer meetings which could sometimes be described by such statements as, "The power of God . . . came as mightily among us that one, and another and another fell down as thunderstruck."¹ "Prayer is certainly the grand means of drawing near to God," Wesley wrote to Miss March.² Prayer meetings were the "grand means" of revival, Wesley told Edward Jackson.³ In the Letters mystical prayer was examined in detail.

In his early life John Wesley gave himself to mystical prayer, studied mystical writings and tried with all his might to ascend the mystical ladder to faith and perfection. He thought faith would follow works. Wesley nearly made shipwreck of his faith by seeking God according to the pattern of the mystics. But when he saw that salvation is by faith alone he turned against his previous master, mysticism, with a vengeance. He described it as "set on fire of hell," as a "specious snare of the devil" and "wisdom from beneath."⁴ James Hervey, Wesley's student at Oxford, was warned of mysticism as being "Satan transformed into an angel." Wesley added: "I fear that offspring of hell . . . Mystic

¹ Letters, 1:309, May 10, 1739. ² Letters, 4:90, Apr. 16, 1760.

³ Letters, 8:99, Oct. 24, 1788. _

⁴ D. Dunn Wilson, "John Wesley's Break with Mystician Reconsidered" Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society XXXV, (Dec. 1966):65.

prudence has drawn you away"5

Wesley claimed that the mystical works were half food and half poison. For all their "poison" Wesley reprinted many mystical works for Methodist consumption: Macarius, a`Kempis, Lopez, DeRenty, Bourignon, Brother Lawrence, Molinos, Juan D'Avila, Fenelon, William Law, Madame Guyon, and Henry Scougal. Two things about these writers attracted Wesley. First, their teaching on perfection, and second, their examples of continual communion with God, i.e. practicing the presence of God.

Understanding the elements in mysticism which Wesley opposed is crucial to developing a Wesleyan spirituality; therefore his objection to mystical prayer as seen in the Letters will be examined.

1. Mystical prayer is a struggle for salvation by works. Wesley maintained a truly Protestant doctrine of prayer "as the heart-cry of those who would receive a gift from God."⁶ To Wesley the rungs in the mystics' ladder of ascent were rungs of meritorious works. On this matter Wesley severely rebuked his mystic mentor William Law. In a furious letter, he charged Law with failure to teach him salvation by grace. Instead, Wesley claimed, Law taught him salvation by self-discipline and perfection through "a law by which a man cannot live."⁷

2. Mystics lose interest in the instituted means of grace. The sacrament, worship, forms of prayer, Christian conference, and preaching give way to subjective religion.

⁵ Letters, 1:287, Mar. 20, 1739.

⁶ D. Dunn Wilson, "John Wesley and Mystical Prayer." London Quarterly and Holborn Review CXCI (Jan. 1968):61.

⁷ Letters, 1:239, May 14, 1738.

3. Mystics make their own experience the standard of religion.

Every mystic, Wesley warns Mary Bishop, "has a religion of his own Each of them makes his own experience the standard of religion."⁸

Wesley insisted that subjective prayer be policed by reason and Scripture. He rejects the mysticism of Jacob Behmen, who led Law astray, because, "he contradicts Scripture, reason, and himself."⁹

4. Mysticism teaches that supra-reasonable mental prayer is superior to vocal prayer. Wesley declared, "They have absolutely renounced their reason and understanding Sensible devotion in any prayer they despise"¹⁰ Wesley wanted his people to use forms of prayer in order to avoid enthusiastic excesses. He counsels Mary Bishop against her yen for Madame Guyon's mental prayer, saying, "It is certain the Scripture by 'prayer' almost always means vocal prayer and whosoever intermits this for any time will neither pray with voice or heart."¹¹

5. Mystics refine the religious life and ruin it. The precise prayer of the mystics refined Christianity to a fine art that only an "artist" in the desert could hope to attain. In a letter to certain Moravians Wesley charges that they refine the plain religion of the Bible, manipulating it to accommodate mystical notions.¹² Wesley warns Ann Bolton about mystically "refining upon religion, aiming at something more sublime than plain, simple love"¹³ She is also instructed to

⁸ Letters, 6:44, Sept. 19, 1773.

⁹ Letters, 4:106, Sept. 17, 1760.

¹⁰ Cited by Wilson, "Mystical Prayer," p. 62.

¹¹ Letters, 6:44, Sept. 19, 1773.

¹² Letters, 1:350, Aug. 8, 1740.

¹³ Letters, 5:347, Nov. 28, 1772.

stop reading Behman and Guyon.¹⁴ Penelope Newman is warned about "Mystic authors" who 'refine upon plain Christianity . . . [and] . . . spoil it." True Christianity is "only humble, gentle, patient love. It is nothing less and nothing more than this."¹⁵

6. The dark night of the soul is an unscriptural creation of the mystics. To Wesley the mystics' dark night of the soul was just another rung in the ladder of self-righteous ascent. Wesley said that the Bible teaches that prayer brings light and joy, not darkness and despair. Ann Bolton was coached against a "Papist" doctrine of darkness. Wesley tells her, "They suppose God deserts or forsakes the soul for His own will and pleasure! But this is absolutely impossible: I deny that such a state ever existed under the sun."¹⁶ He goes on to tell Bolton that her spiritual heaviness is due either to her illness (Wesley diagnoses it as a "disordered liver") or the harassment of the devil.

When Wesley's correspondents complained of darkness or heaviness of spirit he never attributed this to the dark night of the soul but regularly cited the effects of a sick or exhausted body, diabolical attack, or some sin or fault in the person's own life. Spiritual self-examination was the first step which Wesley advised. If sin were the source of the cloud then it would be fatal to suppose the darkness was God willing the believer a desert to conquer. True spiritual darkness, Wesley told Mary Bishop, "seldom comes upon us but by our own fault." But heaviness of soul "may be occasioned by a thousand circumstances such as frequently

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 342, Oct. 25, 1772.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 341, Oct. 19, 1772.

¹⁶ Letters, 6:261, Apr. 24, 1777.

neither our wisdom can foresee nor our power prevent."¹⁷ Hannah Ball was told that her "heaviness" was without doubt due to "diabolical agency" and "weakness of the body."¹⁸ Elizabeth Padbury was told the same thing,¹⁹ and Damaris Perronet was told her "sinking . . . of spirit" came from the body pressing upon the spirit.²⁰ Dorothy Furly was given similar advice and urged to go on praying as she has been "then, if sin be the cause, it will be discovered."²¹ Miss March's darkness was diagnosed as the result of "evil reasoning," and the condition called "the wilderness state."²² Rebecca Yeoman was also told that her heaviness is due to "the wilderness state," a period of doubt, conflict, and temptation that many experience between conversion and sanctification.²³ Wesley resisted the dark night of the soul idea so strongly that he would not permit its existence even in the deep depression that followed Thomas Walsh to his grave, or in Jenny Lee's deep seated death wish.²⁴ One thing Wesley was sure of was that the God to whom he prayed was a God of light, peace and joy who enabled the Christian to "rejoice evermore." The dark night of the soul is central in many traditional spiritualities. Therefore who would develop a Wesleyan spirituality should consider Wesley's objection carefully.

7. In mysticism inward religion swallows the outward. For Wesley religion was a matter of acts of piety and acts of mercy, holiness of heart

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 111, Sept. 13, 1774. ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 27, May 23, 1773.

¹⁹ Letters, 7:185, Aug. 1, 1783.

²⁰ Letters, 5:235, Mar. 30, 1771.

²¹ Letters, 3:231, Oct. 21, 1757.

²² Letters, 4:270, Oct. 13, 1764. See Also Wesley's sermon "The Wilderness State".

and life. Many mystics became absorbed in atomistic interiority, manicuring their souls while people were hungry, naked, and ignorant of the gospel. Wesley told Ann Bolton that if she drifted into "Quietism" she would experience "an abatement of zeal for doing good."²⁵ Two years later Wesley repeated the warning to her, adding that an insensible slide into Quietism and Stoicism would result not only in loss of zeal for good works but in love to her friends and neighbors. This is "Satan coming with his angel face."²⁶ Wesley also saw the continual absorption in mental prayer as conspiring against Christian conference. "Mystical silence . . . is the very bane of brotherly love," he told James Hutton.²⁷ Further, excessive interiority breeds a false "voluntary humility" which prevents the Christian from witnessing to what God's grace has wrought.²⁸

8. Mystics carry self-abasement too far. Wesley practiced self-denial, and expected it of his people. But it could be carried too far. Wesley says this in a letter to Ann Bolton whose tender conscience could not bear the violent self-abnegation of the Mystics.

These are perpetually talking of 'self-emptiness, self-inanition, self-annihilation,' and the like: all very akin to 'self-contradiction' . . . they almost naturally lead us to deny the gifts of God. nay and to make a kind of merit of it; to imagine we honour Him by undervaluing what He has done. Let it not be so with you. Acknowledge all His work while you render Him all His glory.²⁹

9. The Mystical practice of prayer is not scriptural. The subjective practices and notions of the mystics, Wesley insists, "have no title of

²⁵ Letters, 5:347, Nov. 28, 1772.

²⁶ Letters, 6, Oct. 1, 1774.

²⁷ Letters, 1:276, Dec. 1, 1738.

²⁸ Letters, 1:350, also 8:93.

²⁹ Letters, 5:313, Mar. 25, 1772.

Scripture to support them."³⁰ "I regard no writings but the inspired," Wesley wrote to William Law, "Tauler, Behmen, and a whole army of Mystic authors are with me nothing to St. Paul."³¹ Law was vehemently urged to "spew out" the mystics and return to plain biblical religion.

There are several commonalities which Wesley and the mystics share with most believers. It would be a mistake, however to consider classical mystical prayer as the Wesleyan way of prayer.³²

Private Prayer

Private prayer is a basic ingredient of Wesleyan devotion in the Letters. Believers must persist in this exercise even though as Dorothy Furly discovered, "Nature and the devil will always oppose private prayer."³³ Nothing can take its place including public prayer, preaching, and worship. Joseph Benson was reminded that study of theology cannot replace it, "Let not study swallow up or entrench upon the hours of private prayer."³⁴ Ann Bolton is warned, "Let not your works of mercy rob you of time for private prayer."³⁵ Mary Yoeman was told, "Pray as you can, though you are ever so cold or dead."³⁶ Mary Bosanquet is told to pray whether she can or not.³⁷ Ann Bolton is

³⁰ Letters, 1:350, Aug. 8, 1740.

³¹ Letters, 3:332, Jan. 6, 1756.

³² D. Dunn Wilson quoted in this chapter tries to make Wesley one with the mystics, but he succeeds only superficially and by stretching incidental comparison too far.

³³ Letters, 3:229, Sept. 25, 1757.

³⁴ Letters, 5:212, Nov. 30, 1770.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-6, Aug. 25, 1771.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149, Sept. 2, 1769.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

to pray "however dull or dry your soul may be."³⁸ Damaris Perronet is to "continue in private prayer, in spite of all coldness and wanderings. . . ." ³⁹

Wesley wanted each person to have a regular schedule for prayer. "Private prayer you must never omit,"⁴⁰ he wrote to Ann Taylor. Miss March, John Trembath, Ebenezer Blackwell, Alexander Knox, Samuel Furly, and Elizabeth Ritchie were among those receiving similar direction.⁴¹ Wesley held up as a model his busy mother who "never suffered anything to break in upon her stated hours of retirement, which she sacredly observed from the age of seventeen or eighteen to seventy-two."⁴²

Depending on each person's circumstances Wesley recommended a specific scheme of prayer for each correspondent. Theological student Samuel Furly Wesley told to rise at five and spend an hour in private exercises. Another hour in the evening was to be reserved for prayer. Two separate hours, one in the morning and one in the afternoon were to be reserved for walking.⁴³ On the other hand Lady Maxwell, a gentlewoman with time on her hands was advised to spend six hours per day in prayer and reading. The Conference of 1745 set forth the expected use of time for the traveling preachers. After the 5:00 A.M. preaching service they were to "spend their morning (from 6-12) in reading, writing, and prayer; from 12 to 5,

³⁸ Ibid., p. 207, Nov. 16, 1770.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 235, Mar. 30, 1771.

⁴⁰ Letters, 7:374, Mar. 8, 1787.

⁴¹ Letters 4:86, 100, 161; 6:111, 314; 3:118.

⁴² Letters 6:84, May 8, 1774.

⁴³ Letters, 3:118, Mar. 30, 1754.

visit the sick and well; and from 5 to 6 use private prayer."⁴⁴

Wesley himself modeled what he preached. His prayer diaries show his unusual faithfulness to private prayer. From 1725 to 1738 Wesley's devotional life seems to have been a fervant, nearly frenzied, search for faith, and assurance. The Oxford diaries and Wesley's own prayer manual reveal an intense, self-disciplined and sometimes moribund soul searching for God. Wesley's devotional life was systematic, and constant. He collected for his own prayer manual forms of prayer from various and sundry sources.⁴⁵ He collected self-examination questions to be asked hourly, kept track of how many minutes of each hour were spent in "devotion," and made hourly notes of his spiritual state. As an example of how he kept his hand on his spiritual pulse, he noted on October 21, 1733 at 10:00 A.M. that he was "Fervent," and at 5:00 P.M. "Zealous."⁴⁶ He wrote rules and resolutions by which to measure himself. He stopped for self-examination at nine, twelve, five, and nine to consider the day hour-by-hour. Beside every rule he had broken and every resolution which he failed to keep he placed a dot. On Saturdays he totaled his failures. For example, in July 1732, he had a great deal of difficulty measuring up to question seven: "Have I after every pleasure and every command, given thanks?" He had failed at this point seventy-three

⁴⁴ Cited by J. Steven Harper, Devotional Life of J. Wesley, I, p. 309. He also quotes the minutes of the next year's conference in which this schedule is given in more detail, pp. 309-310.

⁴⁵ Steven Harper, in his 1981 dissertation "The Devotional Life of John Wesley 1703-1738," transcribes the young Wesley's own prayer manual and identifies nearly all the sources of the collected prayers. All information in this chapter regarding the diaries and the prayer manual come from Harper's work.

⁴⁶ J. Steven Harper, "Devotional Life of J. Wesley" I, p. 263.

times.⁴⁷ Harper notes that, "No matter how hard Wesley tried he could never clear his chart of all the dots."⁴⁸

Harper claims that "for the rest of his life, Wesley never swayed from his commitment to pattern and order in his devotions."⁴⁹ This is probably true, but it should not be taken to mean that the nature of his devotion did not change. The Letters, for example, do not show us the pinched-souled, self-righteous devotee we see in the diaries. Harper has only three fragmentary post-Aldersgate prayer diaries for evidence and if there is a weakness in the Harper analysis it is in the area of projecting too much of the young Wesley on the mature Wesley. Harper labels the post-Aldersgate changes in Wesley's devotional life as a matter of maturation. He describes it by saying that after Aldersgate Wesley's devotional life "became an expression of his assurance rather than a means to it."⁵⁰ Yet in his various writings he sometimes tends to make the rigid practices of the young Wesley represent the whole Wesley.⁵¹

It is clear from the Letters that private prayer was central in Methodist piety. "Prayer may be said to be the breath of our spiritual life," Wesley said. "He that lives cannot possibly cease breathing."⁵²

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 262. ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 263.

⁴⁹ Harper, "Devotional Life of J. Wesley" I, p. 268.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 302.

⁵¹ For example, Harper cites the young Wesley's elaborate system of resolutions and self-examination in the diaries without showing this to be characteristic of the Wesley who was looking for works to precede faith. See, Steven Harper, "A Response to 'The Devotional Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Movement,'" Wesleyan Theological Journal 16, No. 2 (Fall, 1981) p. 8.

⁵² John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament, 2 Vols., (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981) I Thess. 5:16-17, (pages are not numbered).

In addition to the Book of Common Prayer which was common property for the Methodists, Wesley prepared prayers for worship, prayers and devotions for every day of the week, prayers for families, and prayers for children. Wesley encouraged mixing both written and extemporary prayer in private and in public devotion. Even the depressed, weary, or sick believer can pray properly if some form of prayer is at hand. In the Letters, however, extemporary prayer is what Wesley advises. He gives some direction on this to Jane Hilton, "Tell Him simply all you fear, all you feel, all you want. Pour out your soul into His bosom."⁵³ Miss March is told, "the most desirable prayer is that where we can quite pour out our soul and freely talk with God."⁵⁴ She is further advised to, "Pray just as you are led, without reasoning, in all simplicity. Be a little child hanging on to Him who loves you."⁵⁵

Damaris Perronet in a time of "sinking spirits" is told

simply . . . to give [herself] up into the hand of God. Tell Him, 'Lord, I am Thine. I will be Thine. I desire to be Thine alone for ever. Thou shalt answer for me. Keep Thou Thine own; and let me do or suffer just as seemeth Thee good.' What can hurt us if our eye be single.⁵⁶

Though prayer is to be policed by reason and scripture Wesley recognizes that sometimes extemporary prayer may exceed reason. Sometimes, Wesley explained to Miss March, "the understanding has little to do, while the soul is poured forth in passive prayer."⁵⁷ Wesley illus-

⁵³ Letters 5:101, Aug. 20, 1768.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262, June 25, 1771.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 325, July 1, 1772.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235, Mar. 30, 1771.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147, Aug. 12, 1769.

trated the point by citing the closing of the previous Conference when "all the preachers were melted down" as they sang:

Thou who so long hast saved me here,
A little longer save;
Till freed from sin and freed from fear,
I sink into the grave.
Till glad I lay my body down,
Thy servant's steps attend;
And, oh, my life of mercies crown⁵⁸
With a triumphant end!

In such poured out prayer, language may fail us. Wesley urges Mary Stokes to "enter into your closet and shut the door and pray to your Father who seeth in secret, then is the time to groan to Him who reads . . . the unutterable prayer."⁵⁹

Petition and intercession were to be a part of extemporary private prayer. Mrs. Woodhouse in 1770 was urged on to "double diligence in private prayer"⁶⁰ for her husband who disliked Methodism. The "double diligence" bore fruit for in 1773 Wesley rejoiced in another letter to her: "I am glad to hear so good an account of Mr. Woodhouse. We have to do with a God that heareth prayer."⁶¹ Wesley and his correspondents shared prayers of intercession and petition over backsliders, the sick, persecution, family problems, the nation and the king. And they prayed for each other. To Mary Stokes Wesley wrote, "I am accustomed to remember a few of my friends about ten o'clock in the morning: I must take you in among them on condition that you will likewise remember me at that time."⁶² Such mutual prayer Wesley viewed as a sort of communication. He wrote to Mrs. Bennis, his vigorous helper in Ireland, saying, "It would

⁵⁸ Ibid. ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 334, Aug. 10, 1772.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 174, Jan. 1, 1770. - ⁶¹ Letters, 6:51, Oct. 22, 1773.

⁶² Letters, 5:288, Nov. 9, 1771.

be a strange thing if I should pass a day without praying for you. By this means at least we may reach each other; and there may be a still increasing union between you and your affectionate brother."⁶³

The prayer life Wesley coveted for his correspondents was continual prayer: praying without ceasing, and living at all times in all circumstances with the prayerful awareness of God's presence. In support of this he cited I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." The existential validation of this Scripture came from mystics like Gregory Lopez, Jean Baptiste DeRenty, and Brother Lawrence. All of these testified to uninterrupted communion with God even during vigorous activities of various kinds. Wesley, like the Puritans, was sure that the spiritual life did not require retreat to a desert monastery, but could be lived by shopkeepers, miners, mill hands, and peat cutters. He tried to lead his directees into this pattern of constant prayerfulness. Bishop Maxie Dunnam, a modern Methodist, calls this pattern "prayerful living." He defines it as "recognizing, cultivating awareness of, and giving expression to the indwelling Christ We sharpen our sensitivity and deepen our yieldedness to his presence."⁶⁴ Prayerful living also includes reflecting Christ's "life within us in our daily living; living out of his presence so that His Spirit will be expressed through us."⁶⁵ This observation accurately interprets Wesley's words to Ebenezer Blackwell, "Do you not find need to pray always? And if you can't always say,

My hands are but employed below,
My heart is still with Thee,

⁶³ Ibid., p. 243, May 15, 1771.

⁶⁴ Maxie Dunnam, Alive in Christ (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), p. 26.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

is there not [more reason] for some season of solemn retirement . .

.⁶⁶ Prayerful living is the topic of concern in his January 15, 1773 letter to Ann Bolton:

Do you find as near and as constant a communion with God as when I saw you last? Are you now continually sensible of His loving presence and continually happy in Him? Do you enjoy an uninterrupted spirit of prayer . . .? Does not company or⁶⁷ hurry of business ever hinder your attention to the presence of God?

Continual prayer was not the grace of a babe in Christ, but of the sanctified and growing life. It was particularly expected of those who had been perfected in love. Peggy Dale, Miss March, Sarah Ryan, Philothea Briggs, Mrs. Woodhouse, Jane Bisson, and Elizabeth Baker were among those of whom prayerful living was expected.⁶⁸

Group Prayer

In addition to private prayer the early Methodists operated many prayer meetings. A prayer meeting might be called because of a shortage of provisions, to overcome persecution, to seek revival, health for the sick, or for reasons of Christian conference. William Simpson was commended for enlarging the number of prayer meetings at Yarm and strategically planting them in various parts of the town. "I do not know of any means of grace," wrote Wesley, "more owned of God than this."⁶⁹ John Valton was reminded that remarkable blessings including revival usually accompany the prayer meetings.⁷⁰ Joseph Benson, was told by Wesley, "I love prayer-meetings, and wish they were set up in every corner of town."⁷¹

⁶⁶ Letters, 2:131, Mar. 15, 1758.

⁶⁷ Letters, 6:10.

⁶⁸ See Letters, 4:233, 305; 5:71, 271, 338; 8:27, 89.

⁶⁹ Letters, 8:35-6, Jan. 18, 1788.

⁷⁰ Letters, 5:289, Nov. 2, 1771.

Adam Clarke and Mrs. Crosby are instructed by mail on how to run prayer meetings properly.⁷² Ann Bolton is reminded that sometimes prayer meetings achieve more than preaching, Mary Bosanquet is commended for organizing prayer meetings, Ann Loxdale is urged to start one among her friends, and Thomas Rutherford is encouraged to start even more because the ones he has are so good.⁷² He is also commended for "holding prayer-meetings in and making visits to the Poorhouse."⁷⁴ The prayer-meetings were to be orderly, with only one person praying at a time. Seasons of prayer might be punctuated with mutual exhortations and the meetings were to be dismissed after one hour. Group prayer was an important element in early Methodist spirituality and must be employed by any who would enact again a Wesleyan spirituality.

Fasting

Fasting did not occupy the mind of Wesley to a great degree when he wrote to his people. I found fewer than thirty letters among 2,800 in which fasting is treated, and in some of those letters it is an incidental item. Fasting, however, was part of the Methodist model of Christian life. The Anglican fasts on the church calendar would have been observed by most Methodists. Wesley himself practiced fasting. The young Wesley at Oxford fasted Wednesdays and Fridays. Later he observed only Friday as a regular fast day as did most Methodists.

Punitive or extreme fasting was neither practiced nor recommended by Wesley. Perhaps one of the reasons for a relatively light emphasis on

⁷² Letters, 8:234, 237; 5:130.

⁷³ Letters, 5:130; 6:50; 7:145, 162, 295.

⁷⁴ Letters 6:362, Nov. 9, 1779.

fasting was the involuntary fasting demanded by widespread hunger which was a rude fact of life in England at the time. My 1984 study of seventeenth century British newspapers turned up stories of one-hundred fifty hunger riots during Wesley's time of ministering. Almost every edition of the newspapers carried stories of starving persons dying of "Want."⁷⁵ The problem was finding food, not turning it down.

Nevertheless, Wesley believed that, "When you seek God with fasting added to prayer, you cannot seek His face in vain."⁷⁶ "Prayer and fasting are of excellent uses,"⁷⁷ Wesley assures Elizabeth Padbury. Adam Clarke is commended for "recommending fasting" but is told "you need not wonder" that fasting will be opposed by "formalists" and "by half Methodists."⁷⁸ In three letters societies are reprimanded for neglecting fasting as a means of grace."⁷⁹

From the Letters it appears that the most common use of fasting among the early Wesleyans (besides the Friday fasting) was to set special days of fasting for special needs such as a revival in Waterford,⁸⁰ persecution in the Dales Circuit,⁸¹ or John Wesley's illness.⁸²

Bible Reading

For Wesley there was no question about either the sufficiency or the authority of the Bible: "I am fully assured today, as I am of the shining

⁷⁵ Wesley Tracy, "The Eighteenth Century 'Worst of Times' and What John Wesley Did About Them." Emphasis 10, No. 1 (Sept./Oct./Nov. 1986): 15-16.

⁷⁶ Letters, 5:112, Nov. 18. 1768.

⁷⁷ Letters, 7:193-194, Oct. 29, 1783.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 314, Feb. 3, 1786. ⁷⁹ Letters, 4:312, 7:256, 259.

⁸⁰ Letters, 6:77. ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228. ⁸² Letters 1:360.

of the sun, that the Scriptures are of God."⁸³ The Bible was the rule and interpreter of practice. No "precarious inward motion [is to take] the place of the written Word."⁸⁴ "The Scriptures are the touchstones whereby Christians examine all, real or supposed revelation."⁸⁵ "On Scripture and common sense I build all my principles,"⁸⁶ Wesley wrote twice to Samuel Sparrow. The mystics may cry out 'Au desert! Au desert!' . . . but I say 'To the Bible! To the Bible!'"⁸⁷ The Bible is after all "the most decisive of all proofs" ⁸⁸ Wesley wrote to John Dickens the day after Christmas, 1789: "What I rightly wish is that you may all keep close to the Bible. Be not wise above what is written. Enjoin nothing that the Bible does not clearly enjoin."⁸⁹ Many times Wesley welcomed the label he embraced and shared with Ann Bolton, "You and I are bigots to the Bible."⁹⁰

It is predictable that our "Bible bigot" would fill his letters with exhortations to read and meditate on the scriptures. Seldom is anyone told to pray without also being instructed to read the Bible, and in many cases to meditate. Frequently reading above and beyond Bible study is also prescribed. Elizabeth Morgan is counseled about "a prudent mixture of reading, meditation, prayer and conversation;"⁹¹ Sarah Wesley is

⁸³ Letters, 2:92, Mar. 25, 1747.

⁸⁴ Letters, 1:351, Aug. 8, 1740.

⁸⁵ Letters, 2:117, Feb. 10, 1748.

⁸⁶ Letters, 6:49, 60. ⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 128, Nov. 30, 1774.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 245, Dec. 26, 1776. ⁸⁹ Letters, 8:192.

⁹⁰ Letters, 5:313, Mar. 25, 1772.

⁹¹ Letters, 7:51, Mar. 13, 1781.

advised, "Your best helps will be prayer and reading;"⁹² Robert Consterdine is told to be sure his people "read as well as pray;"⁹³ Mrs. Woodhouse is to "stir up the gift of God . . . by reading, by meditation, and . . . by private prayer;"⁹⁴ and Mrs. Gair is to "contrive all the opportunities you can for . . . prayer, reading, and meditation."⁹⁵ To Joseph Benson Wesley writes, "O Joseph, keep close to the Bible both as to sentiment and expression."⁹⁶ Miss March, John Dickens, Sarah Ryan, Ann Bolton and many others received similar counsel.

Although the letters do not often contain detailed Bible study methods, some instruction is given from time to time. Wesley wrote to Martha Chapman:

The most profitable way of reading is to read in an exact method: suppose a chapter or two (as time may serve) in the Old Testament with the Notes in the morning; and a chapter more or less of the New Testament in the Notes in the afternoon or evening. Next to this it might be useful to read the Works in order, only not too fast, not too much at a time. For all reading should be joined with meditation and prayer. Read a little, pray and meditate much.⁹⁷

Such instructions are repeated in several letters including correspondence to Elizabeth Ritchie, Zachariah Yewdall, Alexander Knox, Philothea Briggs, and Ann Foard.⁹⁸ To Samuel Furly, a theological student, similar instructions are followed with "above all, study the Greek and Hebrew Bible, and the love of Christ."⁹⁹

Though these instructions may seem to be so sparse as to be of little help, one must remember that in other publications Wesley had been

⁹² Ibid., p. 39, Nov. 15, 1780. ⁹³ Letters, 5:67, Nov. 26, 1767.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 12, May 17, 1766. ⁹⁵ Letters, 6:346, May 26, 1779.

⁹⁶ Letters, 5:215, Dec. 28, 1770. ⁹⁷ Letters, 6:7, Dec. 17, 1772.

⁹⁸ Letters, 6:125, 357, 314; 5:221, 25.

⁹⁹ Letters, 3:163, Feb. 18, 1756.

more specific about how to study the Bible. Most of Wesley's correspondents would have known Wesley's homo unius libri statement:

I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from Heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here in His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: "Lord, is it not Thy word, 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God'? Thou 'givest liberally, and upbraidest not.' Thou hast said, 'If any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know.' I am willing to do, let me know, Thy will." I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.

Most of Wesley's correspondents would have also known this statement from the preface to the Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament.

If you desire to read the Scriptures in such a manner as may most effectually answer this end, would it not be advisable, (1) To set apart a little time, if you can, every morning and evening for that purpose? (2) At each time, if you have leisure, to read a chapter out of the Old, and one out of the New Testament; if you cannot do this, to take a single chapter or a part of one? (3) To read this with a single eye, to know the whole will of God, and a fixed resolution to do it? In order to know his will, you should, (4) Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith, the connexion and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness: (5) Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God; seeing "Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given." Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written in our hearts: (6) It might also be of use, if, while we read, we were frequently to pause, and examine ourselves by what we read, both with regard to our hearts and lives. This would furnish us with matter of praise, where we found God had enabled us to conform to his blessed will, and matter of humiliation and prayer, where we were conscious of having fallen short. And whatever light you then receive should be used to the uttermost, and that immediately. Let there be no delay. Whatever you resolve, begin to execute the first moment you

100 John Wesley, Works, 5:3.

can. So shall you find this word¹⁰¹ to be indeed the power of God unto present and eternal salvation.

With such instructions in their minds Wesley's correspondents knew what to do when he told them to read, meditate, and pray.

Meditation

Meditation is mentioned quite often, always making its appearance in the company of reading or prayer, or both. Wesley does not explain meditation in detail in the letters, but clearly it has nothing to do with meditation based on ascetical practices. For Wesley meditation has a strong rational flavor and seems to be more closely related to reading than to prayer. For example, in 1774, Elizabeth Ritchie was advised to read Wesley's Works, "marking any . . . part . . . which you find most useful, that you may make it a matter of meditation."¹⁰² Miss March was instructed, "We learn to think by reading and meditating on what we read . . ."¹⁰³ No particular meditation procedures are mentioned by Wesley. But for Methodist use Wesley did reprint Richard Baxter's method for meditating on the scripture. Baxter's method has five steps: information, examination, dehortation, consolation, and exhortation. It includes "stepping into the Bible scene," conversing with the Bible characters, and hearing their songs, questions, and proclamations.¹⁰⁴

Wesley also spoke of meditation as being related to prayer. To Christopher Hopper he wrote, "He [God] calls you to converse with Him more in

¹⁰¹ John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament, 3 vols. (Bristol: William Pine, 1755), p. ix.

¹⁰² Letters, 6:125, Nov. 29, 1774.

¹⁰³ Letters, 5:326, July 1, 1772.

¹⁰⁴ Richard Baxter, The Saints Everlasting Rest. ed. Wm. Young (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1909), pp. 350-363.

prayer and meditation. In the former we more directly speak of God; in the latter He speaks to us."¹⁰⁵ Ebenezer Blackwell was counseled toward meditation with an emphasis on solitude. He was urged to find a "season of solemn retirement (if it were possible every day), wherein you may withdraw your mind from earth, and even the accounts between God and your own soul."¹⁰⁶ Ann Bolton was exhorted to read and meditate on a theme, "Read and think of the love of God. That is your point. Jesus loves you! He is yours Prisoner of hope, be bold!"¹⁰⁷

Whatever else may be included in Wesleyan meditation, mystical flights of fancy and subjective whimsy are excluded. Meditation for Wesley was devout reflection on scripture and devotional literature.

Extra-Biblical Reading

Wesley kept his people reading. In the Letters he directs his correspondents again and again to the literature he thinks will help. Most of the early Methodists became voracious readers. Wesley constantly published tracts, books and hymns. A Christian Library in fifty volumes published between 1749 and 1755 met a crying need. The first edition of Wesley's Works was published in 1771. These reference sets became the basic core curriculum Wesley expected his preachers and members to master or at least read. Just how seriously Methodists were to view reading may be seen in the following example: Margaret Lewen, age twenty-two, asked Wesley's advice about what to read for the sake of her mind and soul. Wesley told her to begin with the Bible, spending "at least two hours every day in

¹⁰⁵ Letters, 3:141, Sept. 12, 1755.

¹⁰⁶ Letters, 6:131, Mar. 15, 1748.

¹⁰⁷ Letters, 5:93, June 7, 1768.

reading and meditating." Further, if she wished to save herself the "trouble of thinking" she could add Matthew Henry's Commentary. On the other hand, "If you would only be assisted in thinking add the Explanatory Notes." In the same letter Wesley told Lewen that beside the two hours per day in Bible study "Your studying hours . . . might be five or six hours a day." Three hours in the morning and two or three in the afternoon were recommended. The early hours were to be given to books that require a "strong and deep attention." When by afternoon such study begins to tire the mind, she was advised to "relax [her] mind by interposing history or poetry."¹⁰⁸

Margaret Lewen, a new convert, was then referred to some one hundred volumes for serious study in the fields of grammar, mathematics, geography, drama, logic, poetry, history, moral philosophy, metaphysics, history, science, and divinity.¹⁰⁹ Wesley prescribed the same reading list to Ann Granville, Samuel Furly, and Sarah Wesley.

As a rule Wesley's correspondents were given less prodigious reading recommendations. The works which Wesley recommended most frequently included the Explanatory Notes on the Old and New Testaments, the Sermons, the Arminian Magazine, a`Kempis' Imitation of Christ, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Primitive Physics, William Law's Works and Sermons and the biographies of DeRenty, Lopez and David Brainerd.

Wesley's movement, fueled by Christian Conference in league with private prayer, group prayer, serious Bible study, the reading of weighty devotional literature, and reflective meditation on it all, resulted in an informed, zealous, and devoted membership.

¹⁰⁸ Letters, 4:247-249, June, 1764. ¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

SELF-KNOWLEDGE, SELF-EXAMINATION AND SELF-SURRENDER

For Christian spirituality as taught and practiced by John Wesley self-knowledge, self-examination, and self-denial were important threshold values. "Know your disease; know your cure" was Wesley's maxim. A principal means to self-knowledge is self-examination which if practiced honestly will give God a chance to reveal our true condition to us. When self-examination reveals to the believer unholy tempers, inordinate affection, fear of praise or dispraise, or sinful selfishness cleaving to all one does or says, humble self-denial, resignation, and complete submission to God are made possible. In this chapter these steps in spiritual formation will be treated as they appear in the Letters.

Self-Knowledge

Wesley is interested in self knowledge through self-examination neither as a morbid exercise of self-abnegation, nor as a means of self-motivated improvement but as a preface to the revelation of Christ in His transforming power. "God is aiming . . . to bring you to a knowledge of yourself as one in whom by nature dwells no good thing . . . ," Wesley writes to his niece Sarah, "that you may know yourself in order to know Him."¹ "Perhaps one end of this close trial," Wesley counsels a criticized and bleeding Sarah Ryan, "was to give you a deeper knowledge of

¹ Letters, 7:54, Mar. 31, 1781.

yourself and of God, of His power to save."² Alexander Knox is told, "It is right to know ourselves, but not to stop there, This is only of use if it leads us to know Him that loves and saves sinners."³ Lady Maxwell is comforted with these words "Be not afraid to know yourself -- yea to know yourself as you are known. How soon then will you know your Advocate."⁴ Each of these letters was written in a different decade. They illustrate Wesley's consistently positive use of self-knowledge.

Even when the self-knowledge is to "know yourself a poor, guilty helpless sinner"⁵ the use of such knowledge was not self-flagellation but self-surrender to a beneficent God. Even when a believer like Thomas Davenport finds himself "fit for hell" that is the point Wesley tells him that "you are just fit for Him. If you are a mere sinner, He cannot cast you out."⁶ The believer may find inner sin of various stripes, but this is not to bring condemnation, for God reveals our state to us that He may heal us. Wesley's sermons "Satan's Devices" and "The First Fruits of the Spirit" explore this point fully. Despair and condemnation are out of order, for "God is love and Christ has died."

Self-Examination

Self-examination is the road to self-knowledge. It is also a devotional exercise for Wesley that even the most holy must practice. In his letters Wesley creates hundreds of self-examination exercises for his correspondents. Almost anyone who received more than one letter from

² Letters, 4:4, Jan. 20, 1758. ³ Letters, 6:309, Apr. 2, 1778.

⁴ Letters, 4:250, June 20, 1764.

⁵ Letters, 7:231, Aug. 19, 1784. ⁶ Ibid., p. 95, Dec. 2, 1781.

Wesley was given self-examination exercises. Wesley's letters to Jane Bisson, Jane Hilton, Sarah Ryan, Peggy Dale, Elizabeth Ritchie and Miss March yield particularly profitable study on this subject.

As an example of Wesley's use of self-knowledge and self-examination in spiritual direction his correspondence with Miss March will be surveyed. In Wesley's first letter to this lady of education, fortune and piety Wesley spoke of the value of self-knowledge, "It is a blessing indeed when God uncovers our hearts and clearly shows us what spirit we are of."⁷ In the same letter he reassures her that self-knowledge does not bring condemnation. "Therefore how deeply soever you may be convinced of pride, self-will, peevishness, or any other inbred sin, see that you do not let go that confidence whereby you may still rejoice in God"⁸ The following month he tells her, "The knowledge of our desperate state by sin has a particular tendency to keep us earnest after deliverance."⁹ Seven months later Wesley writes her because self-examination had produced condemnation. "I believe I understand your state better than you do yourself." You are condemned for nothing, if you love God and continue to give Him your whole heart."¹⁰ The conviction is merely a prelude to cleansing which God will bring in His own time. A month later Wesley writes to the tenderhearted Miss March, "You may blame yourself, but I will not blame you"¹¹

By 1762 Miss March is making progress toward perfection and may have testified to Wesley about receiving sanctifying grace. On May 13, 1762 Wesley gives her the first self-examination exercise.

⁷ Letters, 4:85, Mar. 4, 1760. ⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

⁹ Ibid., p. 90, Apr. 16, 1760. ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 109, Nov. 11, 1760.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 124, Dec. 12, 1760.

1. Have you never found any wandering since? (Apparently the meaning is "since being made perfect in love").
2. Is your mind always stayed on God?
3. Do you find every thought brought into captivity . . . to Christ?
4. Do no vain thoughts lodge within you?
5. Does not the corruptible body at some times more or less press down the soul?
6. Has God made your very dreams devout?¹²

Three years later Wesley wrote to Miss March, "I have many fears concerning you, lest you sink beneath your calling."¹³ Additional Self-examination is in order. Wesley asks:

1. Is your heart still whole with God?
2. Do you still desire and seek no happiness but in Him?
3. Are you always or generally sensible of His presence?
4. Do you generally, at least, find communion with Him?
5. Do you expect all that you enjoyed once, and more; to be sanctified throughout before you go hence?¹⁴

Wesley writes her again on August 31 and October 13, about regaining sanctifying grace, citing similar examples of others who lost and regained this grace.¹⁵ Two years later Wesley poses another self-examination for Miss March.

1. Are you still making the best of life?
2. [Are you] employing a few days exactly in such a manner as you judge is most to the glory of God?
3. Do you still hold fast what you have received and expect the fullness of the promise?
4. Are all your family breathing this spirit [of love] and strengthening each others hand?¹⁶

Wesley's next two letters have to do with Christian perfection¹⁷ and the life of self-denial of which David Brainerd is the cited model.¹⁸ Later on Wesley is still counseling Miss March about

¹² Ibid., p. 181.

¹³ Ibid., p. 310, Aug. 9, 1765.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 310-311; 313-314.

¹⁶ Letters, 5:53, June 29, 1767.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 81, Mar. 14, 1768.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 95, July 5, 1768.

self-denial which he believed was to follow self-examination. He urges her to read his sermon "On Self-Denial" and counsels her not to let self-examination be a matter of feelings alone.¹⁹

Ideally self-knowledge, self-examination and self-denial lead to a life of consecration and devotion and this is one of the subjects of Wesley's letter to Miss March on April 14, 1771. She will find happiness if she is "outwardly and inwardly devoted to God."²⁰ This is still the topic in a 1774 letter in which Miss March is urged, "aim at one thing -- holy, loving faith, giving God the whole heart."²¹ In one of his last letters to Miss March Wesley returns to the subject of self-knowledge, telling her that "the knowledge of ourselves is true humility."²² Miss March apparently never made as much progress as Wesley thought she should. He closed his last letter to her with these words.

I am sorry you should be content with lower degrees of usefulness and holiness than you are called to. But I cannot help it: so I submit; and am still, my dear Miss March, Yours in sincere affection.²³

Miss March's case demonstrates the progression from self-examination to self-knowledge to self-denial to consecration. It also shows that regression is possible. On the whole her self-examination exercises were less intense than those sent to Sarah Ryan, Philothea Briggs, and Peggy Dale. In three letters, Sarah Ryan was administered the following self-examination questions.

1. How have you found yourself since we parted?
2. Have you suffered no loss by anything?
3. Has nothing damped the vigour of your spirit?
4. Is honour a blessing and dishonour too?

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 200-201. ²⁰ Ibid., p. 238.

²¹ Letters, 6:113, Sept. 16, 1774. ²² Ibid., p. 220.

²³ Ibid., p. 293.

5. Are you one and the same in ease and pain, always attentive to the voice of God?
6. What kind of humility do you feel?
7. What have you to humble you if you have no sin?
8. Are you wise in the manner of spending your time? Do you employ it all, not only well, but as well as possible?
9. What time do you have for reading?
10. [Do you feel] a sense of sinfulness?
11. Is it [humility] not a sense of helplessness, of dependence, of emptiness, . . . nothingness?
12. How do you look back on your past sins?
13. What tempers or passions do you feel while you are employed in these reflections?
14. Do you feel nothing like pride while you are comparing your present with your past state or while persons are showing approbation or esteem for you?
15. Are you careful to abstain from the appearance of it?
16. Do you find no interruption . . . at any time of your joy?
17. Do you continually see God . . . without any cloud or darkness or mist between?
18. Do you pray without ceasing, without ever being diverted from it by anything inward or outward?
19. Are you never hindered by . . . the power or subtlety of Satan or by the weakness or disorders of the body pressing down upon the soul?
20. Can you be thankful for everything without exception? Do you feel all working together for good?
21. Do you do nothing great or small, merely to please yourself?
22. Do you feel no touch of any desire . . . but what springs from the pure love of God?
23. Do you speak no words but from a principle of love and under the guidance of His Spirit?²⁴

It should also be noted that during the years leading up to 1762, that is, at the time Wesley seemed to be "grilling" Sarah Ryan, Wesley was establishing his empirical base for the doctrine of entire sanctification. During these years he closely interviewed more than one thousand persons who testified to Christian perfection. He believed Sarah Ryan to be one of the holiest. He may not have been trying to find a niche in her armor, but simply wanting a first hand description of a religious experience which he himself may not have enjoyed. Further, he had put

²⁴ Letters, 3:241, Nov. 30, 1757; 4:5, Jan. 27, 1758; 4:6, Feb. 10, 1758.

Ryan in a position of leadership which many thought she (after three marriages and no divorces) should not have received. Therefore, Wesley may have felt the need to be especially precise with her.

Self-Denial and Complete Devotement to God

In Wesley's scheme, self-examination yielded self-knowledge -- almost invariably a knowledge of inward sin in the believer. The closer the person drew to God the more sensitive he or she was to personal sinfulness. The next step was self-denial or self-surrender. Ellen Gretton is told we must be willing to give up our own will, and what we might think the most reasonable, and "die to ourselves and advance in the life of God."²⁵ Robert Hopkins is told that the way to God's blessing is to "give yourself up to God without reserve."²⁶ An unnamed correspondent is told that in a painful life circumstance he is "loudly called to give yourself wholly to God."²⁷ Evangelist Sarah Mallet is told that "nothing is more profitable to us than to cut off a right hand or pluck out an eye."²⁸ Sarah Ryan is told that her will must be "wholly subject to the will of God."²⁹ And Sarah Wesley, Hester Ann Roe, Ann Bolton, Mr. Abraham, Elizabeth Ritchie and Mary Bishop are all counseled to give up their whole will to God.³⁰ Wesley wanted them to sing with their whole heart the verse he cites in a letter to Miss Ritchie:

Determined all Thy will to obey,
Thy blessings I restore;

²⁵ Letters, 7:130, July 23, 1782. ²⁶ Ibid., p. 76, July 25, 1781.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 156, Dec. 23, 1782.

²⁸ Letters, 8:229, July 31, 1790.

²⁹ Letters, 4:233, Mar. 25, 1764.

³⁰ Letters, 6:138, 217, 266, 311, 373; 7:74.

Give, Lord, or take Thy gifts away,
I praise Thee evermore.³¹

In a letter to Miss March, he writes: "Entire resignation implies entire love. Give Him your will and you give Him your heart."³² To Mary Cooke he charged, "Be little and mean and vile in your own eyes! You are an amiable woman it is true; but still you are a sinner born to die."³³

Wesley believed that self-surrender was indispensable. Still he did not believe in self-abnegation or self-annihilation. Here we come to a crucial distinctive of Wesleyan spirituality. Self-surrender is necessary, but the "voluntary humility" of the mystics and the war against one's humanity seen in certain ascetics is not to be found in Wesley. On this point Wesley counseled several of his correspondents. Jane Hilton is told to "be little and mean in her own eyes" but in the same paragraph she is told, "Hang simply on Him that loves you . . . just as a little helpless child. Christ is yours, all yours: that is enough. Lean your soul upon Him!"³⁴ Alexander Knox, a tenderhearted victim of epilepsy is told, "You blame yourself where no blame is." What he struggled with, Wesley said, was "no part of corrupt nature. It belongs to pure nature."³⁵ Miss Cooke, once told to view herself as "mean and vile," is later warned against thinking too little of herself.³⁶ Thomas Brooke is ordered to be careful about undervaluing God's gifts with a false humility.³⁷ Wesley urges Lady Maxwell, "Look unto Him He is now hovering over you with tenderness and love! Only believe!" Lady Maxwell's problem was

³¹ Letters, 6:225, July 15, 1776.

³² Ibid., p. 326, July 1, 1772.

³³ Letters, 7:293, Sept. 24, 1785.

³⁴ Letters, 5:94, June 25, 1768.

³⁵ Letters, 7:209, Feb. 5, 1784.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 298, Oct. 30, 1785.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 89, Nov. 15, 1781.

in thinking that she must abase herself more. Wesley's response was, "Do not think you are not humble enough, not contrite enough, not earnest enough. You are nothing; but Christ is all, and He is yours."³⁸ Mary Bishop and Miss March were among others who received similar counsel.³⁹

In the matter of self-examination and self-knowledge resulting in a joyous, expectant, self-surrender rather than in self-abnegation and self-annihilation, Wesley triumphs over his tutors. Macarius taught him that he must "by habitual violence esteem himself as nothing."⁴⁰ Molinos taught him to "mortify thyself in all things, and at all hours," to slay "the seven-headed beast of self-love" and to annihilate one's self in all respects."⁴¹ Fenelon coached Wesley that Christ "annihilated himself and you must do the same."⁴² Isaac Ambrose taught Wesley eight varieties of self-denial.⁴³ Richard Baxter taught Wesley that he should treat the self with furious fierceness, and Henry Scougal and William Law joined in with similar advice. Wesley's favorite, a`Kempis, taught him to "esteem thyself inferior to all," and to "despise himself, and to rejoice in being despised and to seek the lowest place and be beneath everyone."⁴⁴ Even the usually moderate Jeremy Taylor taught Wesley to insure humility in this manner, "Every day call to mind some of thy

³⁸ Letters, 4:253, July 10, 1764. ³⁹ Letters, 4:313; 6:214.

⁴⁰ Macarius, "Homilies," A Christian Library, I:85.

⁴¹ Molinos, "Spiritual Guide," A Christian Library, 23:87, 93.

⁴² Fenelon, "The Interior Life," A Christian Library, 23:42.

⁴³ Isaac Ambrose, "Practice of Sanctification," A Christian Library, 8:3-88.

⁴⁴ Frank Baker, John Wesley's Own Choice, pp. 26, 30, 35.

foulest sins, or the most shameful of thy disgraces."⁴⁵ Because Wesley had better comprehended the evangelical character of grace he rose above his tutors in spiritual theology.

Wesley had the insight to rise above such teaching. In a letter to Ann Bolton he dispenses with the extremes found in the writers cited above, "The Mystic writers . . . are perpetually talking of 'self-emptiness, self-inanition, self-annihilation,' and the like: all very near akin to 'self-contradiction.'"⁴⁶ This dangerous notion, Wesley adds, is "unscriptural" and it "almost naturally lead[s] us to deny the gifts of God. Nay, and to make a kind of merit of it; to imagine we honour Him by undervaluing what he has done."⁴⁷ Thus another distinctive of Wesleyan spirituality is established.

The process of self-examination, self-knowledge, and self-surrender leads to a life that is all devoted to God, one in which persons like Jenny Lee discover, "He is your Lord, your love, your all . . . your portion in time and in eternity."⁴⁹ And persons like Mrs. Bennis learn that a "heart steadily and uniformly devoted to God is essential to sanctification."⁴⁹ Similarly Kitty Warren and Peggy Dale learn to be "entirely devoted to God."⁵⁰ Ann Bolton discovers consecration by learning to sink down before the will of God when it is made known.⁵¹ The goal of self-examination was to become, as Wesley described Hester Ann Rogers, "owned of God."⁵²

⁴⁵ Jeremy Taylor, The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living, p. 124.

⁴⁶ Letters, 4:313, Mar. 23, 1772.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 183, June 7, 1762.

⁴⁹ Letters, 6:68, Jan. 18, 1774.

⁵⁰ Letters, 6:17, 309; 5:63.

⁵¹ Letters, 5:240, May 2, 1771.

⁵² Letters, 7:248, Nov. 7, 1784.

CHAPTER VII

THE INTERIOR LIFE AS OBSERVED IN THE LETTERS

Like Schleiermacher in the next century who championed religious immediacy Wesley attached major importance to the interior religious life. Wesley called Methodism a religion of the heart. Prayer, meditation, self-examination and other religious exercises must be monitored by reason and scripture, but whatever else early Methodism was it was a religion of the heart. Like Jonathan Edwards, Wesley believed that if one had not been stirred at the level of the affections that person had not yet heard the gospel and was not yet truly a Christian.

Wesley traces his own spiritual and theological journey to "heart religion" in his Works. "I began to see, that true religion was seated in the heart," the young Wesley wrote in his journal after reading Thomas a`Kempis.¹ In A Plain Account of Christian Perfection Wesley notes that Jeremy Taylors' book Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying "exceedingly affected" him, particularly in regard to purity of intention. He then proceeds to cite a`Kempis again, saying:

In the year 1726, I met with Kempis's Christian Pattern. The nature and extent of inward religion, the religion of the heart, now appeared to me in a stronger light then ever it had before. I saw, that giving even all my life to God (supposing it possible to do

¹ Wesley Works, 1:99. Journal for May 26, 1738.

this, and go no farther) would profit me nothing, unless I gave my heart, yea, all my heart, to him.

I saw that "simplicity of intention, and purity of affection," one design in all we speak or do, and one design ruling all our tempers, are indeed the "wings of the soul," without which she can never ascend to the mount of God.²

Wesley next names William Law's works Christian Perfection and A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life as pointing him toward inward religion. Wesley goes on to say that, in the year 1729 his study of the bible convinced him that the interior life of the true Christian would be characterized by "having 'the mind that was in Christ.'"³

The "religion of the heart" figures prominently in the letters. To his ecclesiastical superior Thomas Secker who had criticized the Methodists as enthusiasts, Wesley writes, "True religion is eminently seated in the heart."⁴ The religion of the love of God "must be felt (if it is in the soul) as much as fire upon the body,"⁵ Wesley assures John Bennet. Lady Maxwell is coached to avoid the company of those "who are strangers to the religion of the heart."⁶ Early in the Methodist revival Wesley denounced "dreams and visions" and "falling into fits" as enthusiasm.⁷ Nevertheless, Wesley identifies "inward feeling" as "the most infallible of all proofs."⁸ A few months before he died Wesley was still recommending "the religion of the heart; the religion which Kempis, Pascal, Fenelon enjoyed: that life of God in the soul of man, the

² Ibid., 11:366-67.

³ Ibid., p. 367.

⁴ Letters, 2:61, Dec. 30, 1745.

⁵ Ibid., p. 23, June, 1744.

⁶ Letters, 4:261, Aug. 17, 1764.

⁷ Letters, 2:24, Aug. 22, 1744.

⁸ Letters, 1:263, Oct. 30, 1738. One should not interpret this to be all that Wesley had to say about "proofs." He also called the scripture the most infallible of all proofs. He never gave subjectivism free rein as this quotation considered alone might imply.

walking with God and having fellowship with the Father and the Son."⁹

The Witness of the Spirit

Central to Wesley's understanding of the inner religious life is his doctrine of assurance. For the definitive description of this doctrine one should consult Wesley's two sermons on the witness of the Spirit, along with the sermon "The Witness of Our Own Spirit." Wesley claimed that to "understand, explain and defend this doctrine" was part of the Methodist mission. Through the Methodists, Wesley claimed, this great evangelical truth has been recovered. He says:

The Testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witness to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God.¹⁰

In the Letters this doctrine is hammered out on the anvil of controversy between Thomas Secker and Wesley in a series of long letters to "John Smith." Secker was first Bishop of Bristol, then Bishop of Oxford, and later Archbishop of Canterbury. He was in a position to break Wesley's ecclesiastical neck over this matter of assurance. Wesley carefully yet vigorously defended the doctrine as scriptural and as verified by experience. In the Secker correspondence Wesley claimed, "Many receive from the Holy Ghost an attestation of their acceptance as perceptible as the sun at noonday."¹¹ "I hold," he asserted, "God inspires every Christian with peace, joy, and love, which are all perceptible."¹² "Every Christian believer hath a direct perceptible testimony of the

⁹ Letters, 8:218, April 29, 1790.

¹⁰ John Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, n.d.), p. 128.

¹¹ Letters, 2:70, June 25, 1746.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

Spirit that he is a child of God."¹³ Wesley attacked Secker's objections by appealing to syllogistic reasoning, and to St. Paul, Chrysostom, Origen, and Bernard.

It is not our task to develop the rationale by which Wesley supported his doctrine, but to note how the witness of the Spirit figured in the religious life of the Methodists. First, The witness of the Spirit was to be clear and direct. Mrs. Bennis told Wesley that she had cried mightily for the witness of the Spirit. This was granted, she said, "in a manner very clear to me."¹⁴ Wesley answers, "What you say concerning the witness of the Spirit is agreeable to all sound experience."¹⁵ Wesley assured Miss March that there can be no "steady enjoyment of pure love without the direct testimony of the Spirit . . . without God's Spirit shining on His own work."¹⁶ To Mrs. Freeman he promised that in times of temptation the ordinary light of God will have a "clear witness . . . super added."¹⁷

The second significant aspect of the way Wesley's doctrine of assurance affected the spiritual life of the early methodists is that the witness was to be constant and abiding. Wesley told Hannah Ball that the witness could be "clear and Permanent."¹⁸ Miss Ritchie was asked if she carried with her "an experimental verity and a fullness of the presence of the ever-blessed Trinity."¹⁹ The same month Wesley asked if the same witness persists "day and night" and in the "midst of trials."²⁰ Of

¹³ Ibid., p. 75.

¹⁴ Letters 5:24.

¹⁵ Ibid., Aug. 14, 1766. See also letter of March 29, 1766.

¹⁶ Letters, 6:88, June 3, 1774.

¹⁷ Letters, 4:231, Mar. 2, 1764.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 48, Oct. 4, 1773.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 270, Aug. 2, 1777.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 272, Aug. 24, 1777.

Mrs. Bennis Wesley wants to know if she has received the assurance of sanctifying grace, and more particularly, if "the witness of this [is] abiding with you." Wesley assured her that one person he knows "has not lost that witness one moment for these ten years."²¹ In Wesley's paradigm of babes, young men, and fathers, the babes have the witness "sometimes"; the young men have it "continually" and the fathers have it in fullness.²² Peggy Dale, Mary Bosanquet, Ann Bolton, Martha Chapman, and Elizabeth Baker are others with whom Wesley corresponded about the continuing witness of the Spirit.²³

In the case of Sarah Ryan we see how one correspondent responded to Wesley's probing questions about the witness of the spirit. She responded to one of Wesley's self-examination lists by writing: "I do love God My will and affections never wander from Him; and He does give me direct witness that He has saved me thus."²⁴ She adds, "I first received this eight years ago; but through my inexperience of human nature it has not always remained unclouded though it is so now."²⁵

To guard against fanciful subjectivism, the direct witness of the Spirit was to be balanced with the indirect witness of the fruit of the Spirit. "Let none ever presume," Wesley warns, "to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of it."²⁶

¹⁶ Letters, 6:88, June 3, 1774.

¹⁷ Letters, 4:231, Mar. 2, 1764.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 48, Oct. 4, 1773.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 270, Aug. 2, 1777.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 272, Aug. 24, 1777.

²¹ Letters, 5:188, Apr. 12, 1770.

²² Ibid., p. 229. See also 5:175.

²³ Letters, 4:222, 307; 5:50, 152, 175; 6:10; 7:24, 246; 8:85, 89.

²⁴ Letters, 4:240, May 4, 1764. ²⁵ Ibid. ²⁶ Sermons, p. 137.

Mary Cooke is counseled, "When the witness and the fruit of the Spirit meet together there can be no stronger proof that we are of God."²⁷

The spiritual heights of the witness of the Spirit are represented by the "full assurance of faith, the full assurance of hope" and being "sealed by the Spirit." The full assurance of faith Wesley describes in a letter to Hester Ann Roe, "The plerophory (or full assurance) of faith is such a clear conviction that I am now in the favour of God as excludes all doubt and fear concerning it."²⁸ The full assurance of hope goes beyond even this and "is such a clear confidence that I shall enjoy the glory of God as excludes all doubt and fear concerning it."²⁹ The plerophory of hope he tells Elizabeth Ritchie, "is a divine testimony that we shall endure to the end . . . that we shall enjoy God in glory."³⁰ To Philothea Briggs he explains, "The full assurance of hope excludes all doubt of our salvation."³¹ But he explains to Hester Ann Roe that this has nothing to do with eternal security and he carefully points out to Briggs and Roe that such assurance can be lost and "cannot continue any longer than we walk closely with God."³²

There is yet another dimension to the witness of the Spirit. When one has received the full assurance of hope and in addition has been wholly renewed in the image of God "as the wax receives the whole impression of the seal," one has been "sealed by the Spirit."³³ With so much hanging in the balance it is no wonder that conscientious Methodists vigorously sought the inner witness to pardon and purity.

²⁷ Letters, 7:231.

²⁸ Letters, 7:57-8, Apr. 10, 1781.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

³⁰ Letters, 6:323, Oct. 6, 1778.

³¹ Letters, 5:253, May 28, 1771.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p. 280, Oct. 4, 1771. See also Letters, 6:47-48, Oct. 4, 1773.

Communion with God

In addition to the witness of the Spirit to justification or sanctification Wesley speaks to his correspondents about communion with God. He exhorts Sarah Ryan to "keep close every moment to the unction of the Holy One! Attend to the still small voice."³⁴ Two weeks later he quizzes her about keeping in touch with God while sleeping and even when dreaming.³⁵ Later, he asks her if she is always "attentive to the voice of God."³⁶ He tells Philothea Briggs that here are "times of nearer access to God" and that one must "improve those precious seasons."³⁷ Astonishingly, Wesley instructs Mary Bishop that maintaining "close communion with God is the most likely way to obtain contact with the dead."³⁸ Ann Loxdale was "to be swallowed up in God"³⁹ and Peggy Dale was to "sink a thousand times deeper into Him."⁴⁰ From these and other comments four things may be derived.

1. There are degrees of communion with God. Wesley says to Miss March, "Undoubtedly there are various kinds and various degrees of communion with God."⁴¹ The gradations appear to range from pouring out one's heart freely to dry duty.

2. Communion with God is to be constant and uninterrupted regardless of the circumstances. Wesley's prime examples of continual communion are John Owen, DeRenty, Gregory Lopez, and Captain Boehm (Chaplain to the

³⁴ Letters, 3:242, Nov. 30, 1757.

³⁵ Ibid., 243-4, Dec. 14, 1757.

³⁷ Letters, 5:286, Nov. 3, 1771.

³⁹ Letters, 7:113, Mar. 9, 1782.

⁴¹ Letters, 5:261, June 25, 1771.

³⁶ Letters 4:5, Jan. 27, 1758.

³⁸ Letters, 6:26, May 9, 1773.

⁴⁰ Letters, 4:307, July 5, 1765.

Prince George of Denmark, who incredulously claimed that he could "deal with a crowd, listen to one person, and dictate to another all at the same time, and all that hurry no more hinders my communion with God than if I was all the time sitting alone in my study or kneeling at the altar."⁴² Constant communion with God was expected of those perfected in love.

3. Constant communion with God might lead to a devotional experience of the Trinity. A number of Wesley's correspondents testified to experiencing God distinctly as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It seemed to occur to only a few of those thought to be the most spiritual. This included Jane Bisson whom Wesley believed at age nineteen "exceeds madame Guyon in deep communion with God."⁴³ Wesley told Sarah Mallet, a female evangelist, that Miss Bisson's experience of God "seems to be more clear than yours . . . in her communion with the blessed Trinity" ⁴⁴ It appears that Mallet claimed to have discovered such an experience some time later. Anne Cutler testified to receiving this experience,⁴⁶ as did Lady Maxwell, Hester Ann Roe, Elizabeth Ritchie, Hannah Ball, Miss March and Charles Perronet.⁴⁷

4. The result of this many-faceted communion with God was holiness of heart and life. When Lawrence Coughland called Christian perfection a delusion, Wesley retorted that the seekers of perfection had not received delusion but "that deep communion with the Father and Son, whereby they are enabled to give Him their whole heart, to love every man as their own soul, and to walk as Christ also walked."⁴⁸

⁴³ Letters, 8:18, Oct. 12, 1787. ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15, Oct. 6, 1787.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 160, Aug. 3, 1789. ⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 214.

⁴⁷ Letters, 6:263, 266, 272; 7:392; 8:83.

⁴⁸ Letters, 5:103, Aug. 27, 1768.

Holy and Unholy Tempers

Even the heart of the justified Christian has unlit corners where unholy tempers germinate. Only love expelling sin, or Christian perfection, will remove these unholy tempers and replace them with the fruit of the Spirit, that is, holy tempers. But before this can happen the unholy tempers must be recognized, and renounced. Pride, anger, evil desires, jealousy, hatred, resentment, self-will, sloth, love of ease, love of praise, and envy are among those unholy tempers about which Wesley counsels his people. Sarah Crosby is asked to examine herself for a "tendency to pride," "any useless desire," such as desire for praise or "increase of fortune." Further, she is to guard against "stubbornness, sloth, or self-will,"⁴⁹ Mr. Hutchinson, though he had a powerful mind, was a victim of "uncommon pride and sourness of temper."⁵⁰ Hannah Ball is queried, "Do you still find a clear deliverance from pride, anger, from your own will, and from the love of earthly things?"⁵¹ Philothea Briggs is assured that "uceless words and thoughts spring from evil tempers."⁵² Joseph Benson is informed that only when love reigns "worldly-mindedness, malice, cruelty, revengefulness are all destroyed."⁵³ Jane Hilton is told, "You need never more be entangled either with pride, anger or desire or any creature. Christ is yours."⁵⁴ Penelope Newman is promised the same freedom from "any . . . evil temper."⁵⁵ Yet the "tempers" are features of human infirmity. Wesley tells Mrs. Marston that as long as she is in the body she will recognize "more and more . . . [her] numberless defects

⁴⁹ Letters, 7:19, May 11, 1780. ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 367, Feb. 4, 1787.

⁵¹ Letters, 5:152, Nov. 4, 1769.

⁵² Ibid., p. 313, Mar. 22, 1772. ⁵³ Ibid., p. 203, Oct. 5, 1770.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 24, July 22, 1766. ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 311.

and imperfections of [her] best . . . tempers."⁵⁶ Such discoveries, However, should not interrupt her spiritual joy. Due to human limitations, "right and wrong tempers are often divided by an almost imperceptible line,"⁵⁷ Wesley observed that from the beginning the Methodists were passionately concerned with the biblical injunction to "put away all anger, and wrath, and malice, and bitterness, and evil speaking."⁵⁸

Unholy tempers were to be replaced by holy tempers, frequently identified as joy, peace, humility, sweetness, patience, and love. Early in Wesley's life he saw what was needed in his own soul. He wrote to an unidentified friend, "I know every thought, every temper of my soul ought to bear God's image and superscription. But how am I fallen from the glory of God! I feel that 'I am sold under sin.'"⁵⁹ Twenty-two years later we see Wesley commending Miss March for "seeking to have [her] every temper, and thought, and word, and work suitable to the will of God."⁶⁰ Wesley cautions her about blaming herself too much for not having already achieved this; he reminds her that this comes by faith and not by works.

One of the most celebrated holy tempers urged on Wesley's correspondents was simplicity. Samuel Furly is encouraged to be a "quiet, simple loving Christian."⁶¹ James Wheatley is lauded as scarce having an equal in "simplicity and godly sincerity;"⁶² Miss March is urged to seek an unconscious simplicity, i.e., that "grace which frees the soul from all

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 196, Aug. 11, 1770.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266, July 13, 1771.

⁵⁸ *Letters*, 1:252, July 7, 1738.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245, May 24, 1738.

⁶⁰ *Letters*, 4:124, Dec. 12, 1760.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163, Sept. 8, 1761.

⁶² *Letters*, 2:87, Mar. 3, 1747.

unnecessary reflections upon itself."⁶³ Conquered by evil reasoning, Miss Sparrow needs "above all things . . . simplicity, the spirit of a little child."⁶⁴ Ann Bolton, Philothea Briggs, Mary Bishop, Lady Maxwell and Mrs. Marston are all urged to seek this grace. Ann Loxdale appeared to possess the grace of simplicity. Wesley writes to her "Nothing endears you to me so much as your artless simplicity."⁶⁵ Wesley tells Peggy Dale, he will never forget her childlike confidence in God, her tenderness, her honest, artless simplicity.⁶⁶

Closely related to simplicity is the holy temper of humility. Ann Bolton is told that there is "a true nobleness and greatness in humility."⁶⁷ Ann Foard was charged, "See that you make me farther amends by swiftly advancing in lowliness"⁶⁸ Mary Bishop, in spite of her reputation for brilliance learns that in matters spiritual all her intelligence avails little. In fact, Wesley tells her, "You can do no more herein than if you was (sic) an idiot."⁶⁹ John Blunt, a well-to-do lawyer, was told with exclamation points ablaze?

O humble yourself before God and man! Despise no man but yourself! Learn to say from your heart, 'Lord, I am not high minded! I have no proud looks!' Then you will give as much pleasure as you have frequently given pain to your affectionate brother.⁷⁰

⁶³ Letters, 5:193, July 6, 1770.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 308, Feb. 26, 1772.

⁶⁵ Letters, 7:59, April 15, 1781.

⁶⁶ Letters, 5:30, Nov. 7, 1766. See also, Letter of Aug. 27, 1767.

⁶⁷ Letters, 5:287, Nov. 7, 1771.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 321, June 7, 1772.

⁶⁹ Letters, 6:53, Oct. 31, 1773.

⁷⁰ Letters, 8:103, Nov. 7, 1788.

Another holy temper cultivated by the early Methodists was thankfulness. Repeatedly Wesley's correspondents are urged to "in everything give thanks." Jenney Lee, Ann Foard, Miss Woodhouse, Hannah Ball, Mrs. Pywell, Sarah Ryan, Hester Ann Roe, Samuel Bradburn, Mary Cooke and Jane Bisson were among those assigned to live in thankfulness to God in all circumstances. Wesley's advice to Miss March typifies his instructions.

You have abundant reason to praise God for both spiritual and temporal blessings. Beware of indulging gloomy thoughts; they are the bane of thankfulness. You are encompassed with ten⁷¹ thousand mercies; let these sink you into humble thankfulness.

For Wesley and the early Methodists the Christian life was to be accented with happiness and joy. "Every believer ought to enjoy life," (emphasis Wesley's) John Wesley wrote to a depressed Samuel Bradburn. "That melancholy [feeling] is directly opposite to a Christian spirit."⁷² Happiness, they were sure, came only with holiness. True happiness was never to be found in worldly possessions, learning or in any creature. A typical Wesley salutation is found in a letter to Thomas Rutherford, "I wish Isabella and you much happiness, which you cannot fail of if you have much holiness."⁷³ "He chastens you also for your profit," Wesley tells Ann Bolton, "that you may be more holy and consequently more happy."⁷⁴

"Joy in the Holy Ghost" was a favorite description of the spiritual rejoicing Wesley hoped his correspondents would experience. He frequently used the scriptural phrase, "Rejoice evermore." However, Wesley warned his people that the sense of joy would sometimes be "withheld even from

⁷¹ Letters, 6:263-4, April 26, 1777.

⁷² Letters, 7:391-2, June 27, 1787.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 72, July 4, 1781.

⁷⁴ Letters, 8:9, Sept. 18, 1787. See also 1:306; 4:14, 253; 5:230, 337; 6:153, 234.

them that walk uprightly"⁷⁵ and "may depend on a thousand circumstances."⁷⁶ Therefore, we cannot look to joy as the final word on our state of grace, it is after all "the most variable of all our sensations. . ."⁷⁷ and may be mistaken for faith "and then certainly we would trust joy instead of Christ."⁷⁸ When associated with the witness of the other fruits of the Spirit, however, joy became an important evidence.

With all the hazards surrounding religious joy it was still understood that it was the privilege of the Christian to rejoice "with a calm, still, heartfelt joy."⁷⁹ As one "has more power over sin" there comes naturally "more joy in the Holy Ghost."⁸⁰ "Joy in the Holy Ghost," Wesley tells Lady Maxwell, "is a precious gift of God."⁸¹

It is by joy in the Holy Ghost that God purifies those whom He sanctifies. "The usual method of our Lord is, according to Wesley, "to purify us by joy in the Holy Ghost."⁸² Another method is through the fire of trials. The former method is surely to be preferred. He may use affliction, but "perhaps He will . . . overpower your whole soul with peace and joy and love and thereby work in you fuller conformity to Himself . . ."⁸³ There are, nevertheless, "two grand medicines for a sin-sick

⁷⁵ Letters, 6:243, Dec. 21, 1776.

⁷⁶ Letters, 5:288. Nov. 9, 1771.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 200, Sept. 15, 1770.

⁷⁸ Letters, 7:64, May 26, 1781.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 120, Apr. 12, 1782. See also 6:243.

⁸⁰ Letters, 2:89, Mar. 25, 1747.

⁸¹ Letters, 4:261, Aug. 17, 1764.

⁸² Letters, 7:114, Mar. 9, 1782.

⁸³ Letters, 5:323, June 16, 1772.

soul . . . pain and pleasure."⁸⁴ But whether God chastens or cheers, the sanctified believer should still experience what John Wesley prayed Jane Bisson would receive: "joy that flows as a river."⁸⁵

The rapturous joy of the newly justified or sanctified, Wesley taught, soon subsides into the chief of all holy tempers: love. The centrality of love in Wesleyan spirituality cannot be overstated. Matthew 22:37 states Wesley's doctrine of perfection. Wesley says "Christians are called to love God with all their heart and to serve Him with all their strength; which is precisely what I apprehend to be meant by the scriptural term perfection."⁸⁶ Our concern at this point, however, is love as a fruit of the Spirit, or love as a "holy temper." Wesley does not leave us in doubt about the primacy of love in the Letters: "Religion is holy tempers and holy lives, and the sum of all is love."⁸⁷ Wesley tells Philothea Briggs is told to:

'walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave Himself for us.' All is contained in humble, gentle patient love. Is not this . . . a divine contrivance to assist the narrowness of our minds, the scantiness of our understanding? Every right⁸⁸ temper and then all right words and actions branch out of love.

He warns Penelope Newman not to seek some mystical refinement of Christian love and thus end in confusion, for Christianity is:

only humble, gentle, patient love. It is nothing less and nothing more than this; as it is described in the 13th chapter of the [First Epistle to the] Corinthians. O keep to this! aim at nothing higher⁸⁹ at nothing else! Let your heart continually burn with humble love.

⁸⁴ Letters, 8:229, July 31, 1790. ⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 5, Aug. 4, 1787.

⁸⁶ Letters, 3:157, Feb. 5, 1756.

⁸⁷ Letters, 6:178, Sept. 22, 1775.

⁸⁸ Letters, 5:299, Jan. 5, 1772.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 341-2, Oct. 23, 1772.

Christian perfection itself is "humble, gentle, patient love: love regulating all the tempers, and governing all the words and actions."⁹⁰ Elizabeth Ritchie is urged to "desire nothing different in nature from love! There is nothing higher in earth or heaven."⁹¹ Mary Bishop learned from Wesley that good works avail nothing. What counts is "that humble, meek, patient love of our neighbour, which supposes and flows from love of God."⁹² Ann Bolton is to, "Go on in this humble, gentle love, . . . aim at nothing more . . . and may the love of God possess you whole . . ."⁹³ Elizabeth Morgan was told that learning cannot be stressed "as if it is a road upon a level with love It is . . . the handmaiden of love."⁹⁴ In the same letter Wesley said: "I trust your heart says:

'To love is all my wish!
I Only live for this!'⁹⁵

Therefore Wesley celebrated when it appeared that Miss March would be "swallowed up in love;"⁹⁶ when Mary Stokes was about to "sink deeper and deeper into His love;"⁹⁷ and when Ann Bolton could go "soaring aloft upon the wings of love."⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Letters, 6:266, June 11, 1777.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-230, Aug. 12, 1776. See also a letter to her Jan. 17, 1775.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 206, Feb. 4, 1776.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 33, July 18, 1773.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Letters, 5:54, June 29, 1767.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 294, Dec. 26, 1771.-

⁹⁸ Letters, 6:280, Sept. 15, 1777.

Spiritual Combat

As in many spiritualities something akin to Scupoli's Spiritual combat maintains an important place in Wesley's spiritual theology. While the metaphor of combat is not as pervasive in Wesley as in Scupoli the spiritual pilgrim frequently battles the pull between positive and, negative poles. In this section on the interior life two arenas of battle will be examined: detachment versus inordinate affection, and discernment versus evil reasoning.

Detachment Versus Inordinate Affection

Wesley urged his correspondents to fight against inordinate affection. They were rather to set their eyes wholly upon God in a holy detachment from the world. Wesley warned them against youthful lusts, worldly pleasures, earthly possessions, and inordinate affection to the creature rather than true devotion to the Creator.

Miss Cummins and Ann Taylor were young women Wesley warned against falling into the snare of romantic pleasures that can never bring true happiness. To Ann he writes, "Your real temptation . . . especially while you are young, is to seek happiness in some creature." Wesley quizzes her as to whether or not she has already been fantasizing, "Oh, how happy I should be if I were to spend my life with this or that person!"⁹⁹ Wesley, assuming Ann had been so thinking, offered: "Vain thought! Happiness is not in man."¹⁰⁰ Miss Cummins was addressed in these words: "Believe me, my dear maid, what are called pleasures and diversions can give you no solid happiness. They are poor, empty, insignificant trifles; and you was [sic] made for better things." Wesley

⁹⁹ Letters, 7:374, Mar. 8, 1787.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

reminded her she was an "immortal spirit traveling to eternity." He added, "I am concerned lest you should forget this, like other pretty, giddy, unthinking creatures. What if it should be said of you -

'At dawn poor Stella danced and sung;
The gazing youth around her bowed;
At night her passing-bell was rung;
I saw, and kissed her in her shroud.'¹⁰¹

One can only surmise what Miss Cummins thought of all this. Apparently, however, Wesley never heard from her again.

Jane Hilton was older than Cummins or Taylor, but when she married Mr. Barton, Wesley was quick to write to warn her of the "great danger of cleaving to each other as to forget God, or of being so taken up with a creature as to abate your hunger and thirst after righteousness."¹⁰² Wesley proceeds to solemnly warn her of "whiling away time" with her husband in "good sort of talk" which "does not quicken your souls." Such small talk is addictive and hard to give up. Here again we see the poison of Wesley's own failed marriage influencing him to see marriage partners as spiritual adversaries rather than as companions on the way to God.

Wesley alerted many of his correspondents to the dangers of worldly cares and possessions. He admonished Lady Maxwell to remain "dead to the world" since worldliness for this wealthy gentlewoman is her "greatest danger." Her temptation will be to "seek happiness [outside] of Christ." This is a snare to which "your person, your youth, and your fortune will not fail to expose you."¹⁰³ To Dr. Wrangel a warning is given that prosperity damages the mind, that "Riches sap its fortitude, destroy its

¹⁰¹ Letters, 6:30, June 8, 1773.

¹⁰² Letters, 5:131, April 9, 1769.

¹⁰³ Letters, 4:253, July 10, 1764.

vigour, and nourish its caprices."¹⁰⁴ Mary Stokes Wesley commends for no longer seeking happiness in worldly things; he exhorts, "I trust you will be entangled no more in that snare."¹⁰⁵ Philothea Briggs is told, "You now see and feel what is the real worth of this poor, perishable world, and how little happiness is to be found in all things under the sun."¹⁰⁶ Methodists were supposed to see, as Wesley pointed out to Joseph Benson, that the "real value of a thing [is] but the price it will bear in eternity."¹⁰⁷

Though Wesley was aware of the value of love and the deep friendships which developed in classes and bands he was also aware that to invest any thing or any person with ultimate value was a mistake. Assigning ultimate importance to any one other than God is the essence of idolatry. Wesley apparently thought that his correspondents were most vulnerable to this danger.

Thus, following his own tutors A'Kempis and Scougal, he wrote most about a detachment that avoids inordinate affection to a person. Inordinate affection to a suitor was the cause of Jane Hilton's "losing the pure love of God."¹⁰⁸ Sarah Mallet was to "mark the first rising of desire" and "keep clear of inordinate affection."¹⁰⁹ John Valton was to "Take care you do not cleave to any person . . . God is a

¹⁰⁴ Letters, 5:180, Jan. 30, 1770.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 230, Mar. 17, 1771.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 277, Sept. 13, 1771.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 212, Nov. 30, 1770.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 108, Sept. 30, 1768.

¹⁰⁹ Letters, 8:15, Oct. 6, 1787.

jealous God."¹¹⁰ Joseph Benson was told, "You need all the power of God to preserve you from loving the creature more than the Creator."¹¹¹ Ann Loxdale was counseled not to "expect that any creature will increase your happiness any farther than it increases your knowledge and love of God."¹¹² Thomas Broadbent was instructed, "If you seek your happiness in God alone, you will never be disappointed: if in anything else you surely will; for all creatures are broken cisterns."¹¹³

The inappropriate lengths to which this teaching could be carried is seen in a crude and insensitive letter from Wesley to young Adam Clarke. Clarke's firstborn daughter died in his arms on December 16, 1790. By January 3, Wesley had received and answered Clarke's grief-stricken letter with these words:

But you startle me when you talk of grieving so much for the death of an infant. This was certainly a proof of inordinate affection; and if you love them thus all your children will die.

How did Mr. DeRenty behave when he supposed his wife to be dying? This is a pattern for a Christian.¹¹⁴

Discernment and Faith Versus Evil Reasoning and Doubt

The concept of evil reasoning is very important to Wesley's teaching on spirituality. Nearly all of Wesley's regular correspondents are warned against it. The fact that he does not explain it carefully in the Letters probably means that it was so much a part of Methodist

¹¹⁰ Letters, 5:14, Mar. 23, 1769.

¹¹¹ Letters, 7:45, Dec. 26, 1780.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 131, July 23, 1782.

¹¹³ Letters, 8:258, Jan. 29, 1791.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 253, Jan. 3, 1791. De Renty had so achieved detachment from the creature that he reported that he could have danced and sung while his wife lay dying, had it been appropriate.

terminology that it needed no thorough explanation.

The doctrine of evil reasoning came to Wesley directly from the pen of Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan. Wesley abridged Goodwin's book on the subject, A Child of Light Walking in Darkness, and published it in A Christian Library. Goodwin's doctrine was as follows. A child of God who has received the witness of the Spirit may, nevertheless, come into a season of darkness when it seems God has deserted her or him. The believer then uses his or her "fallen" reason in a pathological attempt to determine what has gone wrong. At this point Satan enters the picture, in league with the remaining sinfulness in the believer. Together they lead believers to "false and fearful conclusions against themselves."¹¹⁵ Satan knows just how to raise "hideous apprehensions and desperate conclusions [about] a man's own state."¹¹⁶ Goodwin points out that Satan is good at reasoning a believer out of his or her faith since, "He is a student of five thousand years standing who has lost no time."¹¹⁷ The believer's corrupt reason is an eager ally with Satan and, Goodwin confirms, this pair can "cast us into these burning fits of trouble and distress."¹¹⁸ Satan and carnal reasoning hide all our gifts of grace from view until the eye of the soul can see nothing but its defects. "The graces that are in us lie covered . . . and the dark side of our hearts (as of the cloud) is turned toward us"¹¹⁹ The disarmed believer is no match at debating Satan and is apt to deny the works of grace and growth already wrought by God.

Wesley found this concept very helpful in giving spiritual guidance. The Methodists professed some lofty miracles of grace--justification,

¹¹⁵ A Christian Library, 6:242. ¹¹⁶ Ibid. ¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 252.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 246-247. ¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 246.

sanctification, Christian perfection. Wesley discovered, however, that many of his people who once felt the witness of the Spirit and observed the fruit of the Spirit in their lives could fall into fierce struggles with doubt and subsequently cast away their confidence. Wesley wanted his people to live by simple faith when divine assurance was not strong.

To avoid "evil reasonings" the Methodist had to become concerned about discernment. The spiritual ear had to be able to distinguish between the voice of Satan, the voice of self-deception, and the voice of God. Discernment of one's state of grace was important. Even if the witness and fruit of the Spirit "meet together" in one's life, Wesley tells Mary Cooke, "you may relapse into painful doubts if you do not steadily watch against evil reasonings" She must not substitute the "deductions of reason for the witness of the Spirit."¹²⁰

Discernment between what was merely temptation and what was sin was also required. Philothea Briggs is informed that such discernment "is generally plain enough to them that are simple of heart; but in some exempt cases it is not plain."¹²¹ The answer lies not in calling every defect a sin, but in the unction of the Holy One who alone can make the truth known.

Skills of discernment were needed as well to tell when the Christian was wrongly "leaning" to his or her own understanding and when he or she was properly using the rational faculties. This was not always easy to determine and the final appeal was to "the unction of the Holy One."¹²² The "impressions" which Christians sometimes received had to

¹²⁰ Letters, 7:377, Mar. 31, 1787.

¹²¹ Letters, 5:341, Oct. 19, 1772.

¹²² Letters, 7:18, May 8, 1780.

be discerned as to their source. When Philothea Briggs received a mysterious impression Wesley wrote, "I am in doubt whether it be not a temptation from the enemy. It may occasion many wrong tempers; it may feed both pride and uncharitableness."¹²³

In addition, discernment skills were needed to determine whether the tempers, and emotions the disciple was experiencing came from God, sin, or Satan. Of the "sudden emotion" Mrs. Bennis experienced, Wesley said it was "exceeding hard to judge" whether it was a "preternatural dart from Satan" or something that "springs from your own heart." Since he had earlier counseled her against anger this may be the "sudden emotion" that was the topic of this letter. At any rate Wesley told her to "pray against it."¹²⁴ Discernment of spiritual lethargy was needed as well. Sometimes it was merely a worn or sick body weighing down the spirit; sometimes even drowsiness was "not natural but diabolical."¹²⁵

Wesley believed in a personal devil that was out to deprive every Methodist of her or his faith. A letter to Mary Stokes is typical.

A peculiar kind of watching, to which you are now called, is against the suggestions of that wicked one who would persuade you to deny or undervalue the grace of God which is in you. Beware of mistaking his voice for the voice of the Holy One. Do justice to Him that lives and reigns within you, and acknowledge His work. There is no pride in doing this: it is only giving Him His due.¹²⁶

Alexander Knox was warned of the tactics of Satan and received instructions about how to cope with assaults from the wicked one.

¹²³ Letters, 5:253, May 28, 1771. See also letter to Elizabeth Ritchie where Wesley explains the relationship of reason, Scripture, and impressions, 7:319.

¹²⁴ Letters, 6:56, Dec. 1, 1773. See also 5:243.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 110, Aug. 29, 1774.

¹²⁶ Letters, 5:294, Dec. 26, 1771.

Satan will surely take occasion . . . to inject a thousand thoughts; and will then accuse you for them: but he, not you, shall answer for them to God. God is on your side: He knows whereof you are made; and Jesus careth for you. He keeps you . . . as the apple of an eye.¹²⁷

In another letter Knox is told to, "Resist every distrustful thought the moment it is injected. God is on your side. Believe not the old murderer who tells you to the contrary."¹²⁸ But such discipline could go out of control and breed counterproductive introspection. Wesley warned Knox to stop "finding out arguments against yourself."¹²⁹ Finally Wesley orders him to stop thinking about his former sins at all and think only of the love and mercy of Christ.

Mrs. Bennis was among those counseled not to debate with the accuser of souls, "do not stoop to reason with the adversary, but flee to the Strong for more strength"¹³⁰ Wesley gave similar counsel to Ann Bolton, Hester Ann Roe, Mary Bishop, Thomas Rankin, Elizabeth Ritchie, Mary Cooke, James Ridall, Lady Maxwell, Elizabeth Baker, Miss March, Mrs. Marston, Mary Bosanquet, Sarah Crosby, Jane Hilton, Mrs. Mullis, Mrs. Rose, Ann Foard, Jenny Lee and Miss Sparrow.¹³¹ The counsel they received is echoed in Wesley's word to Peggy Dale: "Beware, my dear friend, of the Reasoning Devil, whose way is first to tempt, and then to accuse."¹³²

¹²⁷ Letters, 6:364, Dec. 23, 1779.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 314, June 5, 1778.

¹²⁹ Letters, 7:44, Dec. 23, 1780.

¹³⁰ Letters, 6:6, Dec. 16, 1772.

¹³¹ See Letters, 4:183, 251, 263, 270; 5:25, 60, 124, 101, 171, 176, 188, 193, 216, 255, 308; 6:6, 57, 89, 109, 205, 253, 382; 7:298, 303; 8:88, 139, 156.

¹³² Letters, 4:321, Feb. 8, 1766.

Wesley suggested several ways to resist the assaults of "evil reasoning." Sometimes he recommended prayer, sometimes helping others. To Mary Cooke he recommended finding such a deep sense of the peace of God that her soul would be kept like a garrison. But the most frequent prescription for resisting assaults by doubt was to hold the spiritual ground already gained by faith, being very careful never to cast away confidence. The scriptural phrase, "Cast not away your confidence," was repeated to a long list of correspondents including Mary Cooke, Hannah Ball, Martha Chapman, Sara M'Kim, Miss March, Peggy Dale, Mrs. Bennis, Mrs. Savage, and Penelope Newman. A letter to William Minethorp is typical of Wesley's instruction on this topic.

Dear Billy--You have nothing to do with past sins. They are blotted out. Whoever tells you the contrary, answer him, 'Thou art a liar. Get thee behind me, Satan. I will not cast away my confidence: Jesus hath lived, hath died for me.' [Beware of] your own frailty in reasoning with him [Satan] instead of looking to the Strong for Strength.¹³³

The spiritual quality most needed to avoid evil reasoning was simplicity. Accordingly, correspondents Hilton, Marston, Bennis, March, Sparrow, Bolton, and Lee were among those coached to seek simplicity as antidote to evil reasoning. For those under his care Wesley wanted a cessation of crippling introspection and a continuation of simple trust in God.

One simple way of distinguishing between the voice of the Holy One and the assaults of the accuser was given to the Methodists by Thomas Goodwin. When self-examination brought revelation of corruption:

the difference is that the Holy Spirit dealeth sweetly herein; as a father that convinceth his child of his misdemeanors but without

¹³² Letters, 4:321, Feb. 8, 1766.

¹³³ Letters, 6:241, Nov. 29, 1776.

putting in any such sting as this in the conclusion, that therefore we are hypocrites.¹³⁴

The one grace needed by the spiritual warrior to detect evil reasoning was "the unction of the Holy One," Wesley tells Miss March. Those who have been so gifted "are thereby enabled to discern his [Satan's] devices whenever they occur, and to distinguish them from the influences of the good Spirit, how finely soever they are disguised."¹³⁵

Discoveries by modern psychological science have revealed that some aspects of Wesley's teachings on interiority to be primitive, naive, simplistic and perhaps neurotic, unhealthy and destabilizing. Therefore his theological descendants have been more than willing to discard certain elements of early Wesleyan interiority. Nevertheless, concern for the interior life is essential to any spirituality which calls itself Wesleyan. Wesleyan spirituality is not as introspective as most ascetic or mystic spiritualities. It can never be properly understood as interiority alone. Outward acts of service are equally essential to Wesleyan spirituality. Wesleyan spirituality, however, with its concern for assurance, communion with God, holy attitudes, spiritual combat, discernment and evil reason is fully aware of the significance of the interior life.

¹³⁴ A Christian Library, 6:259.

¹³⁵ Letters, 5:147, Aug. 6, 1769.

CHAPTER VIII

SEEING GOD IN EVERYTHING:

PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE IN THE LETTERS

An important element in the spirituality of Wesley is his doctrine of particular providence. God not chance determines human events. Not only is the hand of God involved in all earthly happenings, but God has a redemptive purpose in all events large and small.

In the Letters we see Wesley counselling his disciples to see the hand of God in everything from deaths, to transportation delays. His advice seems at times more akin to Calvin's statement that not one drop of rain falls without God's intentive will causing it than to the implications of Arminian thought.

Particular Providence in the Letters

Hundreds of examples of the doctrine of particular providence could be cited, but only a few representative ones will be used. In 1755 Wesley wrote to Ebenezer Blackwell:

The doctrine of a Particular Providence is what exceeding few persons understand—at least, not practically, so as to apply it to every circumstance of life. This I want, to see God acting in everything, and disposing all for His own glory and His creature's good.¹

And indeed Wesley proceeded to see God in all things, not only in his life but in the lives of others. To Lady Rawdon, in grief because her cousin had been hung, Wesley writes, "May we not see God therein? May we not both hear and understand his voice? . . . He speaks sometimes

¹ Letters 3:139, Aug. 31, 1755.

in the whirlwind."² Wesley suggests that since her ladyship had become a backslider God was speaking through the hangman to call her back to true devotion. Arthur Keene and his wife suffered much at the bedside of a dying child — a "poor little maid bemoaning herself." Wesley interpreted the situation in light of his doctrine of particular providence. "She is permitted thus to linger in pain, not only for her own sake (. . . the greater her sufferings . . . the greater . . . her reward); but likewise for your sakes, that your 'wills may be melted down and take the mould divine.'"³ Damaris Perronet was facing "many trials," "a rough way," and a "stormy path;" but she was urged to see the "Potter's hand" in it all. "Your trials, you know, are all chosen by God," Wesley told her. "It is the cup which your Father has given you."⁴ Hester Ann Roe, facing "the trials that are at hand," is assured "that these . . . are ordered by unerring Wisdom, and are given us exactly at the right time and in due number, weight, and measure. And they continue no longer than is best; for CHANCE has no share in the government of the world."⁵ Alexander Knox receives assurance that his epilepsy came from a gracious Providence who used it to "suppress the fire of youth, to keep you dead to the world" and to keep him [Knox] from levity and being the victim of the praise of others. "A common illness . . . would by no means have answered the intention, or saved you from admiring yourself . . ." Wesley added, "Therefore God keeps you long in His school, the very best wherein Infinite Wisdom could place you."⁶

² Letters, 4:87, Mar. 18, 1760.

³ Letters, 8:3, July 24, 1787.

⁴ Letters, 5:234-5, Mar. 30, 1771.

⁵ Letters, V, 234-5, Mar. 30, 1771.

⁶ Letters, VI, 339, Feb. 11, 1779.

Alexander's mother, Wesley felt, was too kind and protective of her epileptic son. If she does not change she is in danger: "I am not sure," Wesley warned, "that it will not cost her the life of another child, though God tries milder methods first."⁷ Ann Bolton is counseled to be convinced "of that great truth that there is no such thing as chance in the world; that fortune is only another name for Providence." What seems to be chance, Wesley added, "is guided by an unerring hand . . . of infinite wisdom and goodness. Such are all the afflictive circumstances that have followed you . . . almost from your childhood."⁸

Wesley realized that such a doctrine of particular providence was in tension with his teaching about free grace and human freedom. He attempts to draw a line between the two teachings in tension in a letter to Miss March. "We cannot impute too much to divine Providence," he said, "unless we make it interfere with our free agency God does . . . in a thousand instances draw good out of evil; yea, . . . He may . . . sometimes permit us to be overtaken in a fault to preserve us from a greater."⁹ Sometimes Wesley appears to want to avoid identifying God as the direct source of sickness. In a letter to Miss Bishop he notes that many persons "are made better by sickness." He then adds "unless one would rather say 'in sickness.' . . . In sickness many are convinced of sin, many converted . . . and still more confirmed in the ways of God and brought onward to perfection."¹⁰ While such disclaimers may give modern Wesleyan-Arminians some breathing room, they are so few and far between in the Letters that they are strongly overshadowed by the teaching that one should see all events in life as coming from the hand of God. The early Methodist was

⁷ Letters, 7:273, June 8, 1785.

⁸ Ibid., p. 46, Jan. 2, 1781.

⁹ Ibid., p. 45, Jan. 2, 1781.

¹⁰ Letters, VI, 263, Apr. 26, 1777.

taught to resign herself or himself to such trials and look for God's redemptive purpose therein.

In only a few letters does Satan appear as the author of evil. Wesley writes to Emma Moon that he had tried to answer her last letter "ten times" but had "been as often hindered." He interpreted this as the work of Satan who "does not approve our corresponding together."¹¹ Even when Satan does afflict the Christian he does so either with God's permission or His direction. John Bredin fell from a horse. He was bruised but no bones were broken--no thanks to the devil. "So far the old murtherer could go and no farther."¹² Wesley informs Elizabeth Padbury that God delights in mercy more than in punishment, but that God sometimes permits the devil to "cloud our mind."¹³ If the devil desires to sift her as wheat Mrs. Marston is to understand that "conflicts and various exercises of the soul are permitted."¹⁴ "Satan sometimes by God's permission weakens the body,"¹⁵ was the good news Hannah Ball received in May, 1773. When such things happen we must "know [that] chance is an empty sound: The Lord sitteth on His throne, and ruleth all things well."¹⁶ A few months later Wesley again writes to Hannah Ball admonishing her not to "fly from those sufferings which God chooses for us," for spiritual death is the result. If we "fly," remember "God punishes us either by Himself or by the devil for going out of His way."¹⁷

¹¹ Letters 4:195, Nov. 5, 1762.

¹² Letters, 4:195, Nov. 5, 1762.

¹³ Letters, 8:105, Feb. 20, 1782.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 185, Aug. 1, 1783. ¹⁵ Letters, 5:242, May 6, 1771.

¹⁶ Ibid. ¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 75-76, Feb. 27, 1774.

There was, Wesley admitted, mystery about the ways of God. Wesley was always ready to defend God's ways--even if his rationale had to be stretched to the breaking point. Doubtless Wesley was at times too quick to identify, and explain the divine design in the life of his people. But he also recognized that much about the problem of evil defied human reason. When Samuel Walker, a young preacher, died, Wesley mourned, "It seems strange that, when there is so great a want of faithful laborers, such as him should be removed; but the will of God is always best . . ."¹⁸ To his good friend Jane Hilton Barton, whom he comforted through many sorrows including the death of a child, Wesley wrote:

There is frequently something very mysterious in the ways of divine Providence. A little of them we may understand; but much more is beyond our comprehension, and we must be content to say, 'What Thou doest I know not now, but I shall know hereafter.' At present it is sufficient for me to know that all His ways are mercy and truth to them that love Him.¹⁹

Wesley and his Methodists were sure that suffering was part of God's will for them. Wesley writes to Betsy Bradburn when her three-year-old son died, "May God enable him [husband Samuel] and you to do and to suffer His holy and acceptable will."²⁰ When he wrote this he was repeating what he had often said to others. For example, he wished his friend Ann Bolton "continual power to do and suffer the will of God."²¹

Though the early Methodists expected suffering it was not to be regarded as meaningless. Each trial or illness carried in it redemptive seeds that would make them better, glorify God and, perhaps help others.

¹⁸ Letters, 4:160, July 16, 1761.

¹⁹ Letters, 6:329, Nov. 13, 1778.

²⁰ Letters, 7:110, Feb. 28, 1782.

²¹ Letters, 8:156, July 27, 1789.

Mary Stokes is assured that "sanctified crosses are blessings indeed."²² Mrs. Woodhouse is told to center her heart in God for, "This will endear and sweeten every cross, which is only a painful means of a closer union with Him."²³ Lady Maxwell's illness, Wesley claims, was without doubt "ordered well by an unerring Providence as a means of keeping you dead to all below, and of quickening your affection to things above."²⁴ Wesley tells the "weak and tender" Jane Hilton, "I am not sorry you have trials; they are intended to show you your own helplessness, and to give you a fuller confidence in Him"²⁵

Wesley's later correspondence with Ann Bolton is rich with the theme of the redemptive nature of suffering. "My Nancy, look up! . . . He chastens you long for your profit, that you may be a partaker of His holiness . . . and consequently more happy."²⁶ Again, to this "daughter of affliction" he says, "You are still in God's school . . . He loveth whom He chasteneth."²⁷ "It has seemed good to our Lord for many years to lead you in a rough and thorny way" Wesley wrote again, "but still His hand has held you"²⁸ On another occasion Wesley writes saying that "our poor weak understandings cannot fathom the deep counsels of God," but this much we do know: "if you had not seen trouble . . . you would not have been what you are now. You have fairly profited . . . you have learnt more and more obedience by the things that you have suffered."²⁹ Later Wesley celebrates with her that she has been made

²² Letters 5:294, Dec. 26, 1771.

²³ Ibid., p. 174, Jan. 1, 1770.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 134, April 29, 1769.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 100, Aug. 20, 1768. ²⁶ Letters, 8:9.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 84. ²⁸ Ibid., p. 117. ²⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

"a partaker of His holiness" through her "patient suffering."³⁰

On the death of Ann's sister Wesley wrote,

But why does our Lord inflict this upon us? Not merely for His pleasure, but that we may be partakers of His holiness. It is true one grand means of grace is the doing the will of our Lord. But the suffering it is usually a quicker means and sinks us deeper into the abyss of love. It hath pleased God to lead you in the way of suffering from your youth up . . . nevertheless it has yielded peaceable fruit. Your soul is still a watered garden, as a field which the Lord hath blessed.³¹

Indeed, the early Methodists expected affliction, but they were assured, as Mary Stokes was, that, "Whenever it pleases Him to send affliction, then affliction is best."³²

Wesley's Doctrine of Particular Providence Evaluated

Wesley derived his doctrine of particular providence from a number of scriptures. Those he quoted or alluded to frequently included:

"The Lord loveth whom He chasteneth,"³³ "All things work together for good"³⁴ and "the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away."³⁵

Even if Wesley can draw some support from these verses his position seems strange to some of his theological descendents. I interviewed four Wesleyan theologians about this matter. Rob Staples (Th.D. Pacific School of Religion) replied, "That has always bothered me about Wesley." He went on to cite a sermon in which Wesley said the Lisburn earthquake was sent by God. Kenneth Grider (Ph.D. University of Glasgow) said that Wesley was clearly wrong in this matter. Yet, he believed, it was predictable that Wesley would come out where he did. If Wesley had

³⁰ Ibid., p. 158. ³¹ Ibid., p. 158.

³² Letters, 5:323, June 16, 1772. ³³ Letters, 8:9, 221, 246.

³⁴ Letters, 5:205; 7:123; 8:86.

³⁵ Letters, 6:269; 7:359; 8:51, 158.

admitted second causes and natural causes he would have played into the hands of the Deists. Appeal to abuse of human freedom as a source of evil would have pushed his doctrine of free grace into a full-blown doctrine of free will which Wesley was not ready to do. Further, to yield any significant ground on the doctrine of God's sovereignty would have put to risk that basic Protestant doctrine which Wesley never sacrificed, and would have made him even more vulnerable to being labeled a "papist." Grider believes that "seeing God in everything" was such a "given" in the Protestant evangelical movement of the eighteenth century that it was unlikely that Wesley would have developed anything revolutionary on this matter. Ray Dunning (Ph.D. Vanderbilt University) stated that to take what Wesley said in a letter about a specific case, details of which we know little, and generalize on it is a questionable procedure. Perhaps this would be true except that in hundreds of cases Wesley's doctrine of particular providence which sees God's deliberate hand in everything is consistently repeated. Further, in the Letters Wesley himself generalizes his doctrine of particular providence. Paul M. Bassett (Ph. D. Duke University) told me straightforwardly that he believed that Wesley's doctrine of seeing God in everything is a basic Wesleyan doctrine that Wesleyans would do well to rediscover.

In my opinion, Wesley's practice of placing God in a causal relationship to everything is questionable and theologically erroneous. Much evil results from the abuse of human freedom: this is a missing concept in Wesley's doctrine of providence as it appears in the Letters. Wesley's view, it seems to me, is the wrong approach to the question of God's relationship to our suffering. Even the idea of the "permissive will" of God is unsatisfactory. To me, a much more fruitful approach

is to see God as Helper and Sharer in our suffering. Though the scriptures do not speak without ambiguity on this issue I believe that strong scriptural support can be found for regarding God primarily as Helper and Sharer of human suffering. Thus I believe it is appropriate to maximize God as Helper in suffering and minimize the causal relationship. Wesley's view, taken as a whole comes too close to blaming (crediting?) God for things for which society punishes persons. My brief analysis in no way removes the mystery of God's ways, but it may make more room for the God whom Jesus of Nazareth revealed.³⁶

For Reflection

Several points worthy of continued reflection are offered as a conclusion to this chapter.

1. What effect did the doctrine of particular providence have on the spiritual life of Wesley's disciples? At first glance it sounds like a theology that encourages acquiescence. Resignation to illness, affliction, and persecution as the will of God might appear to make those early Methodists mere lumps of clay molded by their environment. Yet history does not validate such an interpretation. The Methodists did not acquiesce to anything. Rather than submit to their oppressive environment they attacked poverty, ignorance, and disease. They brought about prison reform, created labor unions, campaigned against slavery and for religious toleration, and lobbied for the Factory Acts and the Child Labor Laws.

Wesley and company seemed to be able to hold resignation to God's will and working for change in creative tension. However providential

³⁶ See: Wesley Tracy, ed. Why Don't You Do Something, God? (Beacon Hill Press, 1974). See also Even So Believe by Chester A. Pennington (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957).

events were, wrongs needed to be made right. When the Anglican clergy criticized the Methodists for trying to change the plight of the poor they charged them with conspiring against divine Providence because, they said, the poor were predestined to be wretched. Wesley, for all his doctrine of particular providence, was able to answer, "My part is to improve the present moment."³⁷

Wesley's ability to hold Providence, and efforts to change ban circumstances in tension can be seen on a lesser scale in the Letters in regard to sickness. Repeatedly Wesley told his correspondents that their illness was providential and then he proceeded to tell them how to treat it. He recommended such remedies as tar water, fresh air and exercise, nettle tea, and electric shock. In a letter to Hannah Ball Wesley said that God had permitted the devil to smite her body. "Chance, he said, is an empty sound . . . God ruleth all things well." But in the same letter he adds: "nevertheless we are even in that [Providential] weakness to use natural means just as if it was owing to natural causes." Wesley recommended "a cupful of the decoction of burdock . . . both morning and evening." He continued, "Our point is to improve by everything that occurs -- by good or ill success . . . sickness or health, by ease or pain."³⁸

It would appear that instead of producing despair and passive acquiescence, the doctrine of particular providence allowed and encouraged Methodists to work for changes in society and in their personal circumstances.

³⁷ Letters, II, 94, March 25, 1747.

³⁸ Letters, VI, 27-28, May 23, 1773.

2. Closely related to the foregoing point is the fact that Wesley's doctrine of particular providence kept the hearts and minds of his correspondents centered on the redemptive aspect of every tragedy, affliction or trouble. The redemptive nature of suffering became a central element in Wesleyan spirituality. An army of sincere Christians always searching for God's redemptive purpose in the difficulties of human existence can achieve much—as early century Methodism proved.

3. The doctrine of particular providence carried too far, however, can create needless obstacles. Who can love a God who kills little children just to teach parents a lesson? Who could believe that a loving God could guide a bullet into the lung of a young soldier in Vietnam and then "will" that he bleed to death? More than a simplistic doctrine of providence needs to be brought to bear upon the problem of evil.

4. Yet with the risk noted in item three modern Wesleyans would do well to reconsider at least part of John Wesley's doctrine of providence. No group has more eagerly embraced the idea of human autonomy, no people have more quickly resonated with the human potential movement in its various dimensions than have many of Wesley's theological descendants. Perhaps their proper resistance to "God has a blueprint for your life," the watchword for certain fundamentalistic folk theologies, has become an over-reaction. Many creative results from encounters with suffering would probably transpire if Wesley's spiritual descendants would adopt and practice, personally and corporately, the most positive part of their "Abraham's" doctrine of providence--looking for God's redemptive purpose in events large and small.

CHAPTER IX
LIVING FOR OTHERS: CHRISTIAN SERVICE AS A
SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE IN THE LETTERS

No description of Wesleyan spirituality would be adequate if it did not include Christian service. Methodists were expected to both "be good and do good."¹ Wesley consistently balanced inward and outward holiness, acts of piety and acts of mercy. Acts of mercy included all kinds of Christian service to others: serving the community of faith, meeting the needs of the sick, the poor, the imprisoned. The Methodists were not their own -- they were to live for others.

We do not "acknowledge him to have one grain of faith who is not continually doing good, who is not willing 'to spend and be spent in doing all good, as he has opportunity, to all men.'"² Thus Hannah Ball is urged to "spend and be spent for a good Master."³ And Wesley calls John Valton a "faithful labourer, willing to spend and be spent for his Master."⁴ He tells Elizabeth Ritchie, "You must not give place -- no, not for a day -- to inactivity . . . Redeem the time!"⁵

In the Letters living for others is not just a matter of being zealous. It is more than admitting that much is to be done and the laborers

¹ Letters, 3:199, Sept. 15, 1756.

² Letters, 2:39, July 1745.

³ Letters, 5:291, Dec. 9, 1771.

⁴ Letters, 6:201, Jan. 25, 1776.

⁵ Ibid., p. 126, Nov. 29, 1774.

are few. Rather Christian service is regarded as an integral and essential part of spiritual formation. Mary Bishop, who loved solitude, is told to get to work for God lest her faith "insensibly die away." Further, Wesley points out to her, "It is by works only that we can be made perfect."⁶ Elizabeth Ritchie is informed that "nothing is more apt to grow upon the soul [than inactivity]; the less you speak or act for God the less you may."⁷ Ann Bolton is assured that as she works to improve others she experiences "personal improvement,"⁸ and the "brightening of all your graces."⁹ Later, Wesley reminds her, "While you help others, God will help you."¹⁰ Sarah Rutter is promised, "Use the faith and talents which God hath given you, and He will give you more"¹¹ Wesley informs Mary Stokes that she must "do as well as receive good" as she ministers to a society she was sent to strengthen.¹² He assures Mrs. Bennis that "The more you help others the more your soul will prosper."¹³ These examples show that in the Wesleyan scheme of things piety is incomplete without the nourishment of service, spiritual formation is retarded without spending and being spent in behalf of Christ and others.

⁶ Ibid., p. 128, Nov. 30, 1774.

⁷ Ibid., p. 126. Nov. 29, 1774. See also 7:229-230.

⁸ Ibid., p. 58, Dec. 12, 1773.

⁹ Ibid., p. 70. Jan. 20, 1774.

¹⁰ Letters, 7:233, Aug. 31, 1784.

¹¹ Letters, 8:242, Oct. 18, 1790.

¹² Letters, 5:305, Feb. 11, 1772.

¹³ Ibid., p. 150, Sept. 18, 1769.

Service to Particular Individuals

As noted in the Letters we see Wesley pointing out to his correspondents persons whom they can serve. Mrs. Armstrong is directed: "I hope you will comfort your sister Rutledge. She has been sadly distressed; a word spoken in season, how good it is! I think you will lose no opportunity of doing good to her" ¹⁴ Wesley reminds Mrs. Johnson that her calling "is not only to do good, but to do all the good which you possibly can." She is then asked to help "my friend Sister Gayer." ¹⁵ Three months later Wesley calls upon her to console Mr. and Mrs. John Wilson whose son had been killed in a fall from a horse. ¹⁶ Ann Bolton is to help Billy Brummah, ¹⁷ and John Wesley writes to Ebenezer Blackwell asking him to give money to "remarkably honest and industrious" Elizabeth Miller who now through "age and weakness is ill able to procure for herself the necessaries of life." ¹⁸ Serving other individuals was and is a part of Wesleyan spirituality.

Service to the Community of Faith

Wesley expected all of his correspondents to vigorously serve the community of faith. The societies, classes, bands, prayermeetings, love feasts, watch nights, Sunday schools, and preaching services required many workers. Twenty percent of all Methodists held office in the society. Much work had to be done and Wesley's correspondents were to

¹⁴ Letters, 8:132, April 22, 1789.

¹⁵ Letters, 7:245, Oct. 27, 1784.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 253, Jan. 26, 1785.

¹⁷ Letters, 5:347, Nov. 28, 1772.

¹⁸ Letters, 3:25, Dec. 18, 1749.

spend and be spent to achieve it. Dorothy Furly, for example, is reminded that the Lord had given her spiritual and physical health "to labour, not to sit still."¹⁹ Mrs. Bennis is reminded that she was sent to Waterford, Ireland for a purpose, "You should gather up and meet a band immediately. If you would meet a class too . . . so much the better."²⁰ Jane Hilton Barton is urged to "snatch all the opportunities you can" for witnessing to neighbors, comforting the afflicted, supporting the weak, and exhorting believers to go on to perfection.²¹ She is later instructed to "labour so much the more to comfort the feeble-minded, to support the weak, to confirm the wavering, and recover them that are out of the way."²² Ann Bolton is urged to be a mother in Israel, a repairer of waste places, a guide to the blind, a healer of the sick, and a "lifter up of the hands that hang down."²³ Such service was needed not only for the benefit of the society but also for the spiritual formation of the workers.

Service to the Poor and Oppressed

As important as the evangelistic and devotional aspects of the Methodist movement were, it is hard to say they were more significant than the humanizing social reforms the movement brought to England. The social service achievements could not have happened, in my judgement, without the evangelistic and devotional thrust of the movement. I am equally sure that the evangelistic-devotional emphasis would have fallen flat without the dimension of social redemption. Further, the spiritual

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

²⁰ Letters, 5:322, June 16, 1772.

²¹ Ibid., p. 151, Nov. 1, 1769. ²² Ibid., p. 189, May 8, 1770.

²³ Letters, 8:246, Nov. 4, 1790.

formation of Wesley's disciples would have been unbalanced and incomplete without the emphasis on social reform.

Wesley declared that his purpose was to reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land. Wesley and his reformers faced a society oppressed by the upper five percent of the nation. Disease ran rampant through the huddled masses. Cholera, typhoid, and smallpox claimed thousands, while many more starved. The municipal graveyards operated "poor holes" -- large open graves into which the bodies of the nameless victims of disease and malnutrition were thrown. Only one child in twenty-five attended any school of any kind. Workers, including children as young as three years of age, suffered in twelve hour a day sweat shops and mines. Ten persons per unfurnished room was the rule in London. Lack of sanitation was a health hazard -- horse manure piled as high as fourteen feet on each side of London's muddy streets was not unusual. Hunger riots were common. Prisons were overcrowded and unbelievably filthy. The government executed up to five hundred citizens per year, thousands more were deported. No fewer than two hundred-fifty violations were punishable by death. Children as young as eleven years of age were hung. Many died for stealing cheese, a handkerchief, a loaf of bread, or a sheep.²⁴

Wesley established and maintained social services:

1. An orphanage at New Castle.
2. A Poor House in London.
3. A widow's home in London.

²⁴ See "Judicial Oppression in England During John Wesley's Ministry as recorded in English Newspapers 1738-1791" an unpublished paper by Wesley Tracy. See also Wearmouth, Whitely, and Semmel in the bibliography of this document.

4. Food distribution in Bristol and London.
5. Clothing distribution.
6. Sick visitation. For example, London was divided into twelve areas. Several sick visitors were assigned to each zone.
7. The first free medical clinic in England.
8. A "lying in" hospital for destitute or unwed mothers. Clients received pre-natal and post-natal care, religious instruction and vocational training. One year this institution served three hundred unwed mothers.
9. A small business loan fund for Methodists.
10. A plan to employ out of work Methodists in textile work.
11. "The Christian Community," established in 1772. This group took religious services and publications into the London work houses. It carried on into the twentieth century.
12. Schools of every kind--boarding schools, day schools, charity schools, Sunday schools.
13. Prison reform and ministry to prisoners. Before one could be admitted to membership in the Bristol society he or she had to promise to work in Newgate Prison. A Methodist was finally made warden of Newgate Prison in Bristol. The place was revolutionized and Wesley wrote to the London Chronicle describing the reforms made and recommending that the responsible authorities follow this model for reforming all prisons.²⁵
14. Anti-slavery appeals, petitions, and programs.
15. The Strangers Friend Society organized by Adam Clarke and John Wesley. No Methodist could get help from this relief organization, but anyone else could. This organization--spread to all the larger cities of

²⁵ Letters, 4:127-128, Jan. 2, 1761.

England. Even the king and queen came to support it.

"Join hands with God to help a poor man live," was one of Wesley's most frequent slogans. In a letter to Christopher Hopper, Wesley dubbed himself "God's steward for the poor."²⁶ Wesley and his spiritual descendants finally pushed through such laws as the Factory Acts, Miners Act, and the Child Labor Laws. The early labor movement in England was led by Methodists. For example, of the 124 officials in the agricultural unions in three East Anglia counties 81 were Methodists.²⁷ The first coal miners elected to Parliament were Methodists, most of them lay preachers.

Wesley's concern for the sick, the poor and the oppressed shows up in his letters — even to a gentlewoman like Miss March. Wesley urges her to "put off the gentlewoman; you bear a higher character." That higher character is to be expressed in this way. "Go and see the poor and sick in their own poor little hovels. Take up your cross, woman."²⁸ Several months later Wesley writes saying, "I want you to converse more, abundantly more, with the poorest of the people, who, if they have not taste, have souls."²⁹ Wesley goes on in the same letter: "creep in among these in spite of dirt and a hundred disgusting circumstances, and thus put off the gentlewoman."³⁰ Less than three weeks later Wesley again pushed the issue, advising Miss March "frequently, nay, constantly to visit the poor, the widow, the sick, the fatherless" This she was to do even though such persons "have nothing to recommend them but that they are

²⁶ Letters, 5:31, Nov. 27, 1766.

²⁷ Nigel Scotland, Methodism and the Revolt of the Field (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1981), p. 69.

²⁸ Letters, 6:153, June 9, 1775.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 206, Feb. 7, 1776. ³⁰ Ibid., p. 207.

bought by the blood of Christ."³¹ She was to expect a "thousand circumstances" to "shock the delicacy" of her nature, but this must not keep her from the blessing to be found in this labor of love.

Others received similar advice. Theological student Samuel Furly is told in three different letters to break away from academic pursuits and regularly visit the sick. "Why do you not go every afternoon to visit the sick?" Wesley asked. Brian Bury Collins, also a theological student, is advised, "You have seen very little of the choicest part of London society: I mean the poor. Go with me into their cellars and garrets, and then you will taste their spirits."³³ Elizabeth Morgan is admonished to "add that truly Christian diversion, visiting the poor, whether sick or well."³⁴

"I bear the rich, and love the poor," Wesley wrote to Ann Foard, "therefore I spend almost all my time with them."³⁵ Wesley's concern for the starving poor is seen in an excerpt from his long letter I found in Lloyd's Evening Post, the London Chronicle, and the Leeds Mercury

Why are thousands of people starving? . . . I have seen it with my eyes in every corner of the land. I have known those who could only afford to eat a little coarse food every other day. I have known one picking up stinking sprats from a dunghill and carrying them home for herself and her children. I have known another gathering the bones which the dogs have left in the streets and making broth of them to prolong a wretched life. Why are so many thousand people in London, in Bristol, in Norwich, in every county from one end of England to the other, utterly destitute of employment?³⁶

³¹ Ibid., pp. 208-209, Feb. 26, 1776.

³² Letters, 4:20, May 3, 1758. See also, IV, 232; III, 123.

³³ Letters. 7:23-24, June 14, 1780.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 51, March 13, 1781.

³⁵ Letters, 4:266, Sept. 29, 1764.

³⁶ Lloyd's Evening Post, Dec. 21, 1772; London Chronicle, Dec. 17-19, 1772; Leeds Mercury, Dec. 24, 1772. See also Letters, 5:350.

Wesley's concern for the imprisoned was cited earlier, is demonstrated in several letters³⁷ one of which is a letter to Henry Moore. One John Bull was put in Marshalsea Prison. He had befriended the Methodists earlier. Wesley writes to Henry Moore as a "man of feeling" who can "sympathize with the afflicted" and asks him to call on Bull in prison, counsel him and supply him with some money. Whether he is guilty of a crime "is not now the question," Wesley says. "Now especially he stands in need of such a friend."³⁸ Two years later Bull was released and the Methodists gave him money to help him get a new start.³⁹ This incident represents many others which demonstrate the kind of service to the oppressed that Methodists were to render gladly.

Spending and being spent in service to Christ, to one's companions in the community of faith, and to the poor, sick, and oppressed was foundational to early Wesleyan spirituality. They were to:

Serve with careful Martha's hands
And Loving Mary's heart.⁴⁰

Living for others is one of the richest strands in the Wesleyan heritage of spiritual formation. Certainly this theme of self-forgetful service ought to be an essential ingredient of a modern Wesleyan spirituality.

³⁷ See Letters, 4:73-74, 84. ³⁸ Letters, 8:13-14, Sept. 30, 1787.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 151. ⁴⁰ Letters, 3:67, May 14, 1751.

CHAPTER X
CHRISTIAN PERFECTION IN THE LETTERS

John Wesley claimed that the "grand depositum" which God gave to the world through the Methodists was the doctrine and experience of Christian perfection. It is clearly the organizing principle around which Wesley's theory and practice of Christian spirituality was built. Almost certainly no doctrine is more characteristic of early Methodism than the doctrine of perfect love or Christian perfection.

The social significance of the doctrine of the perfectibility of humankind is hard to exaggerate. It played an absolutely essential role in the Methodist movement's success in lifting the poor masses. Every reform achieved by the Methodists can be traced directly or indirectly to the doctrine of the perfectibility of humankind.¹ Wesley called Christian perfection "the medicine of life, the never failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world, for all the miseries and vices of men."²

Christian perfection was as central to private devotion as it was to the social aspects of the Methodist movement. It was the capstone of all of Wesley's paradigms for spiritual formation. Perfect love was the difference between the "almost" and "altogether" Christian. Sanctifying grace was the mark that distinguished the "faith of a child" from the

¹ I believe I have established this in a series of papers written for an STD In-parish project. See particularly "John Wesley--Innovative Theologian or Predictable Product of His Times;" "John Wesley Bringing Theology and Social Context into Interaction;" and "John Wesley: Creating a Redemptive Synthesis from the Interaction of Theology and Culture."

² John Wesley, Works, 7:3.

"faith of a servant." Christian perfection is that which characterizes a "father" -- not a "babe" in Christ. Further, perfection is to be the pursuit or possession not of the cloistered few but of every believer.

Many books have been written about Wesley's idea of Christian perfection. Dozens of denominations, and sects have been founded on various interpretations of it. It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate all such literature and ecclesiastical structures.³ Rather, Christian perfection will be briefly described and defined prior to a survey of its treatment in the Letters and two case studies.

Christian perfection (which Wesley also labeled perfect love, holiness, or entire sanctification) is an act of divine grace whereby the justified believer is cleansed from inbred sin. This purifying of the heart is the negative dimension of the Christian perfection. Inordinate selfishness, and unholy tempers are replaced by divine love through the "inspiration" ("in-spiriting") of the Holy Spirit--this is the positive dimension. The cleansed and filled Christian is given "the mind of Christ" and the image of God is restored to the heart. The sanctified believer is brought into complete devotement to God and wills one thing--the will of God. In his brief descriptions of it Wesley calls Christian perfection divine love expelling or excluding sin. In his simplest statement Wesley says it is simply what Jesus taught in Matthew 22:37--loving God with all the heart and one's neighbor a one's self.

Faith is the only condition for sanctifying grace. Works of piety

³ The reader is referred to Wesley's "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" (Works 9:366-445) for a succinct view of Wesley's teaching. Also see "Sanctification in the Sermons of John Wesley" by Wesley Tracy (a 72-page essay which analyzes Wesley's teaching on perfection as found in "A Plain Account" and fifty-eight of Wesley's sermons. Written as an STD assignment for San Francisco Theological Seminary).

and mercy play an important but non-meritorious part. The believer is to expect sanctification at God's own time if one is busy with

all works of mercy . . . such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining strangers, visiting those . . . in prison or sick, or variously afflicted . . . endeavoring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble minded . . . these [are] the fruits . . . necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed His children to wait for complete salvation.

To acts of mercy Wesley added acts of piety such as Bible reading, prayer, worship, and receiving the sacrament. Such works do not earn sanctifying grace, but Christians not engaged in them would look in vain for the gift of Christian perfection.

Those perfected in love were not rendered impervious to temptation. In their free agency they could still turn from God and be eternally lost. There was no room for spiritual pride for there is no perfection, Wesley insisted, that does not admit of continual increase. Further, rather than spiritual pride being the natural result of sanctifying grace, the observed result was increased humility for no one realized their utter dependence on being cleansed moment-by-moment by the blood of Christ more than these pilgrims of the deeper life.

The gift of sanctifying grace is given instantaneously through faith. But a gradual work, Wesley said, both preceded and followed the "crisis" experience of Christian perfection. Thomas Albin's research of hundreds of testimonies in Wesley's publication The Arminian Magazine reveals that those who testified to Christian perfection found that state of grace, on the average, five years after their conversion.⁵

⁴ John Wesley, Works 6:61.

⁵ Thomas R. Albin, "An Empirical Study of Early Methodist Spirituality" in Wesleyan Theology Today. Theodore Runyon, ed. (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), p. 278.

This point of process and crisis in sanctification bears directly on the issue of spiritual formation for modern Wesleyans. Those Wesleyan groups which were born in the nineteenth century American Holiness Movement stressed the "instantaneously by faith" dimension so strongly that the processive nature of spiritual formation was diminished. If Christ can be formed in a person in the twinkling of an eye by faith alone why would anyone prefer a life-long discipline to bring it about? To some extent at least this stress on the instantaneous has created a predictable gap in the writing, teaching and preaching of the time-bound dimensions of spiritual formation among many Wesleyan bodies, including the Church of the Nazarene. This reality contributed to the validity of this dissertation/project.

In the doctrine of Christian perfection we see Wesley the synthesizer at work again. He brought together in creative tension the Catholic doctrine of works and the Protestant doctrine of grace. Harold Lindstrom calls it "a synthesis peculiar to Wesley, an amalgam of both Protestant and Catholic devotion."⁶ George Croft Cell calls it "a necessary synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness."⁷

Christian Perfection in the Letters

In the Letters Christian perfection as the goal of Wesley's correspondents dominates the landscape. From the multitude of references to it several representative themes will be identified and cited.

⁶ Harold Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification (Wilmore, Kentucky: Francis Asbury Press, 1981), p. 12.

⁷ George Croft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935), p. 361.

Definitions

From time to time Wesley paused in the Letters to define his doctrine of Christian perfection. Usually he was trying to simplify the doctrine. To Walter Churchey, a lawyer and poet, Wesley explained,

Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love--love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God.⁸ The Refiners fire purges out all that is contrary to love

When Lawrence Coughlan began to teach that holiness¹² "consisted in a flow of joy" Wesley wrote,

I constantly told you quite the contrary: I told you it was love; the love of God and our neighbour; the image of God stamped on the heart; the life of God in the soul of man; the mind that was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ also walked. . . . that deep communion with the Father and the Son, whereby they are enabled to give Him their whole heart, to love every man as their own soul

When the young scholar Joseph Benson, who was later to write a commentary on the Bible endorsed by the Methodist Conference, was wrestling with the doctrine, Wesley wrote to him,

You allow the whole thing which I contend for -- an entire deliverance from sin, a recovery of the whole image of God, the loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength. And you believe God is able to give this -- yea give it you in an instant. ¹⁰You trust He will. O hold fast this . . . blessed hope

Perfect Love

One of the stressed aspects of Christian perfection was perfect love. Wesley explains the ultimacy of perfect love to Penelope Newman. True religion, he told her, "is only humble, gentle, patient love. It is nothing less and nothing more than this;" He then urges her,

⁸ Letters, 5:223, Feb. 21, 1771.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 101-103, Aug. 27, 1768.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 215. See also p. 141.

"Let your heart continually burn with humble love."¹¹ Perfect love Wesley explains to Hannah Ball, is "humble, gentle, patient love: love regulating all the tempers, and governing all the words and actions."¹² Adam Clarke is advised to give special pastoral care to "all who have tasted perfect love," because "hardly one in three retains perfect love for a long period."¹³ Perfect love is often identified by Wesley as pure love. Hester Ann Roe is reminded of the difference between first love of the new convert and the pure love of the sanctified.¹⁴ Dorothy Furly is assured that God wants to leave "nothing in the heart but His pure love alone."¹⁵ Later Wesley tells her: "I want you to be all love. This is the perfection I believe and teach."¹⁶

Purity or Cleansing

A principal aspect of Wesley's teaching on Christian perfection pertains to the cleansing from inbred sin. Hearing Jenny Lee's testimony, Wesley wrote, "He has purified your heart. He has saved you from pride, anger, desire."¹⁷ Theological student, Samuel Furly who doubted that the unholy tempers could be conquered, was told by Wesley that he (Wesley) had just spoken with "forty or fifty" persons who testify, "He has enabled me to give Him all my heart, which I believe He has cleansed from all sin. I feel no pride, no anger, no desire, no unbelief, but

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹² *Letters*, 6:266, June 11, 1777.

¹³ *Letters*, 8:249, Nov. 26, 1790.

¹⁴ *Letters*, 6:217, May 3, 1776.

¹⁵ *Letters*, 4:56, Mar. 6, 1759.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 188, Sept. 15, 1762.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 183, June 7, 1762.

pure love alone."¹⁸ In a letter to Furly he points out that those who have been "cleansed from all sin -- I mean from all pride, anger, evil desire, idolatry, and unbelief"¹⁹ are the persons most "deeply conscious" of their continual need of Christ. Robert Hopkins, a young preacher, is told that the greatest of all blessings is, "Christ in a pure and sinless heart."²⁰ Many other references to heart cleansing could be cited. The foregoing are merely representative of the way purity and cleansing are spoken of in the Letters.

Renewal of the Image of God

Salvation as the renewal of the image of God in the person's innermost being reaches its zenith in Christian perfection. Rebecca Ingram of Limerick Ireland was commended for her pursuit of "all the mind that was in Christ." Wesley exhorts her, "Now is the time to regain the whole image of God, wherein you was created. O be satisfied with nothing less and you will surely receive it by simple faith!"²¹ Dorothy Furly, is advised to find friends who have "a continual consciousness of His presence, and a strong thirst after His whole image."²² Mrs. Knapp is told that the fact that she was "more athirst for His whole image"²³ increased Wesley's love for her. Elizabeth Briggs is urged to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that the hunger and thirst after His full

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 186, July 30, 1762.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 189, Sept. 15, 1762.

²⁰ Letters, 7:76, July 25, 1781.

²¹ Letters, 8:134, April 29, 1789.

²² Letters, 3:214, May 18, 1757.

²³ Letters, 7:52, Mar. 25, 1781.

image which God has given you may be satisfied."²⁴ Jane Hilton Barton is assured that her growing in deeper fellowship with God will bring "more and more of the mind which was in Him," and she would be "more fully renewed in His likeness."²⁵ To Hannah Ball Wesley explains that to be "sealed by the Spirit" refers to "the receiving the whole image of God, the whole mind of Christ, as the wax receives the whole impression of the seal . . ."²⁶ Could a more noble goal of spiritual formation be found than that articulated by the foregoing representative citations?

Christian Perfection Instantaneously Received by Grace Through Faith

Wesley consistently taught that Christian perfection as a crisis experience was both preceded and followed by a gradual work. However, in the Letters it is the instantaneousness that receives the most emphasis. Before one generalizes about this one must take into consideration the identity and nature of the correspondents. The persons exhorted to expect entire sanctification "in a twinkling of an eye" by grace through faith (just as they were justified) were persons of great piety already. Some of them were Mary Cooke, Hester Ann Roe, Jane Hilton Barton, Jane Bisson Cock, Elizabeth Ritchie, Mary Bosanquet, Sarah Crosby, Ann Bolton, Peggy Dale, Ann Foard, Joseph Benson, Miss March, Lady Maxwell, Hannah Ball, Sarah Ryan, Mrs. Bennis, Philothea Briggs, Samuel and Dorothy Furlly, Ann Loxdale, Mrs. Woodhouse, Kitty Warren, and Mary Stokes. These persons were models of devotion and service. Most of them Wesley had counseled from their youth. To these "companions on the way" Wesley gave

²⁴ Letters, 5:229. March 17, 1771.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 149, Sept. 9, 1769.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 280. Oct. 4, 1771.

messages similar to the one he sent to Ann Bolton who wondered if she would ever be made holy. Wesley wrote to her on May 9, 1768.

How far are you from holiness? Nay rather think how near you are to it! You are no farther from it than you are from faith, than you are from Christ. And how far is He from you? Is He not nigh? Is He not just now knocking at the door of your heart? Hark! The Master calleth you!²⁷

Lady Maxwell is exhorted to remember that full salvation is "the free gift, of God! Therefore it is never far off. The word is nigh thee! Only believe!"²⁸ Ann Foard is told that only lack of faith stands between her and sanctifying grace. But this faith may come at any moment, "yea, while you have this paper in your hand! Today hear His voice."²⁹ Peggy Dale who was once sanctified but had lost the witness to perfect love was told, "You was [sic] as surely sanctified as you was justified. And how soon may you be so again? The way, the new and living way, is open! Believe, and enter in!"³⁰ Ann Loxdale is reminded that,

"by experience, the strongest of all arguments, you have been . . . convinced that salvation from inbred sin is received by simple faith, and by plain consequence in a moment; although it is certain there is a gradual work both preceding and following."³¹

Sheffield preacher George Gibbon is told he was "exactly right" in saying "the work of God is undoubtedly instantaneous with regard to sanctification as well as justification." He was also right in preaching "that the work is gradual also."³² Wesley told him to continue to exhort "the believers to go on to perfection . . . to expect perfect love by simple

²⁷ Letters, 5:88. See also the Apr. 7, letter, 5:86.

²⁸ Letters, 5:11, May 6, 1766. ²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 60, Aug. 8, 1767.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79, Jan. 30, 1768.

³¹ Letters, 8:129, July 12, 1782.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 267-268, April 9, 1785.

faith, and consequently to expect it now."³³ Instructing Mary Sutter, Wesley wrote, "Gradual sanctification may increase from the time you were justified, but full deliverance from sin, I believe, is always instantaneous--at least, I never yet knew an exception."³⁴

Wesley brought many aspects of his teaching together in his second letter to Mary Cooke. Wesley wrote:

Still learn of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. Oh, what a blessing it is to be little and mean and vile in our own eyes! You are an amiable woman, it is true; but still you are a sinner, born to die! You are an immortal spirit come forth from God and speedily returning to Him. You know well that one thing, and one only, is needful for you upon earth--to ensure a better portion, to recover the favour and image of God. The former by His grace you have recovered; you have tasted of the love of God. See that you cast it not away. See that you hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end! And how soon may you be made a partaker of sanctification! And not only by a slow and insensible growth in grace, but by the twinkling of an eye, so as utterly to abolish sin and to renew you in His whole image! If you are simple of heart, if you are willing to receive the heavenly gift, as a little child, without reasoning, why may you not receive it now? He is nigh that sanctifieth; He is with you; He is knocking at the door of your heart!³⁵

Christian Perfection and a Thousand Infirmities

The use of the biblical term perfection by Wesley generated a great deal of criticism and confusion. Wesley was careful to explain that the perfection he preached was a perfection of love, of intention and certainly not of performance. It was neither angelic perfection, Adamic perfection nor absolute perfection. It was, he said a perfection consonant with a "thousand infirmities" of humankind.

Such disclaimers occur many times in the Letters. To Dorothy Furly Wesley wrote that the perfection he taught was "consistent with a thou-

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Letters, 8:190, Dec. 5, 1789

³⁵ Letters, 7:292-3, Sept. 24, 1785.

sand nervous disorders."³⁶ He added that the "high-strained" perfection preached by some was set so high that no person had ever attained it. Preaching such perfection would, Wesley said, drive scriptural perfection out of the world. To Samuel Furly, Wesley commends a group of sanctified believers in the London Society. They abounded in mercy and tenderness, their lives were "holy, unblamable and useful," yet, Wesley admitted even "a truly sanctified person does involuntarily fall short in divers instances of that rule . . . in the 13th chapter to the Corinthians"³⁷ due to human infirmity. Mrs. Bennis, an Irish Methodist, wrote Wesley about her own religious experience. She asked him if there may not be imperfections where there is no sin. Wesley replied, "A thousand infirmities are consistent even with the highest degree of holiness, which is no other than pure love, an heart devoted to God, one design and one desire."³⁸ Wesley told Miss March that no "soul clothed with flesh and blood" will ever be entirely free from such infirmities as ill-judged zeal, wrong judgments and wrong attitudes because of poor judgment.³⁹ Mrs. Marston is instructed, "Undoubtedly as long as you are in the body you will come short of what you could be, and you will see more and more of your numberless defects, and the imperfections of your best actions and tempers."⁴⁰ But such imperfections should not hinder her rejoicing in perfect love, Wesley told her. Elizabeth Hardy is told that the human soul dwells in a "shattered, corruptible body" which presses down upon the soul so that

³⁶ Letters, 4:188, Sept. 15, 1762.

³⁷ Letters, 8:272, Mar. 20, 1762.

³⁸ Letters 5:6, March 29, 1766. See also letter of Aug. 23, 1763 where she is told "many wanderings . . . and . . . deficiencies are consistent with pure love.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 192. July 6, 1779. ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 196. Aug. 11, 1770.

persons "cannot exert their love as they could by always thinking, speaking, and acting precisely right."⁴¹ These "involuntary defects" Wesley added, need the advocacy of Christ.

Indeed, a great deal of time and energy have been expended by Wesley's spiritual descendants in trying to define this perfection "plagued by a thousand imperfections." Perhaps Wesley's choice of pivotal terms was unfortunate. Nevertheless, without the qualifications, disclaimers, and modifications made regarding the infirmities of fallen humanity Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection would have been an even greater riddle.

Case Studies: Christian Perfection in the
Correspondence with Peggy Dale and Ann Bolton

When Wesley was sixty-one he met a fervent young convert, Peggy Dale, age twenty. For the next thirteen years she was one of his favorite correspondents. She married Edward Avison a noted musician in 1773. Both partners died of a lingering disease, Peggy outlived her husband by thirteen months dying at the age of thirty-three in November, 1777. From her conversion she was noted for piety, devotion and humble love. She was a tireless worker in prayer meetings, classes and bands. Wesley wrote at least thirty letters to her. Peggy left thirty letters to her heirs. Only eighteen, however, have been preserved and are found in Telford's collection.

Some aspect of Christian perfection is brought up in all but two of the letters to Peggy. As her spiritual guide Wesley concentrated on leading her to and establishing her in sanctifying grace. His very first letter to her (June 1, 1765) instructs her that she need never again commit sin. Further, "you can give Him your whole heart." He urges her to always be "open to receive His whole blessing." On July 5, 1765 Wesley writes again of wandering thoughts and "pure love." He tells this diligent seeker "to sink a thousand times deeper into Him," and to "present yourself a living sacrifice." On New Year's Eve of the same year Wesley

⁴¹ Letters, 4:167, Dec. 26, 1761.

writes Peggy about "unspotted purity" amidst a thousand temptations. He also addresses the need to walk in perfect love. On February 8, 1766 he addresses the problem of "evil reasoning" which is hindering Peggy from claiming sanctifying grace by faith. On April 1, 1766 he writes to her of pure love, urging her not to cast away her confidence through "evil reasoning." The same month (the letter does not cite the day) he writes again to prevent her from going to Leystone to be with Sarah Ryan. Ryan was indeed saintly but Wesley felt she held perfection "so high as I fear none will ever attain." "I am afraid, Wesley said to Peggy, that if you go up to Leystone you will give up perfection."

After several months the correspondence is renewed. Wesley again counsels her, on Nov. 7, 1766, about perfect love. "I long for you to burn with the flame of the seraphim, to love with love like theirs." He continues the theme in a December 19, 1766 letter telling her, a "depth of blessing remains for you! It is indeed

A sea of life and love unknown .
Without a bottom or a shore!

"It comforts me . . . that you are . . . receiving more and more of Him that loves," Wesley writes in the same letter. It appears from this letter that Peggy Dale is moving nearer and nearer to perfect love. In a March 29, 1767 letter Wesley asks, "Do you still find a witness in yourself that God has purified your heart from sin?" He examines her at several points, then asks if God has sanctified her so thoroughly as to make her "very dreams devout." The May 17 letter indicates that Peggy has lost some confidence in her profession of sanctifying grace and thinks perhaps she had never truly been cleansed. Wesley suggests that it is more likely that "being off your guard, you suffered a degree of evil to re-enter." A month later, June 18, 1767 Wesley is counseling

Peggy about the witness of the Spirit to sanctification. On August 27, 1767 Wesley urges her to give herself up to God "without reserve" in order to be free from sin. The following month (September 29) Wesley urges, "be all love! All devoted! To have one desire, one work, one happiness, one Christ reigning alone and filling you with His fullness."

By January 30, 1768 Wesley again counsels Peggy regarding "the witness of sanctification" which she has apparently lost through "evil reasoning." Wesley tells her she was once clearly sanctified and can be again if she will only believe. On the April 7th following Peggy seems to have spiritual victory again. Wesley writes recommending William Law's A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, mentioning holy tempers, lowliness, meekness, resignation and pure love. On May 20, 1769 Wesley writes speaking not of finding holiness or perfection but of "improvement in all holiness." The last Wesley letter we have to Peggy Dale (Nov. 17, 1769) deals not with doubts or failure or seeking after perfection but with boldness in Christian service. Peggy gave herself to the prayer meetings and small group meetings. In addition she apparently resided and worked for several years in Wesley's orphanage in New Castle.

We have no letters to Peggy during the last eight years of her life. In a letter to another person in 1773 Wesley blessed her marriage to Avison. But in the extant letters to her Wesley the spiritual guide leads the young convert from being a babe in Christ to a person perfected in love and given to Christian service. The inscription on her tombstone declares that she "expired with hopes full of immortality."⁴² For John Wesley, spiritual guide, a job well done.

⁴² See biographical notes, Letters, 4:305.

Ann Bolton heard Wesley preach in January 1764 at her home town of Witney. Four years later Wesley apparently intervened in Ann's life urging her not to marry a certain man. Wesley got her to come to London and visit some of the devout Methodists there. The serious young convert, forty-one years younger than Wesley, heeded Wesley's advice and broke off the relationship. Wesley naturally assumed a sort of parental responsibility for her thereafter. Ann Bolton became one of Wesley's dearest friends on earth. Their intimate correspondence continued for twenty-nine years. The friendship was tested in 1774 when Wesley again refused to approve of a man she wanted to marry. Wesley, seventy-one years of age at the time, insisted his decision was objective and not because he himself was in love with her.⁴³ Wesley died in 1791, and Ann married Mr. Conibeer (a third suitor) the following year.

Ann Bolton was not only a friend and confidant of Wesley, she was his unofficial assistant serving the societies, classes, and bands throughout the region of Witney.⁴⁴ Telford's collection contains ninety-three of Wesley's letters to Ann Bolton in which Christian perfection is a constant theme. In his first letter to her (February 13, 1768) he speaks to the already devout Christian of six years about becoming "wholly devoted to God" a "whole burnt sacrifice of love." Two months later (April 7) he tells her she has still the faith of a "servant" and needs to advance to the faith of a "child." By May 9, 1768 he writes her the letter quoted previously in this chapter telling her she need not despair by thinking about how far she is from holiness, but

⁴³ Letters, 6:72-73, Feb. 17, 1774.

⁴⁴ For more on her life and service see: John Banks, Nancy Nancy (Leeds: Penwork Ltd., 1984).

about how near she is to it. "You are no farther from it [holiness] than you are from faith," he told her. Two years later, however (November 16, 1770), we find Wesley telling her she still has only the faith of a "servant," not the faith of a "child" or "heir" which is the faith of the sanctified. In December of the same year Ann is warned not to think too little of herself and her gifts of grace. On December 29, 1770 Wesley urges her to read A Plain Account of Christian Perfection. She is to be "nursed as a child," but she must seriously seek to be perfected in love.

Two June letters in 1771 tell Ann that her current afflictions are part of the gradual aspect of sanctification, that God is purging away "dross." In August, 1771 Wesley writes, "O how I long . . . that you may be perfect in Him" The following November 7 Wesley writes again about perfect love and quotes a long passage from Fenelon.

By February 1772 Ann Bolton seems to have come into an experience of sanctifying grace. She writes to Wesley reporting that seven persons have "received a clear witness that the blood of Jesus hath cleansed them from all sin." Apparently Ann was among the seven for in Wesley's February 29, 1772 reply he says, "I rejoice over others, but over you above all." On March 13, 1772 Wesley warns Ann about going too far in self-denial. Self-surrender must not be made into "self-emptiness" or "self-annihilation" for this is "self-contradiction."

Over the next several months Wesley writes to Ann about several aspects of the sanctified life. He explains and distinguishes between justification and sanctification. He refers her to two published sermons: "Sin in Believers" and "The Repentance of Believers." In October he counsels her about perfect love as seen in the Sermon on the Mount and in I Corinthians 13. In November he writes more about love.

On December 5, 1772 Wesley writes that he submits her to unusual examination because he longs for her to be "without spot or blemish." No spot or blemish is named but Wesley prays that God will pour more love into her heart than He has ever done before.

On February 18, 1773 Wesley writes that he finds no fault in her. On August 8 of 1773 he encourages her to exhort others to go on to "salvation into the whole image of God" and not to decline in her own zeal for it. Wesley writes on the same theme on February 8, 1775 adding that he finds her to be the "perfect pattern of true womanhood."

Showing that he truly believed that there is no perfection that does not "admit of continual increase" Wesley urges Ann onward in perfect love. On August 15, 1775 he writes "I want you to [be] all a flame of holy love! I want you now to do His will as angels do in heaven! to be all life, all fire, all light in the Lord!" On April 24, 1777 Wesley's letter includes a poem about "the stamp of perfect love." On September 27 of that year he celebrates her "ten thousand blessings" the greatest of which is "Christ in a pure and spotless heart." A June 22, 1780 letter celebrates Ann's progress. Wesley writes that God "has established your soul in pure love and given you the abiding witness of it."

In the years that follow, Ann Bolton's chronic ill health becomes worse. Wesley had always told her these afflictions were God's school, God's refining furnace, and God's will for her. Ann, logically, as the afflictions continue wonders if these sufferings indicate that she is not yet sanctified. In several letters Wesley says they do not indicate sin on her part but they will add greatly to her reward in heaven. Wesley's last letter to her a few months before he died aimed at encouraging her in suffering. He tells her that her reward will "undoubtedly" be three-

fold. She would be rewarded for (1) her inward holiness, her likeness to God; (2) her many good works; and (3) her sufferings. His last words to her, December 15, 1790, were:

But your joy is to come! Look up, my dear friend, look up! And see your crown before you! A little longer, and you shall drink of the rivers of pleasure that flow at God's right hand for evermore.
Adieu!

Ann Bolton lived until June 1822 and was buried in the Witney Church yard on the day after what would have been her seventy-ninth birthday.

In the case of Ann Bolton we see again the success of Wesley's practice of spiritual formation. He took a small town girl who was on the verge of becoming "unequally yoked" and led her from the state of a "babe in Christ" to "Christian perfection." He led her into meaningful Christian service, and through the temptations and trials of much suffering.

Christian perfection was central in Wesley's social movement reformation. It was the organizing principle which formed and informed Wesley's social reformation. Christian perfection was the heart of Wesley's theology, particularly his anthropology and his soteriology. Further our survey of the Letters and the preceding case studies reveal that the heart and soul of Wesley's spirituality and spiritual formation practice was Christian perfection. Any modern spirituality that can be properly called Wesleyan must creatively cope with the complexities, paradoxes, tensions, and possibilities contained in this dynamic teaching, Christian perfection.

CHAPTER XI
SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY
IN TYPICAL WESLEYAN WORKS

In the card catalogue of a United Methodist seminary library I came upon a divider tab which read: "Spiritual Formation; Methodist Authors." At last, I thought, I have found it. I was soon disappointed, however, only one book by a Methodist on spiritual formation was listed. That corroborates what my research has discovered. Few Wesleyan writers find the categories of Christian spirituality or its sub-section spiritual formation to be attractive areas of inquiry.

It seems strange that a tradition so rich in religious experience should avoid dealing directly with spirituality. Perhaps the Wesleyan movement for all its emphasis on experience, is yet such a product of the Enlightenment that honing fine points of doctrine and applying rational analysis to systematic categories in order to believe the right (reasonable) things outweighs the concerns for spirituality. Or, perhaps Wesleyans assume that the matters of Christian spirituality are in place and functioning for them and therefore spirituality doesn't need concentrated attention. There is a sense in which nearly everything in Wesleyan writings "touches" on spirituality, yet in actuality nearly nothing "focuses" on spirituality. In the minds of many Wesleyan writers spirituality may be viewed as being "in and under" everything in such a way as not to need special treatment. The following survey of typical theological educational, ecclesiastical, and socially oriented Wesleyan

works reveals that in order to derive a view of spiritual formation and spirituality from them one would have to apply what these writers say on one topic to concerns (spiritual formation and spirituality) about which they do not directly speak.

Wesleyan Theological Works

One might expect Wesleyans to produce a truly spiritual theology. In reality, however, most Wesleyan theologians have been intoxicated by systematics. This is a result, some say, of the fact that for two hundred years Wesleyan thinkers have smarted under the quirt of critics who scoff at Wesleyanism, charging it with having no systematic theology. Therefore Wesleyan theologues work overtime to make Wesley more like Aquinas, Barth, or Calvin. Many Wesleyan theological works are introduced with, "Although Wesley was not a systematic theologian" Seeing this preamble the reader usually knows to get braced for a squeezing, pushing, shoving of Wesley's tracts, sermons, and journals into systematic categories.

Wesleyan theologians have generally not found spirituality, spiritual guidance and spiritual formation comfortable windows through which to view John Wesley. For example, when the Methodist journal, London Quarterly and Holborn Review (Jan. 1966) dedicated an issue to "Christian Spirituality" John Wesley was not once named. The spirituality of Newman, Kierkegaard, Luther, Loyola, Taize, and the Bloomsbury piety were explored.

In the bibliographic essay which preceded this document seven typical theological works and two Wesleyan theological journals were reviewed quite thoroughly to establish the observation noted in the previous

paragraphs. Space limitations will not permit repetition of the reviews. It is simply noted that such standard Wesleyan theological works as William R. Cannon's, The Theology of John Wesley (1946); Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's A Theology of Love (1972); Colin William's John Wesley's Theology Today (1960); Harald Lindstrom's Wesley and Sanctification (1980); Paul A. Mickey's Essentials of Wesleyan Theology (1980); Franz Hildebrandt's Christianity According to the Wesleys (1956) and Mack B. Stokes' The Bible in the Wesleyan Heritage (1979)¹ help establish the aforementioned observation. Much is said in these works which has implications for spiritual formation and spirituality but in the end a systematic presentation of doctrines prevails. For example, the heart of Stokes' book has to do with, "The Practical Function of the Bible." The practical function, it appears, turns out to be the establishment of "the six most important vital doctrines."²

Some of the best Wesleyan theologians refuse to systematize Wesley. In The Spirit of Methodism,³ Henry Bett avoids systematics as does Albert Outler in Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit.⁴ Outler warns that "every attempt to transform Wesley's ways of teaching doctrine into some system of doctrine has lost something vital in the process."⁵

¹ For bibliographic detail see the bibliography.

² Mack B. Stokes, The Bible in the Wesleyan Heritage (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), pp. 41-65.

³ Henry Bett, The Spirit of Methodist (London: Epworth, 1937).

⁴ Albert Outler, Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Tidings, 1975).

⁵ An unpublished lecture cited by Donald M. Joy, "Some Biblical Foundations and Metaphors of Vocational Ideals in the Wesleyan Tradition," in Wesleyan Theology Today ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), p. 299.

Two Wesleyan theological journals, one American, one British, were examined for articles on spiritual formation or Wesleyan spirituality. Very little on these topics was found.

Each issue of the Wesleyan Theological Journal from its inception in 1966 was examined. No article addressed spiritual formation directly. In general doctrinal battles were being fought and spirituality played only a supporting role. The most helpful article was "The Nature of Wesleyan Theology"⁶ by J. Kenneth Grider. The most curious article was a 1977 article by Rob L. Staples, "The Present Frontiers of Wesleyan Theology."⁷ Among the "frontiers" for Wesleyan theology neither spiritual formation nor spirituality appear.

The London Quarterly and Holborn Review is a British Methodist journal. As noted earlier in their special issue on spirituality six spiritualities are explored, but apparently it never occurred to the editors to say one word about John Wesley. A few articles on spirituality appear now and then through the years. Donald J. Door's 1965 article, "Wesley's Teaching on the Nature of Holiness"⁸ as formation in the mind of Christ was very helpful. D. Dunn Wilson wrote insightfully on "John Wesley and Mystical Prayer," calling Wesley's practice a "subtle blend" of prophetic and mystical prayer.⁹ J. Clifford Hindley explored in a two-part article, "The Philosophy of Enthusiasm," the origins of

⁶ J. Kenneth Grider, "The Nature of Wesleyan Theology," Wesleyan Theological Journal 17, no. 2 (Fall 1982):43.

⁷ Rob L. Staples, "The Present Frontiers of Wesleyan Theology," Wesleyan Theological Journal 12 (Spring 1977):5-15.

⁸ Donald J. Dorr, "Wesley's Teaching on the Nature of Holiness," London Quarterly and Holborn Review CXI (July 1965):234-239.

⁹ D. Dunn Wilson, "John Wesley and Mystical Prayer," LQHR CXCI (January 1968):61-69.

experimental theology.¹⁰ In a 1957 article Ronald B. Spivey recapped Wesley's sermon "On the Means of Grace" in an article "Methodism and the Means of Grace."¹¹ Prayer, Bible study, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper were presented as mediating, preventing, justifying and sanctifying grace.

One looks in vain for a thorough going analysis of Wesleyan spirituality among the typical theological writers in Wesleyanism today. But the researcher should not be disappointed, but rather should appreciate the work that the systematizers have done. They have collected, organized and stated the critical Wesleyan theological standards. This is a valuable service to spiritual formation and Christian spirituality. Wesleyan systematic theology can guide and police various subjectivisms that may arise in the spiritual theology of the post-enlightenment age.

Wesleyan Works on Christian Education

If the theologians neglect Wesleyan spirituality in favor of systematics one might expect that the Wesleyan works on religious education would give more precise attention to spiritual formation and Wesleyan spirituality. However, those who have analyzed Wesley's remarkable record and method of Christian education seem to have had other agendas. John W. Prince in Wesley on Religious Education¹² claimed he was searching Wesley for insights on teaching children. This Methodist professor, however, gave exactly half his book to systematizing Wesley's theology.

¹⁰ J. Clifford Hindley, "The Philosophy of Enthusiasm," LQHR CLXXXII (April and July 1957):99-109, 199-210.

¹¹ Ronald B. Spivey, "Methodism and the Means of Grace," LQHR CLXXXII (July 1957):188-192.

¹² John W. Prince, Wesley on Religious Education (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1926).

In John Wesley and Education¹³ A. H. Body cites Wesley's dependence on John Locke, John Milton, Susannah Wesley, John Amos Comenius and others for his educational ideas. Body's mission was to provide a historical and philosophical explanation of Wesley's educational theory.

A more recent entry in the field is David Michael Henderson's Ph.d. dissertation, entitled "John Wesley's Instructional Groups." This is a most thorough work on the structure and methodology of Wesley's educational contribution. Henderson states the main burden in the form of a question: "What were the methodological components of John Wesley's group technology?"¹⁴ Henderson's work makes a great contribution to those concerned with connecting Wesley's successes to the doctrines of modern professional education. Again, Henderson is in pursuit of a learning theory and group technology, not spirituality or spiritual formation.

My own eight thousand-word article "Christian Education in the Wesleyan Mode"¹⁵ is concerned with building a Wesleyan philosophy of education. It, along with many other educational works, touches aspects of Christian spirituality and spiritual formation, without emphasizing them.

Wesleyan Works on Church Renewal

Wesleyan writers on church renewal also touch on the stuff of spiritual formation but the usual focus is on Wesley's methods, mechanics, and organization. Blaine Taylor is typical of this group of writers who are

¹³ A. H. Body, John Wesley and Education (London: Epworth Press, 1936).

¹⁴ David Michael Henderson, "John Wesley's Instructional Groups," (Ph.D. dissertation Indiana University, 1980), p. 5.

¹⁵ Wesley Tracy, "Christian Education in the Wesleyan Mode," Wesleyan Theological Journal 17, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 30-53.

looking for a blueprint for church renewal. His 1984 book is called John Wesley: A Blueprint for Church Renewal.¹⁶

Howard Snyder's book The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal is by far the best work in this category read for this project. He views Wesley in light of the Roman, Protestant and Free Church traditions of ecclesiology and carefully pictures Wesley as creating a radical synthesis of the three traditions.

Snyder, whose ministry as well as writing emphasizes justice concludes that "a really effective struggle for social justice begins with building a biblically faithful community of Christian disciples."¹⁷ Snyder's book is helpful to the student of spiritual formation and spirituality but it is primarily a book on ecclesiology and justice.

Wesleyan Works on Social Reform and History

Many of the important works on Wesley have to do with John Wesley as a social reformer. These valuable works relate to spiritual formation concerns only in the most oblique way. (See works by Bready, Rattenbury, Semmel, Wearmouth, Wellmon, and Whiteley in the bibliography).

Many of the historical works likewise touch but do not focus on the concerns of spirituality. Davies and Rupp, for example, in A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain organize most of their comments around "our doctrines," "our discipline" and "our polity."¹⁸ "Our spirituality" does not become for them a primary object of historical

¹⁶ Blaine Taylor, John Wesley: A Blueprint for Church Renewal (Champaign, Illinois: Steven E. Clapp, 1984).

¹⁷ Howard A. Snyder, The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), p. 165.

¹⁸ Ruppert Davies and Gordon Rupp, eds. A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain vol. 1 (London: Epworth Press, 1965).

investigation. Even Paul L. Higgin's book John Wesley: Spiritual Witness¹⁹ turns out to be a biography with chapters on Wesley's theology, travels, medical practice, psychic investigations, and preaching--a chapter on everything except spirituality.

In reviewing Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society 1935-1982) I discovered that only a handful of articles deal with any aspect of spiritual formation. An article by John C. English in 1968 on "The Cambridge Platonists in Wesley's 'Christian Library'"²⁰ was helpful in showing how Wesley had in his editing harmonized the Cambridge platonist's teachings on grace and on perfection. D. Dunn Wilson wrote on "John Wesley, Gregory Lopez and the Marquis de Renty."²¹ Wilson cites the use of these mystics by Wesley in letters to four women whom he served as spiritual guide. Wilson's article "John Wesley's Break with Mysticism Reconsidered"²² presents a case for the lasting influence of the mystics on Wesley despite his charges that mysticism is "set on fire of hell."²³ "The Origins of Wesley's Covenant Service,"²⁴ by Frederick Hunter shows the Puritan origins of this significant ceremony in Wesleyan corporate spiritual life.

The Oxford Institute

In 1982 the Seventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological

¹⁹ Paul L. Higgins, John Wesley: Spiritual Witness (Minneapolis: T. S. Denison & Co., Inc., 1960).

²⁰ John C. English, "The Cambridge Platonists in Wesley's 'Christian Library,'" Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society XXXVI (October 1968):101-104 (Hereafter cited as PWHS).

²¹ D. Dunn Wilson, "John Wesley, Gregory Lopez and the Marquis de Renty," PWHS XXXV (December 1966):181-184.

²² Ibid., (September 1966):65-68. ²³ Ibid. p. 66.

²⁴ Frederick Hunter, "The Origins of Wesley's Covenant Service," PWHS XXII (June 1940):126-131.

Studies meeting at Keble College, Oxford assigned some twenty-five of its members to consider an agenda for future Wesley studies. The group came up with one general recommendation and eleven specific ones. Neither spiritual formation, nor Christian spirituality appeared on the list.²⁵

While this literature study has not been exhaustive it strongly suggests that spiritual formation and Christian spirituality are not over-done themes among Wesleyans. To that extent it also validates the need for the project of which this document is a part.

Wesleyan Writers Who Address Spiritual Formation

Or Wesleyan Spirituality Directly

A few Wesleyan writers do address spiritual formation and Wesleyan spirituality directly. They demonstrate a new willingness among Wesleyans to consider spiritual formation and Wesleyan spirituality proper categories for critical inquiry.

Frank Baker

Frank Baker of Duke University is one of the foremost Wesley scholars in the world. He has given special attention to the spirituality of John Wesley in a series called John Wesley's Own Choice: The Heart of True Spirituality.²⁶ These books deal with works on the spiritual life which Wesley edited and published. For each work Baker gives a detailed account of the history of the document, cites any significant changes in Wesley's version, and tries to account for the influence of the work.

²⁵ M. Douglas Meeks, ed. The Future of Methodist Theological Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), pp. 53-66.

²⁶ Frank Baker, John Wesley's Own Choice: the Heart of True Spirituality, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan 1984, 1985).

Baker works with early manuscripts in which Wesley placed an asterisk by the most significant paragraphs. These "asterisked" paragraphs alone are published in Baker's series. Thus he gives us what for Wesley was "the heart of true spirituality." This is no small contribution.

J. Steven Harper

Frank Baker's student, J. Steven Harper, now Professor of Prayer and Spiritual Life at Asbury Theological Seminary, has written several pieces on Wesleyan devotion. By far the most extensive is his 713-page Ph.D. dissertation, "The Devotional Life of John Wesley 1703-38."²⁷ By tracing Wesley's early diaries and journals Harper catalogues in sequence the works the young Wesley read. Harper interprets their contribution to Wesley's own formation. Harper's cut-off date of 1738 coincides with Wesley's evangelical conversion, the launching pad of the Wesleyan revival. Harper thus gives us a look at the formative years of Wesley. This uniqueness is both the strength and weakness of the work. It is a strength because it presents some little known information, and a weakness because it describes the "Wesley" which Wesley himself deliberately abandoned to some extent, perhaps more than Harper believes.

A unique contribution of this work is that Harper presents a transcription of Wesley's personal prayer manual. This work gives us new insights into the compulsive devotional life of the young Wesley.

In 1983 Harper published a ninety-eight page book called Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition.²⁸ The book is an introduction to Wes-

²⁷ J. Steven Harper "The Devotional Life of John Wesley 1703-1738" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1981).

²⁸ Steven Harper, Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1983).

leyan devotion and is written for the laity. The Wesley scholar will find no new material here. Harper distills Wesley's spiritual theology to these essentials: prayer, scripture reading, the Lord's Supper, fasting, Christian conference, and the prudential means of grace.

One week after I had submitted my dissertation/project topic a copy of "John Wesley: Spiritual Guide"²⁹ was put in my hand. The article is a brief survey of the subject stated in the title. The author, J. Steven Harper says that Wesley's letters comprise "a largely untapped treasure-house of insights into Wesley's functioning as a spiritual director."³⁰ This statement confirmed what I had already ascertained.

Gordon S. Wakefield

Gordon S. Wakefield is a British Methodist clergyman. He was for several years the editor-in-chief of Epworth Press, London. He also served as editor of the London Quarterly and Holborn Review. He was the editor of the 1983 Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality. His Puritan Devotion, published by Epworth in 1957 is a classic synthesis of Puritan spiritual theology.

Wakefield's work Methodist Devotion, the Spiritual Life in the Methodist Tradition 1791-1945³¹ is a valuable work. It is an expansion of the "annual lecture" which Wakefield gave at the 1966 meeting of the Wesley Historical Society. Of special interest is the first chapter, "The Legacy from the First Days." Wakefield briefly traces Wesley's

²⁹ J. Steven Harper, "John Wesley: Spiritual Guide" (Unpublished paper submitted to the Wesleyan Theological Journal, 1986).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

³¹ Gordon S. Wakefield, Methodist Devotion, The Spiritual Life in the Methodist Tradition (London: Epworth Press, 1966).

roots in Puritans such as Baxter and Nathaniel Spinckes, Anglicans such as Thomas Ken and Jeremy Taylor, Non-jurors such as William Law, Church Fathers such as Basil, Jerome, and Chrysostom and mystics like De Renty, Gregory Lopez and Thomas a`Kempis. He refers to Methodist religious experience as "prophetic mysticism." He cites the role of Christian conference, preaching, assurance and religious feelings.

Wakefield's Fire of Love: The Spirituality of John Wesley³² is a small book consisting mostly of a few extracts from Wesley's Works.

The Bicentennial Consultation

Methodism celebrated its American bicentennial in 1984. Part of that celebration was a consultation of Wesleyan scholars called "Wesleyan Theology in the next Century: United Methodism Reviews its Theological Task." One of the outcomes of the consultation was a 426-page book containing the papers presented and titled Wesleyan Theology Today.³³

Of the forty-six papers presented six are on the subject of Wesleyan spirituality. Thomas R. Albin's paper "An Empirical Study of Early Methodist Spirituality"³⁴ catalogues the conversion and sanctification experiences of early Methodists. This computerized study shows that the typical early Methodist who experienced entire sanctification did so about five years after conversion, and that 58% of the time the believer was led into this experience by lay persons. James F. White's article "John Wesley's Sunday Service and Methodist Spirituality"³⁵ probes the differences

³² Gordon S. Wakefield, Fire of Love: The Spirituality of John Wesley (New Canaan, CT: Keats Publishing Co., 1977).

³³ Theodore Runyon, ed. Wesleyan Theology Today (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1985).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-290.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 403-405.

between the British and American Sunday Service.

"'True Religion' and the Affections: a Study of John Wesley's Abridgement of Jonathan Edward's Treatise on Religious affections"³⁶ by Gregory S. Clapper, and "'With the Eyes of Faith:' Spiritual Experience and the Knowledge of God in the Theology of John Wesley,"³⁷ by Rex D. Matthews, put before the Methodists a call to return to the affective elements in their heritage. Clapper declares that in a Wesleyan theology the affections "are not dispensable luxuries which may or may not be indulged in . . . after all the hard thinking is done."³⁹ He concludes that the affective domain, the heart, stands "at the center . . . for Wesley, and a theology which ignores it is not a 'Wesleyan theology.'"³⁹

Matthew's paper is built around the three definitions of faith in Wesley's writings: fides, fiducia, and feeling or spiritual experience. The latter receives primary attention. Matthews traces the theology of the "five spiritual senses" from Origen, through Bonaventure, Loyola, Anglican and Puritan theology (including five authors Wesley reprinted in A Christian Library) to John Wesley. Matthews points out that three of Wesley's last sermons, "The Difference Between Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith (1788), "On the Discoveries of Faith" (1788), and "On Faith" (1791) are about the spiritual senses as the way of knowing God. They comprise an empirical epistemology not often cited in Wesley.

Donald Joy's article in this collection, "Some Biblical Foundations and Metaphors of Vocational Ideals in the Wesleyan Traditions" asserts that John and Charles Wesley "formed the most viable holistic theology

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 416-423.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 406-415.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 422.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 421.

since the close of the apostolic age."⁴⁰ However, Wesley's spiritual descendants have infected it with a scholasticism of left-brained rationality that has "dominated the world to the west of Babel."⁴¹ Joy calls for a radical revolution among Wesleyans which will produce a dynamic holistic theology that listens to the noumenal just as much as to the cognitive, the affective just as much as the conceptual, the systemic just as much as the systematic.

One of the most helpful articles, is "Wesleyan Spirituality: Meeting Contemporary Movements," by Mary Elizabeth Moore. In this article Moore aims to "take heed of contemporary movements in spirituality, to look back to John Wesley for guidance, and to look forward to the possibility in the future for a new spirituality."⁴² Attention is given to the sensual spirituality of Matthew Fox, Frances Meehan, and J. B. Libanio.

Moore recommends that Wesleyan spirituality make the following adjustments and rediscoveries. (1) Overcome the individualistic nature of current Methodist spirituality in favor of corporate and collective repentance and service. (2) Return to Wesley's concern for the oppressed -- but improve on his naivete about the causes of oppression. (3) Connect prayer and contemplation with Christian action.

James Fowler

James Fowler is a developmental psychologist who became famous at Harvard for his studies in what he calls faith development. Fowler just happened to be a Methodist clergyman. His fame got him instant invitations including an offer he could not refuse from a Methodist University, Emory. It also got him an invitation to the Seventh Oxford Institute of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 299. ⁴¹ Ibid. ⁴² Ibid., p. 291.

Methodist Theological Studies in 1982. There he gave a paper, "John Wesley's Development in Faith" even though just one year earlier in response to my question in a discussion group he admitted that he did not know much about Wesley. Now, however, for better or for worse, the Methodists have James Fowler on their hands.

I have read three of Fowler's books: Life Maps, Stages of Faith, and Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian. I attended a conference in which Fowler spoke four times and conducted two discussion groups. I listened to five papers in which leading religious educators responded to Stages of Faith. I have studied Stages of Faith, lectured on it, given tests on it. I have even been a "guest lecturer" on Fowler's theory. In spite of all that I am still not quite sure of what Fowler is about and cannot successfully describe his theory succinctly. It was a great comfort to me to discover in the conference cited above that Fowler could not do it either.

In Life Maps, a book co-authored with Sam Keen, Fowler presents his budding six-stage theory of faith development: Intuitive-Projective Faith, Mythical-Literal Faith, Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Individuative-Reflective Faith, Conjunctive Faith, Universalizing Faith.⁴³

In Stages of Faith⁴⁴ he expands his treatment of faith and developmentalism. "Faithing" for Fowler concerns the way human beings construct meaning. The growing human person changes his or her way of making meaning at various developmental stages. Fowler's stage development theory is closely related to Piaget's stages of cognitive development and

⁴³ Jim Fowler and Sam Keen, Life Maps (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1978).

Erikson's eight stages of life. It also parallels Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning. Fowler's theory builds upon Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg and, in its deep concern for pathologies of the past, upon Freud.

Fowler's third book Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian⁴⁵ centers on the stages of faith normally experienced in adulthood. Other writers, Erikson, Levinson and Carol Gilligan, are reviewed and melded into the theoretical base.

In none of these works is Wesley quoted or even mentioned. Yet Fowler is likely to dominate the scene in Methodist spiritual formation concerns in the future. And he is reaching beyond Methodist circles. Two recent books (1986) illustrate this point. Through the Landscape of Faith⁴⁶ (subtitled Christian Life Maps) by Lucy Bregman is a thoughtful and mainly positive interpretation of Fowler through the eyes of a Roman Catholic professor at Temple University. A Baptist pastor, Scott Walker, gets into the act with a light weight book, Where the Rivers Flow: Exploring the Sources of Faith Development.⁴⁷

In 1985 the papers of the Seventh Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies were published in The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions.⁴⁸ Fowler's paper, "John Wesley's Development

⁴⁴ James W. Fowler, Stages of Faith (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

⁴⁵ James W. Fowler, Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984).

⁴⁶ Lucy Bregman, Through the Landscape of Faith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

⁴⁷ Scott Walker, Where the Rivers Flow (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986).

⁴⁸ M. Douglas Meeks, ed. The Future of Methodists Theological Traditions (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

in Faith," is part of the sixth chapter, as is "Wesleyan Spirituality and Faith Development," the group paper put together by the twenty-three Wesley scholars assigned to respond to Fowler. Fowler's paper is a neo-Freudian psychoanalysis of John Wesley as seen by his biographers. Fowler depends primarily on secondary sources. His analysis is fair, it neither vilifies nor exalts Wesley.

The conferees said they found value in the comparative study of Wesleyan theology and faith development theory. They hope it will help the church "discerningly midwife the work of the Holy Spirit in the transformation of lives toward holiness and happiness."⁴⁹ The occasion forced this group of Wesleyan theologians to study and summarize Wesley's spirituality -- perhaps an unusual activity for such a group. Their summary is useful and contains the following points.

1. Right relationship to God and persons is central in Wesley's spirituality.
2. It was a synthesis of mystical (being) and prophetic (doing) piety.
3. It was characterized by a biblical identification with the poor.
4. Human response to grace is essential.
5. Constant dependence on the means of grace is included: prayer, scripture reading, the Lord's Supper, and Christian conference.
6. "Wesleyan spirituality envisions growth in grace and towards perfect love."
7. Real holiness leads to true happiness.
8. Wesleyan spirituality is ecumenical.⁵⁰

The theologians found some commonalities in Wesleyan theology and faith development theory. Each is concerned with the whole person, each critique present life modes, each takes seriously the uniquely personal and the social context, and each is concerned about what is invested with "God-value and God-power."⁵¹

Some serious questions are raised. Fowler's definition of faith may

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 193.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 195-6.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 203-4.

be incompatible with "the Christian understanding of faith as a gift of God's grace and as overturning of any claims to human self-sufficiency." Further, some objected to the "psychological approach which fails to grant the priority of scripture, revelation and the work of the Spirit. . ."⁵² Does Fowler's theory nullify Wesley's doctrine of radical sinfulness and radical grace -- the "pessimism of nature" and the "optimism of grace?"

Further study is needed, the group decided, in these areas.

1. The reconciliation of two kinds of perspectives on the self in community in relation to God.
2. The clarification of relationships and distinctions between faith stage change and conversion, rebirth and sanctification.
3. Liberation from those forms of Wesleyan theology which tend to produce neurotic guilt and an excessively harsh conscience.
4. The struggle to explicate images of human excellence and responsiveness to God and neighbor without falling into new legalisms.
5. Research contemporary equivalents to early Methodism's bands, classes, and societies.
6. Investigation of Wesley's use of scripture in prayer, in theological decisions, and in the contexts of Christian conference.
7. The shaping of a spirituality faithful⁵³ to God's calling in our time to be peacemakers and makers of justice.

Maxie Dunnam

Maxie Dunnam is the lone Methodist author on spiritual formation listed behind the section guide tab: "Spiritual Formation: Methodist Authors" at the Saint Paul School of Theology Library (K.C. MO). Dunnam's book is called Alive in Christ.⁵⁴ The subtitle is The Dynamic Process of Spiritual Formation. Dunnam defines spiritual formation as "that dynamic process of receiving through faith and appropriating through commitment, discipline, and action, the living Christ into our own life to the end that our life will conform to, and manifest the

⁵² Ibid., p. 26. ⁵³ Ibid., pp. 205-206.

⁵⁴ Maxie Dunnam, Alive in Christ (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982).

reality of Christ's presence in the world."⁵⁵

In this book John Wesley is not quoted at all and he is mentioned only once. Obviously no use is made of the letters of Wesley which are crucial to this project. For all this absence of Wesley by name the work has a Wesleyan tone and texture about it. Major themes in the book which are typically Wesleyan include the following.

1. Spirituality is a primarily matter of the heart.

Dunnam picks up the Pauline language of "Christ in you" and asserts that it is "certainly the key to authentic Christian piety and spirituality."⁵⁶ The indwelling Christ is a healing, affirming, and forgiving presence."⁵⁷

2. The scripture is the foundation of Christian spirituality.

Dunnam both verifies and illustrates every major idea by citing scriptural precepts and examples.

3. Prayer is absolutely essential to spirituality.

Prayer or prayerful living, as Dunnam calls the spiritual life, is "recognizing, cultivating awareness of, and giving expression to the indwelling Christ."⁵⁸ "Prayer and spiritual formation is the deliberate, intentional effort to live our whole life in the context of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus."⁵⁹ Dunnam recommends a type of prayerful Bible reading very close to that found in one of Wesley's favorite Puritans, Richard Baxter. As does Dunnam, Wesley also endorses contemplative prayer, and believes prayer should lead to action because all prayer is social.

4. Christian conference is important.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 57, 65, 80.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

Dunnam declares that he has seen "more dramatic and permanent changes in persons take place in small group settings . . . than any place else."⁶⁰ He endorses "koinonia groups" "where a few people can find a place to belong where warmth of acceptance, love nonjudgmental listening, honest sharing and prayer can be experienced personally and intimately."⁶¹ Dunnam also recommends one-on-one spiritual friendships.

5. Sanctification needs to be emphasized again.

Dunnam says, "I am calling for a new look at, and a new commitment to sanctification, the possibility of holiness or wholeness, the restoration of God's image within us."⁶²

6. Self-denial and self-worth are important and complex parts of spirituality, and must be handled with discernment.

Self-denial is present in Dunnam, but not as strongly as in Wesley, the Puritans, or the ascetics. He does assert that our "drum major instinct" must submit to death. "We choose to die to sin . . . we voluntarily die to our 'old' nature."⁶³ The spurious doctrines of self-actualization for personal gain ("winning through intimidation" for example) are perversions that hide the positive values of self-denial. "Self-denial according to Jesus, is the only road to self-fulfillment" and is "not the same thing as self-contempt."⁶⁴ "Self-contempt says we have no worth; self-denial declares that we are of infinite worth."⁶⁵ The notion that we are to "mortify, suppress, even 'kill' some of our human drives or attributes" as "most Christian spirituality prior to the twentieth century" has taught is to be boldly rejected.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 129.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 30.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 49.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 127.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 127-128.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

7. Spiritual formation must eventuate in loving service to others.

Spiritual formation is incomplete without the servant attitude of the cross--life in behalf of others. Love is the chief sign of Christ's presence and service is the chief sign of love. The servant lifestyle begins with the willingness to accept a "downward mobility." According to Dunnam upward mobility is a religion of sinners. The kenosis passage is our model. To be spiritual we must be in "solidarity with the poor and the oppressed." Sin is a flight from compassion. Mother Teresa of Calcutta is cited as a worthy model of compassion. "She gave herself to Christ and through him to her neighbor. This was the end of her biography and the beginning of her life."⁶⁸ Could not the same be said of Wesley?

For the course which this project created at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Dunnam's book was required reading.

Use of Wesley's Letters

As was demonstrated in the preceding pages a handful of Wesleyan writers are now beginning to address spiritual formation and spirituality directly. One way this project can participate in the movement toward spiritual formation is to make use of the letters of Wesley which have been scarcely cited in existing Wesleyan works on the spiritual life.

One of the few persons to make fruitful use of the letters is Robert Chiles who does so in his book Scriptural Christianity.⁶⁹ Chiles builds his unique book around the New Testament model. Chiles uses Wesley's Journal as a parallel to the Book of Acts, treating Wesley's

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 155. ⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 159.

⁶⁹ Robert Chiles, Scriptural Christianity (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1984).

journeys as analogous to the journeys of Paul. Part Two is called "The Letters: Epistles of Apostolic Concern." Here Wesley's letters are sorted and extracted to speak to subjects such as Wesley's call, the defense of the Gospel, the confirmation of the Gospel, and the practice of Christianity. chiles refers to several hundred letters. It is a remarkable work and it parallels several of the concerns of this project.

John Telford's Letters has already been cited. His 1931 work was updated and reissued in 1961. Now, however, Frank Baker, is working on a new edition of the Wesley letters to be published as a part of the new Oxford edition of Wesley's works.⁷⁰ Only one volume of the letters has been published. The project may be in financial trouble, but it is hoped it will be completed. If it is, several hundred previously unpublished Wesley letters which Baker's research has discovered will be made available.

Hopefully, this dissertation/project will help the letters receive more attention, provoke more critical inquiry, and provide insights into the spiritual life.

⁷⁰ John Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, 34 vols. ed. Frank Baker, vol. 25: Letters 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

CHAPTER XII

WESLEYANISM AND REPRESENTATIVE MODERN SPIRITUALITIES

If John Wesley were alive today there can be little doubt that he would carefully evaluate the trends in current spiritualities and incorporate into his own synthesis what he considered best in them. The nature of Wesleyanism would almost require such action. Therefore, the current climate of western Christian spirituality will be surveyed in this chapter. The purpose is to take note of the atmosphere in which any neo-Wesleyan spirituality would have to live. Five representative spiritualities will be briefly described with points of resonance and dissonance with basic Wesleyan spirituality noted.

A Scientific Spirituality

Any attempt to analyze current movements in spiritual formation must include the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University. The Institute has operated since 1963. Adrian Van Kaam has headed the institute since its beginning. Van Kaam and his core of professors and graduate students claim to have elevated spiritual formation to a science—complete with its own theories and terminology.

In 1983 the first of a proposed four volume set of textbooks on the science of spiritual formation was published under the series title Funda-
mental Formation. The other volumes have not yet appeared as far as I know. In volume 1 called Formative Spirituality¹ Van Kaam attempts to

¹ Adrian Van Kaam, Formative Spirituality vol. 1: Foundational Formation (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

state his theory and establish its credibility as a science. Apparently Van Kaam believes that scientific credibility requires abstract technical language. He creates a whole new vocabulary for his new science. "Sin" becomes "autarchic pride form" and spiritual formation is defined as

The preconscious and conscious process of a search for and tentative realization of a unique human form of life guided by directives of formation opted for or ratified in relative freedom on the basis of insightful appraisal of the directives concerned. After such option or ratification and reinforcement by initially focal-conscious repetition, the spiritual formation process continues on the level of prefocal formative disposition.

In the Christian form tradition graced formation power discloses and implements - in the light of pneumatic-transcendent presence - congenial and compatible life-forms that express in unpredictable and creative ways the foundational Christ form of the soul and that approximate progressively the final transcendent and transparent self-forgetful form of life.²

Van Kaam attacks the mystery of spiritual formation with a basic theory of foundational formation which is supported by ten intertwined subtheories: formation sources, formation dynamics, initial form dimensions, integrational form structures, formation fields, formation mystery, form traditions, formation dispositions, social presence formation, and phasic formation. Each subtheory has its own specific assumptions, yet it is intimately related to the assumptions of the other subtheories.

The theoretical superstructure is based on six assumptions.

1. Human formation, by necessity, participates in the laws of formation of the micro-and macrocosmic universe of mineral, plant, and animal formation studied in physics and the biological sciences.

2. Our formation bears a distinctly human quality. This quality is seen in unique formation demands, abilities and desires that transcend the cosmic formation processes in which humans also share. This encompasses the realm of the spirit.

² Ibid., pp. 307-307.

formation."³ The person will sense an aspiration "to integrate the historical, vital, functional and transcendent constituents of life."⁴

5. Pneumatic phase of personal-spiritual formation: at any time in life the person may attain this phase "in a consistent and pure way" -- it is not reserved for silver-haired saints only. It does, more or less, require the previous stages as preparatory for the channels of expression and as embodiments of the transforming grace of the Spirit. Encounter with the Spirit produces in the individual an awareness of sinfulness and impotence along with the realization that transcendent aspirations can never be realized apart from grace. An important key to this stage is renouncement of the "pride form of life" and "abandonment" to God.

Much more could be said about Van Kaam's 1983 book and Richard Byrne does just that in his 1982 dissertation.⁵ Byrne, who certainly had access to Van Kaam's not yet published manuscript, restates, defines, and explains Van Kaam's theories. The effect is beneficial. In Van Kaam you hear the master propose his ideas, and in Byrne one of his best students restates it for the rest of the class. Byrne, always careful not to offend the curia, appears almost prosaically orthodox. The keys to scientific foundational spiritual formation are: Christ (as the primary "classic"), Scripture, Liturgy, and Christian Classics of spiritual formation.

Applying the "science" to the Christian tradition, Van Kaam and Byrne hope to discover what in Roman Catholic spirituality is foundational and what is merely temporary or accretional. They are careful not to recommend drastic changes--Byrne's work in particular is sprinkled with

³ Ibid., p. 144.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Richard D. Byrne, "The Science of Foundational Human Formation and its Relation to Christian Formation Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duquesne University, 1982).

3. Sociohistorical, vital, functional formation of life is incomplete and inadequate without the spirit power, or transcendence dynamic of human life. This universal humanization could be called foundational spiritual formation.

4. The social radius of foundational spirituality goes beyond concern for one's inner life to concerns for a just society. It transcends racial, cultural, and educational barriers, it is transcultural and universalized.

5. The formation wisdom of humanity tends to be articulated in specific cultural form traditions of a religious or ideological nature. The person's roots in the symbols of a certain tradition help make human formation possible and also strongly influences the enduring "core form" ("heart") which a person will develop.

6. The research in the science of spiritual formation should be relevant to praxis of formation.

Van Kaam presents a developmentalism roughly correlative to the stage development found in Erik Erickson, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg and James Fowler. Van Kaam has five stages,

1. Social historical: we "imbibe" parental, cultural and subcultural formative influences.

2. Vital: this is the "vital striving" of early childhood.

3. Functional phase: during later childhood and adolescence persons develop ambitions, skilled functional relationship and a critical or obedient attitude toward religion, authority, etc.

4. Transcendent phase: the late adolescent or young adult becomes aware of a deep uniqueness and to a personal call to transcendence.

"Ideally, this stage calls forth acts of surrender to the mystery of

disclaimers which seem to say that the Church has never been wrong, but in some things it is more right than others. The extreme deference to orthodoxy may jeopardize the scientific quality of the Institute's work.

Neither Van Kaam nor Byrne cite any empirical evidence to support their theories. This gap is dealt with to a certain degree in Mary A. Reuter's 1,182-page dissertation, which is primarily a case study of her own encounter with a carpenter.⁶ She explains foundational formation as it appears in the affairs of daily life. She addresses universal human transcendence, the encounter with the numinous common to all tribes of people. She maintains that pneumatic formation as supersedes merely human transcendence and she advocates self-surrender to Christ as the only true victory over "one's own search for glory." Even the baptized believer will be beleaguered by the "autarchic pride form," the "image of the old Adam"⁷ which lures the believer into fostering merely pragmatic "proximate causes" at the expense of more important "remote foundationals" such as philosophy and theology.⁸ Attainment of and maintenance of the pneumatic level of formation is the remedy for autarchic pride.

Points for Dialogue with Wesleyan Spirituality

Significant differences exist between the spirituality of the Institute of Formative Spirituality and the spirituality of John Wesley. Nevertheless certain ideas held in common make it possible for them to inform each other. Those commonalities include the following.

1. The primacy of scripture, Christ, the sacrament, and Christian tradition.

⁶ Mary A. Reuter, "Formation Through Encounters of Ordinary Life" (Ph.D dissertation, Duquesne University, 1982).

⁷ Ibid., pp. 342, 575. ⁸ Ibid., p. 573.

2. The reality of sin (autarchic pride form) even in "baptized believers." Reuter says that even "doing for others can become a prime avenue of our search for glory."⁹ Wesley says that the justified person will find sin cleaving to his or her holiest deeds.

3. The rigorous use of reason.

4. The nature of sin as selfishness. Wesley regarded selfishness as sin of the second order, that is, turning away from God. Sin of the first order, Wesley believed, was refusing to worship God in faith.

5. The necessity of "plundering the Egyptians"-- that is making use of the best secular, scientific, and cultural sources.

6. The primacy of "remote foundationals" (theology and philosophy) inductive, pragmatic proximate causes.

7. The necessity of self-surrender. "Self-surrender . . . always must be regarded as the vital turning point of the religious life."¹⁰

8. The dependence of humankind on a gracious salvation. Wesley is much clearer about this, but Byrne does claim that one must surrender to "a source and a power capable of transforming human fallenness . . ."¹¹

9. Wesleyanism would agree with Van Kaam that merely reactive behaviorism and humanistic self-actualizing psychologies fail to meet the deepest spiritual needs of human beings.

On the other hand Wesley would object to the following features of approach used by the Institute of Formative Spirituality.

1. Though Wesley himself was rigorously systematic in some areas he would resist the attempt of the Institute to establish the spiritual life (and therefore God's action) by way of scientific law.

⁹ Ibid., p. 342.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 449.

¹¹ Byrne, p. 128.

2. The deliberate attempt to find abstract and complicated terminology Wesley would resist by insisting on "plain truth to plain people."

3. The neglect of religious experience as a criterion by which revelation may be known to be revelation.

A Sensate Spirituality

Matthew Fox is director of the Institute of Creation-centered Spirituality, Mundelein College, Chicago, Illinois. The book under analysis here is Whee, We wee all the Way Home. It is subtitled A Guide to a Sensual, Prophetic Spirituality.

Fox published the book in 1975 as the protest movements of the 1960's and 1970's crested. The version I read is a revised edition for the 1980's.¹² The book is still a protest, a primal scream against capitalism, idealistic spirituality, social oppression, capitalism, the United States government, educational institutions, and the Catholic Church. Fox supports socialism, Marxism, sensuality, homosexuality, social justice, nature, ecology, ecstasy, Freudian psychology, and the arts.

The underlying assumption of the book is that if we can concentrate on a sensate spirituality of the ecstasies of life, we will get our minds off of idealistic "pie in the sky bye and bye" spiritualities. Once we have focused on the human and have met God in the ecstasies of common life, we will experience a rebirth of passion. And passion for life breeds a passion for justice. We enjoy life's pleasures and realize that all people should have the opportunity for epiphany-like ecstasies, and we should work to liberate others. "Pleasure is meant to be pleasure

¹² Matthew Fox, Whee, We wee all the Way Home (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., Inc. 1981).

shared; and this sharing is done by way of justice and love, that is, by compassion."¹³

The concept of pleasure or ecstasy is foundational. Ecstasy, Fox says, comes from two Greek words which mean "to stand outside of." Ecstasy is "a forgetting," a forgetting of one's own self by standing outside oneself through ecstatic pleasures.¹⁴ Thus Fox's spirituality calls for a transcendence of self just as other Christian spiritualities do.

Part I of the book has to do with rediscovering the "Whee" of life. "We are sensual-spiritual creatures made to get high, divinely so, on ecstatic experiences" ¹⁵ Believers need to "sacrifice . . . their security blankets of fall/redemption theologies . . . their guilt, and quest for moral perfectionism."¹⁶ We must learn about pleasure for "if we are ignorant of pleasure we are ignorant of God."¹⁷ Ecstasies are "the veritable speech of God."¹⁸

Part II of the book deals with "We." The primary message of this section of the book is that "we shall become ecstatic together or extinct together."¹⁹ This becomes the stepping stone for Fox to treat the topic of social justice. As we seek to share pleasures with all peoples sensate spirituality becomes prophetic, that is, like the Hebrew prophets. "The prophets were not introverts wallowing in their personal faith life."²⁰ They understood that "'to know Yahweh' does not mean mystical flights of private rapture, it means to do justice."²¹

Part III of this work deals with "weeness." Our "weeness" in the face of cultural institutions is the focus. "Salvation by institutions:

¹³ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 90.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 77.

²¹ Ibid., p. 220.

that seems to be the American way."²² Yet most institutions spend their energies in jealous competition, seeking immortality, self-preservation and the like rather than in service. The church becomes dogmatic and archaic, corporations dehumanize, government oppresses, capitalism exploits, and universities become "intellectual brothels" that will create bombs, or poisons for a price, that is, a federal grant.

Part IV of the book is called "Toward a Theology of a Sensual Spirituality." Here Fox gives a historical review of who has been for and against sensual spirituality. Those who have been against it and thereby infected us with a spirituality made up of "mystical flights of private rapture" include Tertullian, Augustine, Bonaventure, Marcion, Clement, Origen, Henry Suso, Cardinal Bellarmine, Denis the Pseudoareopagite and Thomas a`Kempis. The latter is given a special flogging, second only to Denis who "corrupted" Catholic spirituality. Fox declares, "Denis' influence, through Catholic spirituality has been greater than that of Paul, or even Jesus."²³

Some "saviors" in history have helped preserve a wholesome sensuality. Among them are St. Hildegarde of Bingen who had the good sense to list Christ's virginity among His sufferings, Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, and Heloise who had the honesty to celebrate her impregnation by Abelard. St. Francis with his love of nature and Lorenzo Valla's book called On Pleasure have also helped.

Perhaps the greatest contribution from the distant past comes from Aquinas whose theology of matter has never been fully accepted by the church. Teilhard de Chardin makes some contribution regarding the union

²² Ibid., p. 154.

²³ Ibid., p. 207.

of flesh and spirit, soul and body. But this sheltered "Mary Poppins of theology," says Fox, is a chauvinist and an aristocrat whose social and political ideas are repressive.

Their atheism notwithstanding, the "real fruitful contribution" in our times "from the Hebraic tradition of prophetic spirituality" comes from "Karl Marx and Sigmund Frued."²⁴ Freud's psychology, particularly his doctrine of sublimation, is essential to a sensual spirituality. In Freud there is a basis for a sensual spirituality and in Marx the prophetic dimension of sensual-prophetic spirituality is present. Marx's social analysis offers a sensual-social alternative to the oppression of capitalism.

Points of Dialogue with Wesleyan Spirituality

John Wesley would have liked the prophetic justice dimension of Fox's spirituality, but nothing else. Though Wesley wrote much on joy it was not a joy related to sensuality. Wesley would probably not even read Fox's book. How would John Wesley ever get past the book jacket which features a fat hilarious pig in a swing?

Further, Wesley would not stand still for Fox's flogging of a Kempis. Wesley carried the Imitation of Christ with him everywhere he went for the last sixty-five years of his life.

Wesley would likely reject much of Fox's diatribe against capitalism. Capitalism was the economic escalator Wesley used to lift his oppressed masses to middle class status.

Wesleyanism does need to hear Fox. Its heritage of self-denial and perfection must be critiqued by more wholistic approaches. Perhaps Fox could help Wesleyan spirituality become more world affirming.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 220.

A Psychological Spirituality

Through the help of two psychologists and a psychiatrist Morton Kelsey was enabled to make sense of Christianity and the religious nature of his own inner needs. Therefore it is not surprising that he believes that the spiritual guide needs to know as much psychology (clinical, developmental, educational) as theology. Ordinary pastoral care involving confession, penance, sacrament, sermons and the like is good, but simply not enough. Psychological insight is required. Without psychology religion becomes "distant, unrelated, or ineffective."²⁵ But psychology does not have all the answers either, most psychiatrists are "abysmally ignorant of religious traditions and their value."²⁶ Thus without "a profound religious tradition, the religious questions are not likely to be ministered to, and these are our greatest need."²⁷ Apparently psychology and spiritual theology are to be considered as equal resources for dealing with human needs.

Points of Dialog Between Wesley and Kelsey

Four of Kelsey's books provide the grist for this section: Adventure Inward (1980); Caring (1981); Christo-Psychology (1982); and Companions on the Inner Way (1983). Using these books as a unit points of dialogue with Wesley's spirituality will be cited.

1. The Centrality of Love. Wesley's whole scheme of spiritual guidance was to bring the seeker to a state of perfect love. Love is also a primary concern of Kelsey in the cluster of books cited above.

²⁵ Morton T. Kelsey, Companions on the Inner Way (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 41.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 42. ²⁷ Ibid.

Both Kelsey and Wesley teach love to God, humankind, and the enemy. Kelsey teaches about healthy self-love, which Wesley probably needed.

2. The Need for Self-examination and Self-knowledge. Wesley encouraged regular exercises in self-examination. He said self-knowledge was necessary, for if we know not our disease we shall never seek the proper cure. Kelsey believes self-honesty and self-knowledge are prerequisites for the capability to love. There will be no "fire of deep loving without the wood of self-knowledge."²⁸ Self examination is also necessary to the enablement of love even if we must "look deep and hard at what appears to be our disgusting ugliness."²⁹

3. Christian Conference. Kelsey is just as convinced as Wesley was that guidance and fellowship are necessary. "We . . . seldom go far on the way toward Christian fulfillment unless we have others who understand and are willing to bear with us."³⁰ Kelsey recommends the fellowship of a church, a small group, and a spiritual companion. One-on-one spiritual guidance is, Kelsey says, the minister's "one legitimate task" if there ever was one. To neglect this is to fail "to offer fellowship to those alone in the storm" which is a "wretched pride."³¹

4. The Need for Involvement in and Identification with a Faith Tradition. This too is a belief shared by Wesley and Kelsey. Although the Methodists eventually left the Church of England it was not Wesley's idea. Kelsey also sees the value of a historical religious tradition. Those who think they can derive all the truth they need from private

²⁸ Morton T. Kelsey, Caring (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 49.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 64. ³⁰ Ibid., p. 53.

³¹ Kelsey, Companions, p. 5.

experience are "inflated" and "ridiculous." "The soul needs a religious institution Sharing in some traditional religion keeps one balanced and in touch with reality Beware of new religions."³²

5. The Validity of Religious Experience. Both Wesley and Kelsey attach great importance to religious experience. Kelsey permits more mysticism, however. Both agree that experience needs the critique of reason, counsel, and tradition (Wesley would add revelation). Kelsey believes that Aristotle and his descendants have robbed modern Christianity of its direct contact with a spiritual world. He reminds us that the religion of the New Testament is about discernment, visions, dreams, intuitions, wisdom -- in other words gifts "inaccessible to reason and sense experience."³³ He claims that 3,874 of the 7,957 verses of the new Testament are "contaminated" with the "spiritual" gifts. He used a razor to cut out these verses, leaving in his New Testament what he called "the Gospel according to rationalism."³⁴

In the end Kelsey calls for a metaphysic which proclaims both the material and immaterial worlds as real, a view of reality which has "a place for body, psyche, and spirit."³⁵

6. The Objective Reality of Evil. To begin with, both Wesley and Kelsey agree that the believer retains a deep inward sinfulness. Wesley calls it sin, and sanctification is to eventually destroy it. Kelsey calls it the "inner murderer" and the "inner idiot" -- and it will be always with us. further they insist that Satan (Wesley) or the Evil One

³⁰ Ibid., p. 53. ³¹ Kelsey, Companions, p. 5.

³² Morton T. Kelsey, Adventure Inward (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing Co., 1980), p. 85.

³³ Kelsey, Companions, p. 15. ³⁴ Ibid. ³⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

(Kelsey) exists as an objective reality.

7. The Use of the Bible. The dialogue here would not be harmonious. Wesley found the Bible to be more sufficient and more authoritative than does Kelsey.

8. The Importance of a Personal Journal. Wesley encouraged all his preachers to keep a journal. Kelsey's book Adventure Inward is a book on journal writing. In it he gives twelve reasons for keeping a journal. He reduces this list to nine in Companions on the Inner Way. In both places, however, the principal value in journaling is "to deepen my relationship with that center of spiritual reality of which all the great religions of humankind speak."³⁶ As tolerant as Wesley was he could not have accepted such latitudinarianism.

Social Spirituality

The father of Liberation Theology, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Francis X Meehan have been selected as representatives of social spirituality.

Gustavo Gutierrez

I heard Gustavo Gutierrez say that he wrote We Drink From Our Own Wells because so many were saying that Liberation Theology had no spirituality. My response after reading the book in a single sitting is: It does now! This work supplies Liberation Theology not only with a spirituality but with a much needed demonstration of its orthodoxy and biblical foundation. Gutierrez seems to be answering his critics, beginning with the Pope, and at the same time tempering the extremists among his friends who have put Liberation Theology to risk regarding such foundational

³⁶ Kelsey, Adventure, p. 28; Companions, p. 133.

concerns as divine grace, works righteousness, the resurrection, anthropology, Pelagianism, Christology, and soteriology.

We Drink From Our Own Wells is a book of happy surprises -- at least to those who have regarded Liberation Theology with various cautions. The spirituality Gutierrez develops is wholly Christ-centered. No one can even begin to live the Christian life without a life changing encounter with the resurrected Christ, Gutierrez teaches. Some in the liberationist camp have celebrated the crucified Christ as a warrior who gave his life for the cause, but neglected the resurrection as a snare of superficial idealism which distracts Christians from the sweaty work of justice. Gutierrez again and again cites the centrality of the resurrection. He declares, "Hope of the resurrection is in no sense an evasion of concrete history; on the contrary, it leads to a redoubling of effort in the struggle against what brings unjust death."³⁷

Again, the spirituality of Gutierrez is Bible-based. He cites the reverence for the poor found in the Bible. He notes biblical commands to help the poor. Biblical examples of how to treat the less fortunate brothers and sisters are also documented. But Gutierrez goes beyond such obvious concerns and firmly plants his spirituality in biblical anthropology, Christology, and soteriology.

Grace as the source of all spiritual and temporal gifts is cited again and again. Some liberationists such as Enzo Gatti in Rich Church -- Poor church; Alfredo Fierro, in The Militant Gospel; and Jon Sobrino, in Christology at the Crossroads, seem to call the people to redeem themselves, but Gutierrez carefully avoids such Pelagian notions.

³⁷ Gustavo Gutierrez, We Drink From Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People. Trans. M. J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), p. 118.

"Everything is grace," Gutierrez says. "The gift of God's love is the source of our being God's love for us is gratuitous; we do not merit it. It is a gift we receive before we exist . . . a gift in view of which we have been created."³⁸ Such grace energizes us to love the poor and follow Christ, "gratuitousness thus marks our lives so that we are led to love gratuitously" ³⁹

Gutierrez also preserves personal religion in the midst of collective action. He sees personal conversion, personal prayer and solitude as necessary elements in a social spirituality.

As one would expect, the idea of community, or Christian conference as Wesley called it, is of great importance in the spirituality of Gutierrez.

He also shows a high respect for the traditional spiritualities of the Catholic Church. He quotes Augustine, Ignatius, Therese of Lisieux, Theresa of Avila, Thomas Aquinas, John of the Cross, and Bernard of Clairvaux. He does, however, point out boldly that traditional spirituality must shed its "fuga mundi," its "flight from the world." He insists that privatised, individualistic spirituality in which Christians are "absorbed in their own interiority" is a dangerous "spirituality of evasion."⁴⁰

Gutierrez (unlike Wesley) prizes Christian experience as an inductive way to create a contemporary spiritual theology. The socio-historical context of Latin America gives a unique flavor to the spiritual theology developed from inductive experience which is regarded as the arena of reflection on scripture and tradition. In this limited

³⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

sense Latin American Christians are digging their own wells of salvation. Augustine, Aquinas, Anselm or Abelard cannot with precision quench the Latin American spiritual thirst -- so they must "drink from their own wells."

Gutierrez cautiously attempts to describe the emerging social spirituality in Latin America in these categories.

1. Conversion. "A break with the life lived up to that point is a prerequisite for entering the kingdom."⁴¹ This conversion must yield a new solidarity with the poor, a new appreciation for the body and its needs: "the weak and languishing body of the poor . . . has made the material a part of a spiritual outlook."⁴² What we do about this is a measure of the sincerity of our conversion. True conversion produces a Christ-like attitude of pardon -- even to oppressors. It also brings "a profound fidelity that does not bow to difficulties"⁴³

2. Gratuitousness. The grace of God with which we are gifted must not be frittered away in false humility and ineffective action. A proper use of grace is to make love an effective force. Nothing less will do. The experience of the gratuitousness of God "is not meant to serve as a refuge for historical powerlessness (which is to be rejected as an unchristian attitude)."⁴⁴ God's loving grace "neither suppresses nor competes with the human effort to build a better world."⁴⁵ Here we see Gutierrez' doctrine of faith and works. It is not unlike Wesley's.

3. Joy as Victory Over Suffering. Latin American Christians celebrate "a paschal joy proper to a time of martyrdom."⁴⁶ "Something new is germinating in this universe of unmerited afflictions: the self-

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁴² Ibid., p. 103.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 108.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 115.

consciousness of a people now expressing itself in . . . liberating faith"⁴⁷ which produces paschal joy in the land of death where believers have an Easter hope.

4. Spiritual Childhood. Spiritual childhood is the metaphor Gutierrez uses to describe a willingness to become detached from this world's goods and identify with the poor "in whose faces we see the suffering features of the Lord."⁴⁸ There must be a will to live in the world of the poor. Such a demand we know "will almost certainly overstrain the human capacity for solidarity."⁴⁹ The will to live in the poor person's world "can therefore only follow an asymptotic curve: a constantly closer approach that can, however, never reach the point of real identification"⁵⁰ Nevertheless, one of the elements of social spirituality is "the ready disposition" of "spiritual poverty."

5. Community out of Solitude. The new Latin American spirituality produces new kinds of solitude. It is the solitude of "isolation due to the new and hitherto unexperienced consequences of assuming the needs of the . . . poor from within."⁵¹ The great human cost of liberation creates what Garcia Marquez calls "the immensity of our solitude."⁵² This solitude (and the traditional variety which Gutierrez also prescribes) "gives rise to a hunger for communion."⁵³ Thus the Latin American Christians are discovering that "aleness with oneself and with God . . . is a requirement for authentic community."⁵⁴ The community born of social, cultural, and contemplative solitude is supported in the spirituality of Gutierrez by resurrection hope and Eucharistic faith.

⁴⁷ Ibid. ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 126. ⁴⁹ Ibid. ⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 129. ⁵² Ibid., p. 130. ⁵³ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

"We are a messianic people," Gutierrez declares, "on pilgrimage through history."⁵⁵ The support of the Eucharistic community is needed in "the passage of a people through the solitude and dangers of the desert, as it carves out its own way in the following of Jesus."⁵⁶ "This spiritual experience," Gutierrez says, "is the well from which we must drink. From it we draw the promise of resurrection."⁵⁷

Wesley and Gutierrez

There is remarkable correlation between Wesley and Gutierrez. At each point cited in the preceding pages one finds similarity--conversion, scripture, grace, joy, community, solitude and solidarity with the poor.

Wesley's piety is more individualistic, but it does not neglect service to the poor. Gutierrez is more tolerant of armed resistance to the oppressor. Wesley would do almost anything to prevent war--including post-poning certain kinds of liberation. The thought of poor Englishmen "sheathing their swords in each others bowels" repulsed Wesley. Again, however, Wesley had the British Constitution which with all its abuse could be used as an instrument of liberation. The Latin American dictatorships give Gutierrez much less space to work for peaceful liberation. What Gutierrez has that Wesley could not have been expected to have is a more sophisticated social analysis regarding systemic evil.

Perhaps Wesley and Gutierrez are closer at the point of theological method than at any other. Both take the socio-historical setting as a serious ingredient in creating their theological synthesis. Every innovative doctrine of Wesley can be traced directly to a social need. The Methodist synthesis was Wesley's way of doing what Gutierrez is doing--leading people to drink from their own wells.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 137.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Francis X. Meehan

Francis Meehan teaches moral theology at St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia. His book A Contemporary Social Spirituality is more moderate than the urgent campaign of many Liberation theologians. Some Latin Americans under the heel of oppression want revolution. Meehan is willing to take the evolutionary way. Meehan hopes that we will recognize that the structures of society seen as housing only systemic evil, in many cases have good elements as well. Meehan even hopes that some of the multinational corporations can be redeemed, humanized and made into the "graced structures" of the future.

Meehan teaches three dimensions of Christian spirituality. Intra-personal, interiority and related concerns; interpersonal, love of others, friend and foe; structural, that dimension of spirituality which involves social structures that may affect our brothers and sisters for good or evil. His analysis of systemic evil is convincing.

Meehan sees clearly the bankruptcy of American individualism, "the illusion that each one is saved, like so many individual atoms, with the world around seen merely as a neutral stage within which one works out her or his salvation."⁵⁸ Atomism is not merely the problem of the church. Secular America, Meehan points out, has eagerly embraced the narcissism of existential psychology to the detriment of one and all. He believes pastoral training should stop emphasizing one-on-one counseling and train pastors in community renewal. The victim of atomistic spirituality must recognize that "there is a form of naivete, an economic and

⁵⁸ Francis X. Meehan, A Contemporary Social Spirituality (New York: Orbis Books, 1982), p. 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

social innocence, that is . . . a kind of lethal oblivion."⁵⁹

Meehan believes that Eucharistic faith can do more than anything else to unite and energize Christians to meet the challenges of social spirituality. Eucharist offers us the gift of Christ's cross, that is, the challenge of self-sacrifice. We need such energizing for "work among the poor is not romantic. There is little beauty, little gratification, little visible accomplishment."⁶⁰ Eucharist helps us endure the exhaustion of energy, faith, and hope that work for the poor is sure to bring. It helps us discern the needs, the times and the Spirit. "A spirituality for doing justice requires that we do justice in its time, not our time."⁶¹ Eucharist delivers the eschatological patience we require to work for justice. We will be tempted to manipulate people and structures. But we must not "force the items" and become mere "zealots who bring hatred rather than love."⁶² We must rather be patient workers in behalf of those, "who in their lives reflect the sorrowing face of our Lord."⁶³

The primary points of communication between Wesley's spirituality and Meehan's include: high respect for the sacrament, the connection between horizontal and vertical dimensions of spirituality, and the emphasis upon a conscious choice for the poor.

In creating a neo-Wesleyan spirituality modern Wesleyans can find in social spirituality a most helpful and needed interpretation of the horizontal impulses inherent in their own heritage. The vertical and horizontal dimensions have always been present in Wesleyan spirituality. Emerging social spiritualities, of both the Latin and North American varieties, can

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 42. ⁶¹ Ibid., p. 44. ⁶² Ibid., p. 45.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 46.

provide Wesleyanism with a more sophisticated social analysis that prescribes insightful ways to express its horizontal mission.

Traditional Spirituality

The world in which neo-Wesleyan spirituality must exist is seeing a revival of traditional spirituality. Two authors have been recruited to demonstrate this premise: Kenneth Leech and Alan Jones.

Kenneth Leech

Kenneth Leech is an Anglican pastor, teacher and writer. His book Soul Friend is about spiritual direction and prayer. Spiritual direction is primarily guidance in the prayer life as distinguished from counseling or pastoral care. The title of the book is derived from Annchara a Celtic word meaning soul friend. A proverb of the ancient Celtic saints was "anyone without a soul-friend is a body without a head."⁶⁴

Leech explores the ideas on spiritual direction espoused by Henri Nouwen, Max Thurian, Gilbert Shaw, Leo Trese, Friedrich Wulf, Gregory Carlson, Jean Grou, and Augustine Baker. Drawing these sources together Leech describes the good spiritual director as:

- (1) A person possessed by the Spirit.
- (2) A person characterized by holiness of life and closeness to God.
- (3) A person of experience in prayer and life.
- (4) A person of learning, particularly "steeped in scripture and the wisdom of the Fathers."
- (5) A person of discernment who can read the signs of the times and the writing on the wall of the soul.

⁶⁴ Kenneth Leech, Soul Friend, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977).

(6) A person who gives way to the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵

Leech proceeds to warn us about possible abuses of spiritual direction. He cites Tauler's warning that, "certain directors were like hunting dogs that ate the hare instead of bringing it to their masters."⁶⁶ Directors must not interfere with the Spirit, manipulate the directee, become overly attached to the directee, or breed inordinate dependence on the director.

The principal task of the director is to help the directee in her or his prayer life. The three-fold ascent of prayer taught by the mystics is emphasized by Leech. Step one is purgation occasioned by self-knowledge, self-denial and self-abnegation. Step two is illumination by the Spirit to the mysterious truths of God. Step three is union characterized by intimate friendship with God. Leech sees some version of this sequence in Clement, Origen, Dionysius, Augustine, Bernard, and Bonaventure. He understands this pattern of prayer as analogous to the ordo salutis, "repentance, life in the Spirit, and perfection."⁶⁷

Leech also emphasizes the dark night of the soul as taught by mystics such as John of the Cross, Dionysius, and Thomas Merton, as being "a theological reality . . . an essential element in revelation."⁶⁸ In other words the light of illumination "strikes darkness to the soul."⁶⁹ It is "a negative way of experiencing God, the counterpart of apophatic theology."⁷⁰

Leech expands his study of prayer in a later book, True Prayer.⁷¹ This work stresses:

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 88-9. ⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 50. ⁶⁷ Ibid., pp., 37, 157.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 163. ⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 161. ⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 163.

(1) Prayer as a way to know one's self and God; (2) Prayer as drowning in the sea of God's love, peace and eternity to achieve self-transcendence; (3) Prayer as "interiorizing" the Incarnation; (4) Prayer as ascent through purgation, illumination, and union; (5) Prayer as a way of facing the challenge of justice, "for in Christ God becomes a little poor man, a member of an oppressed race, an exploited class, a colonized nation;"⁷² (6) Eucharistic prayer as the "centre of all Christian prayer;"⁷³ (7) Self-examination in prayer even if it has "something of a knife edge about it;"⁷⁴ (8) Prayer as the way to victory over trials; and (9) Prayer as uninterrupted consciousness of God for all believers.

Wesley, and perhaps Wesleyans, would resist two things in Leech's teaching: The emphasis on mystical prayer and total submission to a spiritual director. In their places Wesley put verbal prayer policed by reason and scripture and mutual spiritual guidance. Wesley also criticized the three-fold ascent of mystical prayer as a form of works righteousness.

Allan Jones

Allan Jones, a Roman Catholic, has taught spiritual direction for more than a decade at General Theological Seminary, New York. His book Exploring Spiritual Direction⁷⁵ presents the spiritual director as "God's usher" practicing the "art of arts." This usher needs to be both "loving and learned" and characterized by love, tender respect, holiness, detachment and theological competence. He or she must be ready "to accept

⁷¹ Kenneth Leech, True Prayer (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

⁷² Ibid., p. 73. ⁷³ Ibid., p. 105. ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 136.

⁷⁵ Allan Jones, Exploring Spiritual Direction (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

another into one's heart," possess the gift of discernment, have the patience to be still and wait for spiritual results in the directee, practice "utter frankness and honesty," and be available to God the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶

God's usher implements a spirituality which emphasizes self-knowledge, self-loss, and self-love. Without self-examination there is no self-knowledge and without self-knowledge "there is no growth, no striving, no stretching of the mind and heart to receive God."⁷⁷ Without self-examination and self-abandonment to God sinful humankind develops a "taste for ashes." "True worship requires the loss of self."⁷⁸ We must then "join battle against the self which assumes it is the center and measure of all things."⁷⁹ We must overcome "our sucking two-percent self which is embedded like a fly in amber."⁸⁰ There is for Jones a great difference between self-surrender and self-destruction. Without a spiritual director the pilgrim is apt to confuse these paths which often look alike in traditional spirituality.⁸¹

The "Christology of humanity" makes it appropriate to speak of a proper self-love. "I am, by definition, one who is loved by Christ."⁸² The believer who surrenders self to God discovers that "God in giving himself to me gives me back myself."⁸³ Jones makes much of the gift of discernment. It is the gift of "reading hearts" including one's own. It enables one to distinguish authentic from the false" in determining the will of God."⁸⁴ Spiritual warfare against the Evil One is a reality for Jones. "Apollyon still walks the earth."⁸⁵ Jones also speaks of

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 77-79. ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 27. ⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 52.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 95. ⁸⁰ Ibid. ⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 44-5.

⁸² Ibid., p. 35. ⁸³ Ibid., p. 75. ⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

damnation, "a dark and difficult word" which "points to the fact that the stakes are high and the battle is serious."⁸⁶ Jones speaks of Christian love as "integration, harmony, radiance."⁸⁷ Prayer is primarily contemplative, and will sooner or later bring us through a dark night of the soul. Freedom receives emphasis as well. The Christian must be a responsible decision maker, and must not trade in his or her freedom for the fatal luxury of blaming heredity, environment or original sin for bad decisions.⁸⁸ The sacrificial life is not one of "wallowing in negativity and self-rejection." It is the "liberated and liberating life" of "self-transcendence."⁸⁹

Wesley would agree with Jones on the importance of having a spiritual guide, but "director" is a word Wesley seldom used since his was more a system of mutual spiritual guidance. Wesley would also appreciate Jones' emphasis on self-examination, self-knowledge and self-surrender.

Since the majority of this dissertation/project has dealt with Wesley's interaction with traditional spirituality this subject will not be pursued further here. The point to make is that in fashioning a neo-Wesleyan spirituality one should note that even now traditional spirituality is alive and well and therefore is a part of the modern theological and cultural milieu which modern Wesleyan spirituality must synthesize.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 12. ⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 25. ⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 20. ⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

CHAPTER XIII

TOWARD A WESLEYAN SPIRITUALITY FOR TODAY

If Albert L. Truesdale is correct the biggest mistake a modern Wesleyan could make would be to "woodenly repeat Wesley."¹ To do so would indeed violate the essential spirit of Wesleyanism, particularly its synthetic method and dynamic character. The task of developing a neo-Wesleyan spirituality must then build on the heritage and continue its spirit without woodenly repeating Wesley.

The purpose of this project includes discovering and implementing the spirituality in Wesley's letters. This goal does not mean, however, that the spirituality of the letters must be rigidly codified and placed like a phylactery on the forehead of twentieth century practice. Thus our concern for contemporary trends in spirituality (Chapter XII) and the spirituality in typical modern Wesleyan works (Chapter XI).

Further, an authoritative Wesleyan spirituality should not be derived from the letters alone. Additional research in other Wesley sources needs to be melded into the research in the letters before a full-blown Wesleyan spirituality can be confidently asserted. Even then no ultimate Wesleyan spirituality should be claimed in light of the on-going creative synthesis and dynamism which characterizes the Wesleyan spirit.

Nevertheless, the study of the letters which has been done in this project, along with study in Wesley's journals, hymns, essays, and sermons which hovers in the background of this study permits the general shape of

¹ Albert L. Truesdale, "Theism" in A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology 2 vols. ed. Charles W. Carter (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Pub. House, 1983), p. 109.

a Wesleyan spirituality for today can be affirmed.

The affirmation presented in the following pages has two major parts. The first part is called the "remote foundationals." This is Adrian Van Kaam's term. It pertains to theological and philosophical foundations. Therefore the first part of the following affirmation could be called the theological essentials which cradle the Wesleyan spirit. However, in order to use the distinctive language of spiritual formation theory the designation "remote foundationals" is used. The second part of the following affirmation of Wesleyan spirituality is subsumed under the heading "Proximate Practices and Concerns." The term "proximate" is used by Van Kaam to describe practical, inductive, functioning. Here we use the term to denote the particular practices of a Wesleyan spirituality.

The Remote Foundationals

A neo-Wesleyan spirituality must build on the Wesleyan heritage and project the Wesleyan spirit as it interprets the following remote foundationals.

A Gracious Principle

Just as justification by faith was the orienting principle of Luther's theology, and the sovereignty of God the orienting principle for Calvin's theology, the orienting principle for Wesley's spiritual theology is salvation by grace alone. This orienting principle provides the integrative thematic perspective by which all other theological concepts are viewed and evaluated for Wesley.² Nothing is more foundational to Wesley's theology or spirituality than its gracious principle.

² Randy L. Maddox, "Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology," Wesleyan Theological Journal 19, no. 2, (Fall, 1984):10.

Salvation by grace alone is so essential to Wesleyanism that Henry Bett can declare, "From the days of Wesley down to the present, no Methodist has ever dreamed of grounding the forgiveness of sins upon anything but the free grace of God and the redemptive work of Christ."³

Generations of Wesleyan theologians agree. "From beginning to end salvation is . . . a free gift to the believer."⁴ "The central message of the gospel is that God in Christ forgives the penitent sinner who does not deserve forgiveness and cannot deserve forgiveness."⁵

Wesleyanism's concern for good works has caused some to think that Wesleyans regard them as salvific. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Not even faith, prayer, and repentance are allowed to be counted as meritorious--they too are the gift of God. "The good deeds of a believer's life are done utterly without any thought of deserving anything."⁶ This is echoed in everything Wesleyan including their hymns:

Whate'er obstructs Thy pardoning love,
Or sin, or righteousness, remove,
And take it all away.

Perhaps it must be noted again that the steps or stages in Wesley's principal paradigm of spiritual formation are steps or stages of grace: atoning grace, prevenient grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace, perfecting grace, glorifying grace. Such salvation is what Truesdale calls "a profound optimism of grace."⁸

Salvific grace is appropriated by the human response of faith. But

³ Henry Bett, The Spirit of Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1937), p. 123.

⁴ Truesdale, "Theism," p. 108. ⁵ Bett, Methodism, p. 109.

⁶ Ibid. ⁷ quoted by Bett without reference, p. 111.

⁸ Truesdale, "Theism," p. 108.

even the response of faith springs from grace for faith is God's gift. As Outler says, "It is God's initiative that makes possible our response; it is his self-presentation in Christ that frees us to accept his acceptance of us."⁹ The gracious gift "operates such as to empower us to respond without compelling us to obey."¹⁰ It is "precisely our awareness of the unmerited nature of God's grace that calls forth responsible Christian living."¹¹

With the preceding in mind no one seeking to establish a neo-Wesleyan spirituality can flirt with the "gospel" of meritorious moral rectitude. Nor with any gospel that sees no need for grace, that is, that declares bondage to sin and man's inability to respond to God to be fictions. Nor can a Wesleyan embrace self-help schemes, "variations on the old themes of human autonomy" whose implicit claims are for "self-salvation."¹² The Wesleyan pilgrim knows that he or she enters God's saving domain as a charity patient.

A Soteriological Aim

Something has gone wrong with us human beings. We need look no further than our own hearts or any newscast to discover that something has gone "fearfully awry in the human enterprize."¹³ Even the baptismal waters leave behind "a tinderbox of sin"¹⁴ which no straining effort of moral rectitude and no stack of self-help psychology books can cure.

⁹ Albert Outler, Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), p. 85.

¹⁰ Maddox, "Responsible Grace," p. 13. ¹¹ Ibid., p. 14.

¹² Outler, Wesleyan Spirit, p. 15. ¹³ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

John Wesley's primary aim was to bring persons (and the society they formed) to salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. On the pessimism of sin Wesley helped to make the optimism of grace shine.

Whatever other agendas Wesley may have included, soteriology was its sine qua non and telos. Ray Dunning calls soteriology the "inner core" of Wesley's commitment. "His actual theologizing was designed to explicate saving truth."¹⁵ L. M. Starkey, Jr. declares that Wesley relates his doctrines "immediately to man's redemption. Salvation is his [Wesley's] primary doctrinal and practical concern"¹⁶

Salvation for Wesley had to do with eternal rewards and punishments, but it was much much more. In "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" Wesley said,

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.¹⁷

Real religion, Wesley said in "The End of Christ's Coming" is

a restoration of man by Him that bruises the serpent's head, to all that the old serpent deprived him of; a restoration, not only to the favour but likewise to the image of God, implying not merely deliverance from sin, but the being filled with the fulness of God.¹⁸

Let it be remembered that Wesley's master paradigm for spiritual formation is a paradigm of salvation as described in the two preceding quotations--atoning grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace, perfecting grace, glorification. "The most distinctive element in Wesley's doctrine

¹⁵ H. Ray Dunning, "Perspective for a Wesleyan Systematic Theology" in Wesleyan Theology Today ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingwood Books/The United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), p. 51.

¹⁶ Quoted by Dunning, "Perspective," p. 51.

¹⁷ Wesley, Works, 8:47. ¹⁸ Ibid., 6:276.

of salvation," writes Randy L. Maddox, "is his affirmation of the possibility of entire sanctification."¹⁹ Thus, more than mere forensic salvation is here described. The idea of invincible concupiscence is here rejected in favor of a salvation which extends to holiness of heart and life. Therefore, one desiring to create a neo-Wesleyan spirituality will not settle for mere mental hygiene or shallow activism, for Wesleyanism has a central soteriological aim, an aim to bring the redemptive power of Christ to the personal and corporate sins and wounds of humankind.

A Catholic Spirit

John Wesley was convinced that what Christians have in common in Christ is far greater than their denominational differences. That is to say that provincialism and sectarianism are foreign to the spirit of Wesleyanism. Wesley affirms that one Christian has no power to constrain another to walk by her or his own rule. "God has given no right to any . . . to lord it over the conscience of his brethren."²⁰

Differences in modes of worship and theological opinions ought not keep Christians from loving each other, Wesley thought. In the sermon "Catholic Spirit" he declares that such things as worship styles, forms of church government, forms of prayer, methods of baptism, and various ways of administering the Lord's Supper should not separate Christians. Even the sacraments themselves were expendable if unity was jeopardized, "Nay I ask not of you (as clear as I am in my own mind) whether you allow baptism and the Lord's supper at all."²¹

¹⁹ Maddox, "Responsible Grace," p. 16.

²⁰ John Wesley, "Catholic Spirit" in Sermons on Several Occasions (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room, n.d.), p. 552.

²¹ Ibid., p. 553.

He pleads rather, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?"²²

Wesley required agreement on only a few things. Loving God was one, "Is God the centre of thy soul? The sum of all thy desires?"²³ He was concerned about religious experience and spiritual formation. In this same sermon he inquires of those with whom he would join heart and hands, "Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ . . . Is he formed in thy heart by faith?"²⁴ In addition Wesley believed loving others as you love yourself to be also essential. Let opinion and modes of practice be put aside, "Let them never come into sight. 'If thine heart is as my heart,' if thou lovest God and all mankind, I ask no more: 'give me thine hand.'"²⁵

Wesley goes on in "Catholic Spirit" to show that doctrine is not of superficial importance to him. He is not teaching, he insists, either practical or speculative latitudinarianism, for such notions are "the spawn of hell." He is urging that all saints be "grounded in love, in true catholic love, till thou art swallowed up in love forever and ever."²⁶ John's brother, Charles, wrote a hymn called "Catholic Love" which accompanied the sermon "Catholic Spirit" in its early publications. The modern Wesleyan when tempted toward a pinched-souled sectarian spirit would do well to sing at least the first two (of seven) verses:

Weary of all this wordy strife,
These notions, forms, and modes, and names,
To Thee, the Way, the Truth, the Life,
whose love my simple heart inflames,
Divinely taught, at last I fly,
With Thee, and Thine to live, and die

²² Ibid., p. 549. ²³ Ibid., p. 554. ²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 556. ²⁶ Ibid., p. 561.

Forth from the midsts of Babel brought,
 Parties and sects I cast behind;
 Enlarged my heart, and free my thought,
 Where'er the latent truth I find,
 The latent truth with joy to own'²⁷
 And bow to Jesu's name alone.

A Biblical Foundation

"O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God!" cried John Wesley. I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unis libri.²⁸ Wesleyanism must never separate itself from that haunting cry of its founder who immersed himself in the scriptures. The biblical foundation of Wesleyanism is so pervasive that United Methodist Bishop Mack B. Stokes can write

This belief in the authority and finality of the Bible goes far deeper than intellectual assent. It is a profound conviction that shapes our feelings and stirs our imagination. It moves our whole being and directs our soul toward the magnificent vision of the greatness and glory of God.²⁹

Almost without doubt every Wesleyan group has a credal statement similar to the 1975 Junaluska Affirmation

These Holy Scriptures contain all that is necessary for our knowledge of God's holy and sovereign will, of Jesus Christ the only Redeemer, of our salvation, and of our growth in grace. They are to be received through the Holy Spirit as the guide and final authority for the faith and conduct of individuals and the doctrines and life of the Church. Whatever is not clearly revealed in, or plainly established as truth by, the Holy Scriptures cannot be required³⁰ as an article of faith nor be taught as essential to salvation.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 561-562.

²⁸ Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions, p. 4.

²⁹ Mack B. Stokes, The Bible in the Wesleyan Heritage (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 16.

³⁰ Paul A. Mickey, Essentials of Wesleyan Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 17.

Even when considering the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral it is understood that the scripture is the first among equals. It judges reason, tradition and experience. As William J. Abraham writes, "none of the other elements in the quadrilateral can be viewed as a coordinate canon of equal standing with the Bible."³¹

To add evidence is unnecessary. Therefore let it be simply noted that the Wesleyan use of the Bible is, typically, wide-scoped, not fundamentalist. It tries to incorporate the general tenor of scripture as opposed to codifying isolated texts or identifying authoritative propositions. J. Kenneth Grider describes this quality by saying

Wesleyan theology is interested in the Bible's plain and literal sense. But it does not stop there. It is interested that that plain and literal sense be interpreted in the light of Scripture as a whole: in the light of Scripture's bottom-line teachings; and in the light of its meaning for us, but only after allowances are made for the differences between Bible times and our own.³²

Grider adds, "Wesleyan theology is biblical, but not narrowly so It views Scripture through its wide-angle lens . . . as it applies . . . Scripture to a given time . . . and culture."³³ The spirit of Wesleyanism treats as irrelevant the fundamentalist "battle for the Bible" and its savage debates over terms like "inerrancy." For Wesleyans the Bible is simply sufficient as the rule of faith and practice.

The one who would develop the heritage of Wesleyan spirituality must be willing to approach the Bible seriously, and with an attitude of

³¹ William J. Abraham, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral" in Wesleyan Theology Today ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books/United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), p. 120.

³² J. Kenneth Grider, "The Nature of Wesleyan Theology," Wesleyan Theological Journal 17, no. 2 (Fall, 1982):48.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

humility before the written Word and Christ the Living Word whom it reveals.

A Christocentric Focus

A Wesleyan spiritual theology must have Christ as its central focus. John Wesley repeatedly noted in his journal that at one location after another he "offered them Christ," "preached Christ," "proclaimed Christ." Albert Outler wrote, "In a hundred different ways on thousands of different occasions, decade after five decades, his message was Jesus Christ and him crucified -- Christus crucifixus, Christus redemptor, Christus victor."³⁴ Durwood Foster states Wesley's Christological focus, (the "Christ-norm," as he calls it) in this formula:

the historical Jesus is normatively revealing so far as he becomes the biblically witnessed Christ, and the biblically witnessed Christ is normatively revealing so far as he becomes the risen and coming Christ,³⁵ who is always experienced as inseparable from contemporaneous truth.

The concern for maintaining the centrality of Christology in Wesleyan spirituality has a great deal of practical value. For a time the branch of Methodism that populated the American Holiness Movement in the nineteenth century lost its Christological focus in favor of a pneumatological emphasis with unhappy results.

Even in light of Wesleyanism's catholic spirit it is difficult to see how a neo-Wesleyan spirituality could embrace any universalizing ecumenism that would trivialize Christological distinctives.

³⁴ Outler Wesleyan Spirit, p. 45.

³⁵ Durwood Foster, "Wesleyan Theology: Heritage and Task" in Wesleyan Theology Today ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books/United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), p. 34.

A Synthetic Method

Another remote foundational to which any architect of a neo-Wesleyan spirituality must be faithful is Wesley's commitment to the synthetic method. Almost every enterprise in which Wesley engaged became a creative synthesis of diverse resources. This was true in his organizational structure, his education philosophy and practice, and in his spiritual theology. But synthesis was governed by central theological norms, sometimes referred to as the "Wesleyan quadrilateral."

The Wesleyan quadrilateral (not Wesley's term) demonstrates the essential synthetic nature of Wesleyanism. The quadrilateral is a construct devised to show the interplay of revelation, reason, tradition and experience in Wesleyan theologizing -- whether the subject is doctrine or how to operate a select society. As noted earlier even in this quadrilateral Scripture (revelation) was for Wesley the first among equals. Nevertheless, a Bible passage that seemed to teach something not validated by experience, reason, or tradition was likely to be labeled a mystery and neglected in preaching.

The interplay of the four corners is an asset to Wesleyanism which Durwood Foster calls "hermeneutic holism." He points out that when a one-sided traditionalism, rationalism, experimentalism, or biblicism threatened "there was from the beginning a built-in Wesleyan resistance to each of these approaches pursued in isolation."³⁶ To such interplay of factors any updated Wesleyan spirituality must submit.

A second demonstration of the Wesleyan synthesis is John Wesley's eagerness to draw from many different theological currents. He forged his spiritual theology by synthesizing what he considered to be the best

³⁶ Durwood Foster, "Heritage and Task," p. 31.

elements in the contemporary theologies and the historical record. Chapter I in this project documents this type of synthesis.

Wesley also was willing to "plunder the Egyptians." He not only incorporated various theologies into his synthesis but also raided the treasuries of culture, literature, and science.³⁷ This informs us that the Wesleyan spirit urges Christians to an "alertness and sensitivity to every new cultural development . . . without becoming 'trendy'"³⁸ John Wesley, if he were alive today, would be open to what psychology has taught us about ourselves. He would listen closely to the lessons that Liberation theology is teaching us about systemic evil. The synthetic method practiced by Wesley suggests that in a renewed Wesleyan spirituality we must "hear" tradition, experience, revelation, and reason. We must "believe that the riches developed within Christ's church belong to all of us, and ought to be made available to all."³⁹ Further, we must "take cognizance of the ferment that characterizes the present social . . . and intellectual scene."⁴⁰

A Dynamic Character

Closely related to Wesleyanism's synthetic method is its dynamic character. A Wesleyan spiritual theology cannot become static or it ceases to breathe the Wesleyan spirit. Wesleyan theology is always on the "grow" and therefore it is dynamic in character. No final, once-and-for-all Wesleyan spirituality can ever be legitimately claimed.

³⁷ See Outler, Wesleyan Spirit pp. 4-10 for documentation of Wesley's use of secular wisdom, the classics, etc.

³⁸ Outler, Wesleyan Spirit, p. 18.

³⁹ Theodore Runyon, ed., Wesleyan Theology Today, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Truesdale, "Theism," p. 107.

J. Kenneth Grider points out several dimensions of the dynamic quality of Wesleyan theology. First, Wesleyan theology takes the guidance of the Holy Spirit seriously. The Spirit "continues to reveal the Father's will to specific persons in specific situations."⁴¹ Further, theology, lacking clear scriptural directions "on myriad supplementary doctrines" must go by faith. In addition, the changing milieu in which the church functions contributes to the dynamic nature of theology.⁴² Dynamism is heightened also as the enemies of the Faith mount newly armed opposition movements. In such cases Grider observes that "theology cannot say simply the same old things . . . for in that case it had just about as well say nothing at all."⁴³ Grider further observes dynamic movement in Wesleyan theology because of "new discoveries . . . in fact (science) and artifact (archaeology). Theology must respond, Grider says, "to what the scientists are doing in outer space and to what psychiatrists are doing in 'inner space.'"⁴⁴

John Wesley's deliberate observance of theological dynamics is pertinent to "our own efforts to update that same gospel and relate it to . . . radical crises of our time."⁴⁵ Our task Outler says is to "plunder the Egyptians" without staying in Egypt, keeping our eyes open to our heritage and our future, while maintaining a vivid sense of the past and a realistic sense of the human prospect.⁴⁶ With this sweaty theologizing the architect of neo-Wesleyan spirituality must be prepared

⁴¹ J. Kenneth Grider, "Nature," p. 50.

⁴² Ibid., p. 51. Grider offers six illustrative examples of theology-changing events.

⁴³ Ibid. ⁴⁴ Ibid. ⁴⁵ Outler, Wesleyan Spirit, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 17, 20.

to cope. The challenge is to "maintain identity and continuity even while undergoing growth and change."⁴⁷

An Experiential Orientation

"I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it,"⁴⁸ prayed the young Wesley. That faith came to him in the heart warming Aldersgate Street experience. And that experience, "that hour in Aldersgate Street was the real beginning of his unique apostolate."⁴⁹ Grider affirms that Wesley received an experience that night which made him the greatest moral, religious and social force of his era.⁵⁰

It is no wonder then that religious experience became a remote foundational for Wesleyanism. A host of scholars have labeled Wesley a theologian of experience. Some claim that experience outranked the other elements in the quadrilateral. Dunning declares that, "Every doctrine of Wesley is centered in vital religious experience."⁵¹ In many Wesleyan churches today "the one most significant prerequisite for membership is an experiential one -- the experience of conversion."⁵²

One integral part of the Wesleyan theology of experience has to do with assurance or the witness of the Spirit. This has been treated in chapter VII. That treatment will not be repeated here. Let it be simply noted that Wesley found it remarkable that anyone could experience the transforming power of regenerating grace and not "be sensible of it."

⁴⁷ Truesdale, "Theism," p. 109.

⁴⁸ Quoted without reference by Bett, p. 20.

⁴⁹ Bett, Spirit of Methodism, p. 33.

⁵⁰ Grider, "Nature," p. 44. ⁵¹ Dunning, "Perspective," p. 51.

⁵² Grider, p. 44.

Another function of experience that is integral to Wesleyanism is the use of experience as validator of tradition, reason and revelation. Wesley himself used reflection on the religious experience of his people to empirically establish the norm for the experience of Christian perfection. During the years 1759-1762 he personally interviewed more than a thousand people who testified to receiving sanctifying grace. In his spiritual guidance Wesley generalized on the collective experience of the people called Methodist. Foster calls this "relating Bible, tradition, and ostensible rationality to the pragmatics of human need."⁵³

The Wesleyan approach to experience also includes in a direct way the affective domain -- the domain of feelings, emotions, attitudes and values. John Wesley asserted that Christianity was more than intellectual assent; it was a matter of the heart. His theological offspring have likewise insisted (usually) on knowledge of God not mere knowledge about God. More than in our own day the doctrine of knowledge by faith drew criticism in Wesley's time. Most religious teachers in the eighteenth century (including Jeremy Taylor) taught that no one could know in this life whether or not she or he had received salvific favor from God. Wesley declared that one might commit all sorts of heresy and go unmolested, but if one once mentions "the religion of the heart, if you talk of 'righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,' then it will not be long before your sentence is passed, 'Thou art beside thyself.'"⁵⁴

Wesley and Wesleyans (generally) persisted in teaching "the evangelical experience as a reality in the soul and in the life."⁵⁵

⁵³ Durwood Foster, "Heritage and Task," p. 34.

⁵⁴ Wesley, Sermons 2:86-7. ⁵⁵ Bett, Spirit of Methodism, p. 122.

Wesley wrote to Thomas Church on the matter:

Do you then exclude all sensible impulses? Do you reject inward feelings toto genere? Then you reject both the love of God and of our neighbor. For, if these cannot be inwardly felt, nothing can. You reject all joy in the Holy Ghost; for if we cannot be sensible of this, it is no joy at all. You reject the peace of God, which, if it cannot be felt in the inmost soul, is a dream, a notion, an empty name. You therefore reject the whole inward kingdom of God; that is, in effect the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

Rex Matthews notes that, "Religious experience does not consist of dreams or visions, but of feeling in one's inmost self the love of God and of neighbor."⁵⁷ He goes on to note that

The knowledge of God to which one comes through this religious experience, . . . does not consist of new data about God's being or inner essence, but of an awareness of what God has done for me. It is an intensely personal form of knowledge of God as Creator and Christ as Redeemer.⁵⁸

The personal quality of religious experience is celebrated in a Charles Wesley hymn, "For the Anniversary Day of One's Conversion"

Then with my heart I first believed,
Believed with faith divine;
Power with the Holy Ghost received
To call the Saviour mine.
I felt my Lord's atoning blood
Close to my soul applied;
Me, me, He loved - the Son of God⁵⁹
For me, for me, He died!

Such a personal emphasis risks being too atomistic. But Wesleyanism at its best has never been merely individualistic. It is inherently social. Bett says that the Methodist insistence on an intensely individual experience was right because "the last reality of religion

⁵⁶ John Wesley, Works, 8:408.

⁵⁷ Rex Matthews "With the Eyes of Faith: Spiritual Experience and the Knowledge of God in the Theology of John Wesley" in Wesleyan Theology Today, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books/United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), p. 414.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bett, p. 26.

must be an individual experience, for the simple reason that men are individual."⁶⁰ Ideally, Wesleyanism is personal but not atomistic.

Spiritual affectivity, for Wesleyanism, is expressed in terms of love, joy and peace and the inner assurance of God's favor. This Wesley consistently taught. Outler insists that all of Wesley's "emphases on duty and discipline are auxiliary to his main concern for human happiness."⁶¹ The spirit of Wesleyanism derives not from legalistic adherence to codes. Rather it springs from the peace, joy, and happiness which is the fruit of self-transcendence facilitated by love to God and neighbor.

The Wesleyan tradition can help inform new discoveries in the noumenal and affective domains. Likewise Wesleyanism can better understand its own heritage of spiritual affectivity by noting advances made in various disciplines studying the affective domain.

An Ethical Quality

Wesleyanism is not the religion of the solitary mystic in a cell, the lonely hermit, the monastic recluse or the lone ascetic fighting evil spirits in the desert sun. Rather, Wesleyanism prizes corporate worship, Christian conference, and mutual spiritual guidance. It is not suited for ivory towers but for busy streets. Wesleyan Christianity calls for responsible living in community. The Wesleyan message "combines radical faith in God's reconciling love in Christ (the inward, personal dimension of salvation) with a moral and social agenda" ⁶² Holiness for Wesley was social holiness. He constantly reminded his correspondents of

⁶⁰ Bett, p. 124. ⁶¹ Outler, Wesleyan Spirit, p. 81.

⁶² Ibid., p. 54.

their ethical responsibilities. Even soteriology "is intensively a communal enterprise"63

A Magnetic Attraction to the Oppressed

The ethical nature of Wesleyanism at its best has been demonstrated repeatedly through a magnetic attraction to the oppressed. Wesleyanism renounces "private piety that clings to Jesus and ignores the human agonies of this world"64 It was John Wesley's "identification with the poor, the forgotten, the ignorant, the exploited, which gave meaning, shape . . . and transformation to [his] theology."65 Indeed helping the oppressed was an integral part of the spiritual life.

Wesley's influence lives on today. A British labor secretary said in an address to the world congress of socialist parties that British socialism, "has learned more from John Wesley than Karl Marx."66 Many of Wesley's theological heirs have neglected this part of Wesleyan spirituality to their own detriment, but commitment to social justice has always survived wherever the whole Wesley is embraced.

Any neo-Wesleyan spirituality must be in touch with Liberation theology and all such attempts to achieve a greater measure of justice. Liberationists and Wesleyans can enrich each other by mutual dialogue. The dialogue could include, according to Meeks, the notation of "the similarity of the response of the church, university, and societal publics of Wesley's day to his theology, and the responses of these

63 Durwood Foster, p. 32.

64 Outler, Wesleyan Spirit, p. 46.

65 M. Douglas Meeks, "John Wesley's Heritage and the Future of Systematic Theology" in Wesleyan Theology Today ed. Theodore Runyon, p. 45.

66 Cited by Theodore Runyon, "Theological Contribution," p. 9.

publics to liberation and political theologies today."⁶⁷

Perhaps Wesley's stated objective is as relevant now as ever: "to reform the nation, particularly the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands." At any rate modern Wesleyanism must bring to the great human problems of today all the resources of its creative synthesis. Perhaps Matthew 5:4-6 is worthy of consideration by the architects of neo-Wesleyanism. In that passage Jesus responded to John's disciples' questions about His credentials by citing his ministry to the "blind," the "lame," the "lepers," the "deaf" and the "poor." Then Jesus appended a punch-line epilogue to the list: "happy is the man who does not find me a stumbling block" (Matt. 11:6 NEB).

Proximate Practices and Concerns

Chapters II-IX in this document catalogued the particular practices of the spiritual life found in the Letters. These practices are here viewed as potential proximate (Van Kaam's term defined earlier) practices, functions, and concerns for modern Wesleyan spiritualities. These proximate matters spring from, are nourished, limited, and guided by the framework of the remote foundationals (theological foundation) described in the preceding section of this chapter. It now remains to lift up the most salient practices and concerns of pristine Wesleyan spirituality and suggest briefly appropriate modifications which can facilitate the necessary growth and change, but which will also allow for continued identity with the heritage.

1. Intensified interest in spiritual formation should characterize neo-Wesleyan spirituality. John Wesley's master paradigm referred to

⁶⁷ Meeks, "Heritage and Future," p. 41.

several times in this document is a good starting point. New cognate studies including the work of Piaget, Kohlberg, Erickson, Fowler and Dunnam should be evaluated critically by Wesleyans to see what contributions they can make to a new creative synthesis.

2. Christian conference should retain a prominent position in any neo-Wesleyan spirituality. Direct mimicry of Wesley's societies, classes, and bands should probably be avoided. But the principles of mutual spiritual guidance, accountability, and fellowship should be preserved and cultivated. The openness and honesty with which Wesleyan Christian conference was conducted is a treasure of the heritage which must be preserved. The information explosion in the field of group process should inform Wesleyan practice. Wesley's "spiritual friend" philosophy will continue to prove fruitful. This form of one-on-one guidance, it seems to me, will be more productive for Wesleyanism than derivations from classic Jesuit spiritual direction. No true Wesleyanism can exist without the practice of Christian conference.

3. Constant study of the Scriptures as the church's revealed book should be a mark of Wesleyanism in any era. Saturation in scripture through life long study and meditation should be the norm.

4. Widespread reading of devotional literature must be a part of Wesleyan spirituality. Serious study in other fields -- literature, philosophy, behavioral sciences, history, etc. -- should also characterize the serious Wesleyan. Neither should beneficial non-print media be neglected.

5. Prayer in various forms should be practiced. Wesley's combination of written and extemporary prayer, and his rationale for combining them is a sound starting place. Perhaps his energetic rejection of mystical "men-

tal" prayer should be re-evaluated. The use of classic forms of prayer (like the Book of Common Prayer) should be treasured, but contemporary forms of prayer should be explored, making sure that the purpose is communion with God, and not art expression or mere aesthetics. Obviously, group prayer, and corporate prayer in worship are still important to Wesleyanism and should be preserved.

7. Self-surrender and self-transcendence must remain near the heart of Wesleyan spirituality. No self-saving notion can render true Christian self-denial superfluous. Almost every Christian spirituality has found some form of self-surrender essential. Wesleyanism certainly has. The way Wesley articulated this theme, however, can surely be improved by modern Wesleyans. Advances in understanding human personality is our ally. The significance of healthy self-esteem was not grasped by Wesley. Modern Wesleyans are doing a better job than Wesley in this matter. Some, however, go too far, making self-love the highest good. Such abuses are sub-Christian and sub-Wesleyan.

6. The inherent value of self-knowledge gained through self-examination as per Wesley's practice has been validated. Self-knowledge is psychologically and spiritually desirable. Wesley's idea of non-condemnatory self-examination (as described in chapter VI) is laudable. Although the language of his self-examination exercises is largely obsolete the practice of self-examination which notes one's own need of grace and which celebrates the gifts of grace can be preserved with much profit.

8. Wesley's concern for pure attitudes and motives which he called affections and tempers should have a place in neo-Wesleyan spirituality. Various psychologies, critiqued by theology, can enrich the goal Wesley

described as holy tempers and holy affections. Much work is yet to be done in this area and modern Wesleys must give it attention.

9. Neo-Wesleyanism needs to rediscover the best elements in Wesley's teaching about detachment from worldly values. Bishop Dunnam's call to practice "downward mobility" as the Christian lifestyle will shock many Wesleyans infected by the theology of prosperity.

10. Neo-Wesleyanism should take sin seriously. Something is radically awry at the center of our beings that only grace can cure. Wesleyans must not be bashful in affirming the soteriological claims of their heritage, -- viz. that God's grace is mediated to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and that it can effect, justification, and sanctification. Some call for an abandonment of Christian distinctives in favor of some universal faith. This may be attractive to some, but adoption of such a creed, whatever else it might be, would not be Wesleyan.

12. Modern Wesleyan's can find no substitute for the centrality of love in the original Wesleyan synthesis.

13. Neo-Wesleyanism should have an eye for the redemptive in all life situations, particularly in trials and sufferings. This represents a moderation of Wesley's doctrine of particular providence, and a retention of its religious substance.

14. Living for others as a spiritual discipline and in loving service to God and our fellow human beings was never more important than now. The global problems of humankind challenge the neo-Wesleyan to "spend and be spent" in self-forgetting service.

15. Neo-Wesleyanism should continue to find its organizing principle in the pursuit and possession of and growth in Christian perfection (a

better descriptor may be found) which is experienced as love expelling sin, sanctifying grace, Christ being formed in us, and the restoration of the image of God. Around this central focus the practices of Wesleyan spirituality move. That is to say that practices such as prayer, meditation, Bible study, Christian conference and the like are to be constantly critiqued as to their effectiveness in moving both individuals and groups forward on the path of Christian perfection.

The foregoing remote foundationals and proximate practices and concerns formed the content of the final presentation in the course which this project created at Nazarene Theological Seminary. The concluding section which follows records the attempt made to analyze and measure the results of efforts to implement the spirituality presented in the Letters and articulated in the remote foundationals and the proximate practices described in this chapter.

CONCLUSION: EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The strategy of this project required more than research into Wesleyan spirituality. What was learned in research was to be organized, written, refined and implemented with a group of theological students. This was attempted through the course "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation," taught at Nazarene Theological Seminary, January 5-28, 1987.

In the following pages the course, the students, and the learning activities will be described. The pre-test, post-test and student evaluation of the teacher and the course will be analyzed, and concluding remarks offered.

Description of the Course

The most succinct description of a course is the syllabus. The syllabus for The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation is here presented.

SYLLABUS

P198T - The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation

OBJECTIVES

The overarching aim is to help persons understand, appreciate, experience and implement the Wesleyan way to spiritual formation and the practice of Christian spirituality.

More specifically, the course is designed to help:

1. persons gain a better knowledge of the rich Wesleyan heritage of spiritual formation and the practice of Christian spirituality.
2. persons come to a new appreciation for and ownership of Wesleyan insights and practices of the spiritual life.
3. persons gain experience and skills in the personal practice of Christian spirituality which will enhance their own spiritual formation.

4. equip persons to teach others the Wesleyan way to spiritual formation.

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The attempt to reach the foregoing objectives will be made through learning activities such as follows.

1. Reading, studying and reflecting on basic works including The Letters of John Wesley, 8 vols., John Telford; "A Survey of the Literature for the Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation: Christian Spirituality in the Letters of John Wesley" and a second work continuing the preceding one, "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation: Christian Spirituality in the Letters of John Wesley," both by Wesley Tracy; and Alive in Christ, Maxie Dunnam. These works are considered the textual materials for the course.
2. Lectures on and discussion of the principal components of Wesleyan spirituality.
3. Case studies of particular correspondents of John Wesley.
4. Participation in spiritual exercises, including several forms of prayer.
5. Participation in creative Bible study.
6. Participation in certain meditation exercises.
7. Participation in small group exercises modeled after John Wesley's band meetings.
8. Keeping a spiritual life journal.
9. Participation in various spiritual disciplines.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (2 semester hours credit)

The course requirements include the following.

1. Regular attendance and participation in class activities.
2. Reading in full "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation: Christian Spirituality in the Letters of John Wesley" by Wesley Tracy, and Alive in Christ by Maxie Dunnam.
Selected Reading is required in:
Telford: The Letters of John Wesley,
Tracy: "A Survey of the Literature for the Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation," and
John Wesley's Journal.
Additional reading is expected among the books and papers put on reserve in the library for students enrolled in this course.
3. Preparation and presentation of two case studies. Each student will study the correspondence between Wesley and two of his spiritual directees. This will include biographical research on the correspondents.
4. Keep a spiritual life journal. This will not be read by the instructor. A spiritual life journal is not something prepared for others--it is for the author's own enrichment. Our journals may be the subject of some dialog sessions which involve only volunteer sharing and discussion of the experience of journalling rather than the contents of the journals.

5. Participation in the various spiritual exercises and disciplines practiced by the class: various forms of prayer, meditation, Bible study, and Christian conference.

OUTLINE OF THE COURSE

- I. The Spiritual Formation of John Wesley Himself
- II. Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Direction in the Letters
- III. Christian Conference in the Letters
- IV. The Spiritual Disciplines of Prayer, Fasting and Reading in the Letters
- V. Self-Examination, Self-Denial, and Self-Surrender in the Letters
- VI. The Interior Life as Seen in the Letters
- VII. Seeing God in Everything: Particular Providence in the Letters
- VIII. Living for Others: Christian Service as a Spiritual Disciplines in the Letters
- IX. Christian Perfection in the Letters
- X. Current Trends in Christian Spirituality and Spiritual Formation
- XI. Wesleyan Spirituality Today and Tomorrow

The preceding is the content outline of the course. The spiritual exercises section of the course will usually, but not always, relate to the subject matter of the course outline.

CASE STUDIES

During the second half of the course, case studies will be presented and discussed. The student is to study the correspondence between Wesley and two of his correspondents. Preparation of the case study should include:

1. Study of the correspondence, categorize the spiritual advices, analyze the issues discussed, evaluate the spiritual guidance. Be sure to cite the most transferable concepts, that is, the insights, truths, practices which are most helpful today.
2. Research the available biographical data on the correspondents.
3. Read Wesley's Journal for the days surrounding the dates to see what was happening in his life at the time, and to see how those events might effect what he says in the letters.
4. Write the report and hand it in (typed, please). Your presentation, however, can be informal, or in any creative form you choose.

GRADING

In order to strive for true objectivity and to eliminate competition for grades, this course is self-graded by the student. Further, some of the work will be private and not read or critiqued by the instructor, making grading hazardous. You will evaluate your own work as far as the term grade is concerned. In evaluating yourself, take seriously the course requirements stated in this document.

The Students

Eight students enrolled for the elective course, The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation.

Alvin C. is 42 years old. A graduate of the University of Cincinnati. Formerly head of the Department of Instructional Television at Carnegie-Mellon University. This graduating senior has supervised a rescue mission during student days. G.P.A. 2.80. Divorced, remarried, father of one child.

Byron N. graduated from California State University and served in the army before coming to NTS. His age is 35, divorced, remarried in 1982, a middler student with a G.P.A. of 3.0. Bright, articulate, a critic of the church as an institution.

Charles D., age 24, first year at NTS with a G.P.A. of 2.50. He is a graduate of Mt. Vernon Nazarene College. Charles is from a broken home — parents divorced when he was eight. Mother has never recovered. Charles feels anger toward his father, confusion about his mother and feels that his older brother overshadows him. He is unmarried.

Darwin C., 25, is a graduating senior with a G.P.A. of 2.76. He is short, quiet, well groomed and well mannered. He is married and the father of a two-year son. A graduate of Mt. Vernon Nazarene College.

Greg L. 27 is a graduating senior with a G.P.A. of 2.05 — an R. E. student. He was raised in a small town in Washington state. His mother raised him to be devoutly religious. Two years ago his mother made a sudden and drastic change in lifestyle. She deserted the home and is living, unmarried, with a lover. Greg is hurt and angry; he dropped out of school soon after this event and his grades plummeted. The group tried to help him toward unconditional love of his mother.

Harold K. has been at NTS for three terms after graduating from Mid-America Nazarene College in Olathe, Kansas. He is unmarried, lives at home and works with his father in the family printing business. His family life has been stable and perhaps over-sheltered. Harold is 24 and has a G.P.A. of 3.04.

Norman T. is a second year student at NTS with a G.P.A. of 2.4. He is a graduate of Olivet Nazarene College, Kankakee, Illinois. He is 34 years old, hails from rural Indiana and claims to be one of the "original hippies" although his lifestyle has changed drastically from his leather jacket, motorcycle and earring days. He is 6'5" and weighs about 250 pounds, has an outgoing, sometimes boisterous, personality to go along with knife and gunshot scars. His father deserted the family when Norman was 13. Norman's mother committed suicide in the home, and Norman, the oldest of five children, discovered her body and had to manage the younger children. His life took a turn toward a decade or more of rebellion. He is married, he and his wife bought their first home during the January course. Norman's father died a week before the course began.

Stanley Y., 28, is a graduating senior. He was a music major in college (Olivet Nazarene College). He is an only child. His parents do not fully approve his choice of a vocation. Stan worked as a church custodian during student days. He suffers from low self-esteem (his own report) and was an eager participant in the activities of the class. His G.P.A. is 2.66.

One of the group disciplines was to pray for each other by name each day. We did not run short of fuel for our intercession.

The Lesson Plans

The group met for eleven two and one half hour sessions, Monday, Wednesday, Friday from January 5-28, 1987.

Space limitations permit only a brief description of the lesson plans for the eleven sessions.

Session I, January 5, 1987, Getting Our Bearings

1. Opening Exercise: Prayer using one of John Wesley's Personal Prayers for Monday morning.
2. Sharing: students responded to the question -- "What is the nature of your interest in spiritual formation?"
3. Get acquainted and group-building exercise. Students shared certain biographical information and their answers to: "What gave you the most pleasure or satisfaction during 1986?"
4. Review of the syllabus, bibliography, textual materials, requirements, procedures and the class calendar.
5. Lecture: The Spiritual Formation of John Wesley Himself (Students were referred to pages 1-152 of "A Survey of the Literature for the Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation." This material has been condensed and is represented in the dissertation/project as Chapter I.

Session II, January 7, 1987, Spiritual Formation and Christian Spirituality in the Letters

1. Opening Exercise: Use of the Lord's Prayer leaving blanks to insert the names of those for whom we prayed.
2. Administration of the pre-test: "Spiritual Formation Inventory".
3. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines

- A. Lecture and discussion of Chapter Two "Spiritual Formation in the Letters of John Wesley." The students had the following study guide to help them prepare.

STUDY GUIDE: "Spiritual Formation Theory in the Letters of John Wesley

- (1) Can you think of current examples of Whitfields' "rope of sand?"
- (2) Read and reread the working definition of spiritual formation. Consider it phrase by phrase, make it your own. This definition will be referred to repeatedly throughout the course.
- (3) Study the five spiritual formation paradigms used by Wesley in the Letters. This is the heart of this chapter. In order to clarify how these paradigms relate to each other draw a comparative graph or chart which presents each paradigm in a relative gradient scale.
- (4) Reflect on the four spiritual formation descriptors used by Wesley. Rank them in order of their usefulness in helping today's Christian to make progress in the spiritual formation journey.
- (5) Look up several of the letters cited in this chapter in Telford. Read them in order to get a broader picture than the brief quotations provide.
- (6) Review the six concluding affirmations about Wesleyan spiritual renewal. Would you like to add or subtract anything?
- (7) What twentieth century writers have you read who illuminate the subject matter of this chapter? Do they tend to emphasize the same things Wesley did? Or were other ideas more firmly emphasized?
- (8) Draw a time-line history of your own spiritual development. Put dates on your diagram and word or sketch symbols to designate turning points, awakenings, renewals reversals or other meaningful events in your spiritual history. What is the next needed step? Pray about this. Write about it in your spiritual life journal.

- B. Lecture and discussion of Chapter III, "Spiritual Direction in the Letters." The following study guide distributed two days earlier piloted the discussion.

STUDY GUIDE: "Spiritual Direction in the Letters of John Wesley

- (1) Read the chapter straight through, then go over the chapter again. Make a list of everything "new" that you learned about John Wesley.

- (2) Consider these phrases for their spiritual and theological value:
- | | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| "art of arts" | "loving and learned" |
| "soul friend" | "companions on the way" |
| "God's usher" | "without disguise or reserve" |
- (3) Study the letter to Ann Bolton July 8, 1785 which is quoted on page three. What does this letter tell you about Wesley's theology of spiritual guidance? What does this letter tell you about the qualities a spiritual guide should possess? The person to whom Ann Bolton was referred was probably Hannah Ball -- what do you know or what can you learn about her?
- (4) Evaluate the effect of Wesley's affectionate language -- then and now.
- (5) How do love and openness relate one to the other in Wesley's spiritual guidance?
- (6) How important is it for a spiritual guide to be able to receive as well as give direction.
- (7) Consider the qualities of a spiritual guide demonstrated by Wesley in the Letters: Affection, Openness, Commendation and Encouragement, Accountability, and discernment. What two qualities are the most important? Which quality is strongest in you? Which one is weakest in your arsenal of guidance gifts and graces?
- (8) Trace Wesley's guidance in the letters to Philothea Briggs cited in the chapter. Or take a name from the "case studies" list in the syllabus and read several letters in Telford to that person and note how Wesley functions as a spiritual guide.
- (9) If Wesley is right and we really cannot fulfill God's call to us without a "soul friend" then pray about your need to both "have" and "be" a soul friend.

4. Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Group Bible Study. Using the Bible study method Wesley borrowed from from Richard Baxter the following exercise was used.

Bible Study and Meditation Exercise

Read Luke 12:13-21 at least two times.

(1) The Use of Information

Think about the passage then preach it (silently) to yourself.

Your sermon to yourself should include:

Explanation of the text

Supporting the text by other scripture

Applying the text: tell yourself what this means to you in your life-situation

- (2) The Use of Examination
 Examine your heart on the issues the text raises
 Note your lacks or weaknesses
 Praise the Lord for victories gained in the area(s) the scripture passage deals with.
- (3) The Use of Dehortation
 Warn yourself about the dangers of spiritual failure on the subjects raised by the text. Renew your vows to God in relation to the text
- (4) The Use of Consolation
 Rejoice in the consolation, hope and comfort that comes from committing the whole matter to the Lord.
- (5) The Use of Exhortation
 Write down what you intend to do about what you have learned from this text and exercise.
- (6) Step Into the Scene
 Imagine the Bible scene before you. Pay attention to the weather, temperature, time of day, sounds, smells, etc. Notice the characters in this passage: The multitude, The Questioner, Jesus, The Rich Fool, God. Close your eyes as you picture the scene. In your imagination step into the scene and experience the event. Jot down your feelings, the meanings that are communicated, the insights you receive.
 What character do you most identify with?
 What new insights did you receive?
 What did you perceive to be Jesus' mood and attitude?
- (7) VII: Step Out of the Scene
 Step out of the scene knowing you can always go back if you wish. Step out and write a letter or memo to some person or persons in the scene. Tell them whatever is on your heart. Write only two or three paragraphs. If you are willing be prepared to share with the group.

Session III, January 9, 1987: Christian Conference

1. Opening Exercise: the personalized version of the Lord's Prayer was used again.
2. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines
 Discussion of Chapter IV "Christian Conference in the Letters."
 (1) Assume you believe that a senior graduating from a Wesleyan seminary should know something about the significance of

Wesley placed on Christian conference. Then, working in pairs develop two or three senior oral comprehensive questions that require integration, analysis, and synthesis.

- (2) What experiences are mentioned in this chapter which you have never experienced.
- (3) What is discussed in this chapter that you have experienced with profit? With grief?
- (4) Explain the rule and procedures for a Wesleyan "Band Meeting."

3. Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Participation in a Wesleyan "Band Meeting." Following the guidelines of a band meeting in Chapter IV the class carried out such a meeting. Significant sharing and interaction ensued. Since "receiving what they are willing to give the poor" was a part of every band meeting we took an offering for the Kansas City Rescue Mission.

Session IV, January 12, 1987: Prayer and Bible Study

1. Opening Exercise: one of John Wesley's family prayers for Monday.
2. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines:

Discussion of Chapter V "Prayer, Fasting, and Devotional Reading in the Letters." General discussion following the outline of the chapter was guided by the teacher. Without a study guide handout as in the previous sessions, the discussion lagged.

3. Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Dialog on spiritual life journals. As per the requirement in the syllabus students kept a spiritual life journal. One hour was

taken to share journalling insights and experience -- on a volunteer basis. Significant interaction occurred.

Session V January 14, 1987: Self-Examination and Self-Denial

1. Opening Exercise: sentence prayers by each member of the group.
2. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines:

Lecture and discussion of Chapter VI "Self-examination, Self-knowledge, and Self-denial as Spiritual Disciplines in the Letters" The discussion technique used is called "telling the story." A student was selected to start "telling the story" of Chapter VI, then in turn each student had to pick up the story until the content of the chapter had been processed.

3. Practice of Spiritual Disciplines.

Psalm 139 was used as material for meditative self-examination. A copy of the Psalm was distributed on a handout which also included this reflection guide:

- (1) After meditating on this psalm make a list of self-examination questions for yourself. Which ones result in praise? Which ones result in confession of need?
- (2) What self-examination questions would you write for another? Think of a specific person who could be helped by such an exercise.
- (3) After studying Wesley's self-examination exercises in the Letters what questions do you think he might derive from this

psalm and include in a letter to you -- assuming he knew you well?

Volunteer sharing followed this exercise.

Session VI, January 16, 1987: The Interior Life

1. Opening Exercise: Wesley's translation of Fenelon's pilgrim prayer.
2. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines.
 - A. The following discussion guide was used to process the content of Chapter VII, "The Interior Life".
 - (1) Students draw a number 1-8
 - (2) Students with numbers 1,2,3,4,5 are to present the materials in the main sections of the chapter as follows:
 1. The Witness of the Spirit
 2. Communion with God
 3. Holy and Unholy Tempers
 4. Detachment versus Inordinate Affection
 5. Discernment versus Evil Reasoning

Students will have 8 minutes to review their section of the chapter. Each one will then present an explanation, interpretation and evaluation of the material. Use 20th century experiences and observations to illustrate. Also prepare a poster-slogan or a bumper sticker (of the non-blasphemous kind) that symbolizes or states one of the most significant ideas. Make a brief presentation -- 4 minutes. Interact with the Listening Team -- 3 minutes.
 - (3) Students with Numbers 6,7,8, comprise the Listening Team. They will question, challenge, restate and force clarification of each presentation.
 - B. Case Studies: student reports on Wesley's correspondence with Sarah Ryan and Bryan Bury Collins.
3. Practice of Spiritual Discipline

Another Wesleyan "Band Meeting" was held. Sharing centered on the theme of the day -- the interior life.

Session VII, January 19, 1987: Seeing God in Everything and Living for Others

1. Opening Exercise: extemporary prayer and singing a Wesley hymn.
2. The Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines
 - A. Lecture and discussion of chapter VIII "Seeing God in Everything: Particular Providence in the Letters" and Chapter IX "Living for Others: Christian Service as a Spiritual Discipline in the Letters."
 - B. Case Studies: student reports on Wesley's correspondence with Samuel Furly and Philothea Briggs.
3. The Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Exploring the Resources of Christian Conference: an exercise in group building and understanding each other based on these well known reflection questions; (1) Give your full name, including nicknames, and tell us where you lived between the ages of 9-12. (2) Where was your favorite childhood hiding place? (3) How was your home heated in those years? (4) Who or what was the center of human warmth in those years? (5) When, if ever, did God become more than a word to you?

Session VIII, January 21, 1987: Christian Perfection

1. Opening Exercise: a part of the Collect for the Communion Service (from the Book of Common Prayer) which Wesley often cited.
2. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines
 - A. General discussion of Chapter X "Christian Perfection in the Letters."

B. Case Studies: student reports on Wesley's correspondence with Jane Hilton Barton and Alexander Knox.

3. The Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

Exploring Christian conference: an exercise of Christian understanding, communication and fellowship based on sharing answers to these probes:

- (1) When it comes to expressing love and appreciation are you a doer or a talker?
- (2) When it comes to expressing affection or participating in worship are you a giver or a receiver?
- (3) In times of conflict are you a now person or a later person?
- (4) Regarding parental blessing (Isaac, Jacob and other biblical examples) do you see yourself as a blessed child or an unblessed child? (in Jesus Christ we are all blessed)

Session IX, January 23, 1987: Current Trends in Spirituality

1. Opening Exercise: singing and extemporary prayer.
2. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines.

A. Discussion of current trends in spiritual formation and Christian spirituality. The reading assignment was chapters eight through twelve in "A Survey of the Literature for the Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation" (Since condensed to form Chapter XII in this D/P). Discussion proceeded on this plan. Two students were assigned ahead of time to be prepared to speak on one of the five spiritualities treated in the assigned reading. In each discussion team one student spoke on the strength of the assigned spirituality, defended and promoted it. The other student addressed its weaknesses, attacked and critiqued it. Having five spiritualities and only four discussion teams (eight students), the professor had to

address one spirituality. Emphasis was put on what each spirituality might contribute to Wesleyan spirituality.

- B. Case studies: student reports on Wesley's correspondence with Lady Maxwell and Dorothy Furly.

3. Practicing Spiritual Disciplines

The class departed its regular room for a one hour session in the prayer chapel. The session was conducted as nearly as we knew to the early Wesleyan prayer and exhortation meetings.

Session XI, January 28, 1987: What Should a Wesleyan Spirituality Look Like

1. Opening Exercise: The session began early with breakfast together at a local restaurant.

2. Knowledge of Spiritual Disciplines

A. Case Studies: student reports on Wesley's correspondence with Jane Bisson, Peggy Dale, Miss March, and Mary Bishop.

B. Lecture based on an outline of what later became Chapter XIII in this document.

3. Evaluation of the Learning Experiences

The post-test was given along with a student evaluation questionnaire supplied by the Dean's office dealing with the teacher, the teaching, and the course.

A discussion in response to my question, "How can I do it better next time?" ensued. We closed the course by sharing a Wesley prayer for Christian perfection.

The Pre-Test and Post-Test

The pre-test and post-test were given in order to measure perceived progress in Christian spirituality. No scientific claims are made on the

basis of the results. At best the tabulations give a general indication of the progress or regression which the students themselves perceived.

Two types of tabulations are included in this chapter: simple summaries which focus on numerical and percentage gain or loss, and the Chi² Sign Test, a non-parametric statistical analysis. Both methods will be used to measure the perceived growth of the class as a whole, the progress of each individual student, and to evaluate the course in terms of the course objectives.

The pre-test and post-test are displayed in Table 1. Table 2 displays the numerical summary of the class as a whole. It shows that as a group progress was perceived in all the areas covered by the pre-test and post-test except item "8". No progress was perceived during the twenty-three day course in making marriage partners into "mutual spiritual guides." Understanding Wesleyan spirituality showed a 106.5% gain while effective prayer showed the second highest perceived increase. Increased regularity in prayer, small group experiences, and ability to teach others also received high marks. Over all the group scored 2.66 on the pre-test and 3.37 on the post-test for a percentage gain of 26.7%.

Table 3 shows the perceived progress or regression of individual students. Students did not put their names on the pre-test or post-test, but rather created their own four-digit numbers known only to themselves. They did not have their pre-test before them when they took the post-test. As this chart shows, student "2456" perceived revolutionary progress while students "9785" and "3259" believed they made remarkable progress. Four others perceived some growth while one student, "6413" recorded a 3.2% regression.

TABLE 1

SPIRITUAL FORMATION INVENTORY

Do not write your name on this paper. Enter a four digit number here

	Very Satisfied 5	Satisfied 4	Satisfied about half of the time 3	Seldom Satisfied 2	Not at all Satisfied 1	Does not Answer
1. To what degree are you satisfied with your ability to maintain a <u>regular</u> prayer time of 15 minutes a day or more?						
2. How happy are you with the <u>effectiveness</u> of your prayer life (answers to prayer, communication with God, drawing strength, courage, peace from prayer)?						
3. How satisfied are you with your knowledge of the distinctly Wesleyan approach to spirituality?						
4. To what degree are you satisfied with the way you are able to find time for solitude and meditation?						
5. How pleased are you with the amount of time you take for non-professional, non-academic, that is, devotional Bible study?						
6. How would you rate the helpfulness and usefulness of your devotional Bible reading?						
7. How would you measure your success in finding a "Soul Friend" a person (other than a spouse) with whom you can share "anything" about your spiritual life?						
8. If you are married what degree of satisfaction do you experience with the degree to which you and your spouse serve as mutual spiritual guides?						
9. How happy are you with your progress <u>in</u> or <u>towards</u> Christian perfection?						
10. How satisfied are you with your skills in teaching others how to live a spiritual life?						
11. How would you rate your satisfaction with the contribution to your spiritual life being made by the small group(s) of which you are a member?						
12. How satisfied are you with your detachment from the world in favor of attachment to Christ?						
13. How happy are you with your progress in the interior life: attitudes, self-examination, witness of the Spirit, self-surrender, humility, etc.?						
14. Rate your satisfaction with the way and the progress with which Christ is being formed in you.						
15. If you are currently serving as spiritual guide to anyone how please are you with your competence in this task?						
16. How would you rate your ability to give thanks in all things and rejoice in God even during trying times?						
17. In "Living for others" through consecrated service how do you rate what God has been able to do through you?						
18. How pleased are you with the amount and quality of devotional reading you do beyond Bible reading?						
19. How would you rate your present skills in prayer, meditation and other devotional exercises?						
20. In light of your original expectations how would you rate your NTS experience so far in helping you grow spiritually and helping you deepen your spiritual life?						

TABLE 2

Pre-Test and Post-Test Statistical Summary
For the Class as a Group

	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	NUMERICAL GAIN	PERCENTAGE GAIN	RANK BY % GAIN
1. To what degree are you satisfied with your ability to maintain a <u>regular</u> prayer time of 15 minutes a day or more?	2.25	3.13	.88	39.1	6
2. How happy are you with the <u>effectiveness</u> of your prayer life (answers to prayer, communication with God, drawing strength, courage, peace from prayer)?	2.25	3.50	1.25	55.5	2
3. How satisfied are you with your knowledge of the distinctly Wesleyan approach to spirituality?	2.0	4.13	2.13	106.5	1
4. To what degree are you satisfied with the way you are able to find time for solitude and meditation?	2.88	3.0	.12	4	17
5. How pleased are you with the amount of time you take for non-professional, non-academic, that is, devotional Bible study?	2.63	3.0	.27	10.2	15
6. How would you rate the helpfulness and usefulness of your devotional Bible reading?	2.88	3.88	1.0	34.7	8
7. How would you measure your success in finding a "Soul Friend" a person (other than a spouse) with whom you can share "anything" about your spiritual life?	2.0	2.75	.75	37.5	7
8. If you are married what degree of satisfaction do you experience with the degree to which you and your spouse serve as mutual spiritual guides?	3.13	3.13	0	0	20
9. How happy are you with your progress <u>in or towards</u> Christian perfection?	2.88	3.63	.75	26	11
10. How satisfied are you with your skills in teaching others how to live a spiritual life?	2.63	3.88	1.25	47.5	3
11. How would you rate your satisfaction with the contribution to your spiritual life being made by the small group(s) of which you are a member?	2.72	3.86	1.24	45.5	4
12. How satisfied are you with your detachment from the world in favor of attachment to Christ?	2.75	3.0	.25	9	16
13. How happy are you with your progress in the interior life: attitudes, self-examination, witness of the Spirit, self-surrender, humility, etc.?	2.38	3.38	1.0	42	5
14. Rate your satisfaction with the way and the progress with which Christ is being formed in you.	2.75	3.50	.75	27.2	10
15. If you are currently serving as spiritual guide to anyone how please are you with your competence in this task?	3.33	3.40	.07	2	18
16. How would you rate your ability to give thanks in all things and rejoice in God even during trying times?	3.13	3.63	.50	15.9	14
17. In "Living for others" through consecrated service how do you rate what God has been able to do through you?	3.38	3.63	.25	7.3	16
18. How pleased are you with the amount and quality of devotional reading you do beyond Bible reading?	2.15	2.75	.60	27.9	9
19. How would you rate your present skills in prayer, meditation and other devotional exercises?	2.43	3.0	.57	23.4	12
20. In light of your original expectations how would you rate your MTS experience so far in helping you grow spiritually and helping you deepen your spiritual life?	2.75	3.25	.50	18.1	13
GROUP AVERAGES	2.66	3.37	.71	26.7	

TABLE 3

PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST RESULTS ANALYZED
BY INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SCORES

Student Identifica- tion number	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Raw Score: Gain or Loss	Percentage Gain or Loss	Rank
2456	1.95	3.68	+1.73	+88.7	1
9785	2.05	3.16	+1.11	+54%	3
3259	2.50	3.65	+1.15	+46%	2
1234	2.60	3.15	+ .55	+21.1%	5
8745	2.0	2.40	+ .40	+20%	6
0416	3.60	4.30	+ .70	+19.4%	4
9263	2.94	3.26	+ .32	+10.8%	7
6413	3.20	3.10	- .10	-3.2%	8

Table 4 organizes the pre-test and post-test data around the objectives of the course stated in the syllabus. The cognitive objective is nearly always the easiest to achieve and frequently learning goes no farther than intellectual information. It would have been simple enough to inflate the scores of Table 4 by inserting several questions dealing with the cognitive objective. This course, however, was designed to go beyond the intellectual to the affective, existential, and behavioral realms. Therefore, only one question, five percent of the test, has to do with the cognitive objective. It of course registered by far the highest percentage gain: 106.5%.

TABLE 4

NUMERICAL ANALYSIS OF PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST
IN TERMS OF THE OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	NUMERICAL GAIN	PERCENTAGE GAIN	RANK IN ORDER OF %GAIN
AFFECTIVE (Items, 2,5, 9,12,13,14,16)	2.67	3.37	.70	26.4	3
COGNITIVE (Item 3)	2.0	4.13	2.13	106.5	1
PSYCHO-MOTOR (Items 1, 2,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,15, 17,18,19)	2.57	3.34	.77	30	2
OBJECTIVE-RELATED QUESTIONS AS A GROUP	2.56	3.39	.83	32.4	

The affective domain is hard to isolate (objective 2 in the syllabus), but can be observed by what appreciations, feelings and values are put into action without pressure of competition for grades. This course was self-grading. Affectivity, it was decided, appears in items 2, 5, 9, 12, 13, 14, and 16. Clearly psycho-motor concerns overlap into affectivity in some questions. The perceived progress in the affective arena was 26.4%.

No fewer than 13 of the pre-test, post-test questions pertain to the psycho-motor objectives (objectives- 3 and 4 in the syllabus) thus reflecting the concerns of its framer for behavioral results. The students recorded a perceived improvement of 30% in the psycho-motor areas. Over all the objective related questions yielded a gain of 32.4%.

The numerical summaries yield basically positive results. Perceived gain by the group as a whole of 26.7%. Seven out of eight students perceived progress in the practice of Christian spirituality. The objective related parts of the quiz reveal a gain of more than 32%. The data must, however be submitted to more sophisticated analysis.

The Chi-Squared Sign Test

The Chi-Squared Sign Test was selected because when using a differential sliding scale checklist one cannot be certain whether the scale is interval or ratio in nature. This calls for a non-parametric analysis such as the Sign test. Further, the existence of the possibility of many confounding variables mitigate against the use of more powerful statistical methods. Thus the Chi-Squared Sign Test seemed appropriate.

The Sign Test is commonly used to test for the difference in location for two dependent groups. It deals with frequencies and proportions. It is assumed that responses are independent. It is also assumed that no difference equals zero or neutrality.

To prepare the data on the differential sliding scale checklist we must organize it on a positive (+) and negative (-) basis. We have five degrees on the gradient scale: Very satisfied, 5; Satisfied, 4; Satisfied about half of the time, 3; Seldom satisfied, 2; Not at all satisfied, 1. To divide these five scales into one positive category and one negative category we begin by dropping out the middle category which is the 3-value column. This means we are regarding all middle, 3-value responses as neutral. The 5-value column (Very satisfied) and the 4-value column (satisfied) are combined into the positive category. The 2-value column (seldom satisfied) and the 1-value column (Not at all satisfied) form a single negative category. Assuming a normal distribution the expected outcome would be an equal number of responses in each category.

To use the χ^2 Sign Test on our data we must do the following.

1. We must state a null hypothesis for the pre-test and one for the post-test. The null hypothesis for the pre-test is: "the students' religious experiences to this point, including seminary education, have made no

significant difference in their knowledge and practice of Christian spirituality."

The null hypothesis for the post-test is: "The learning experiences in P198T, The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation will not significantly improve the students' knowledge and practice of Christian spirituality."

2. Determine the degrees of freedom (df). Since the respondents could choose only the positive or negative categories the degree of freedom is one (1).

3. For each sub-section tested we must tabulate the expected frequency (fe) and the observed frequency (fo).

4. The degree of confidence for which we will test will be selected in each case to see if the null can be rejected with 90, 95, or 99 percent certainty. The table of X^2 critical values reveals that the X^2 score for each item tested must exceed 6.63 to yield 99% certainty; 3.84 to yield 95% certainty; and 2.70 to yield 90% certainty.

5. Each area of inquiry must be tested by this formula:

$$X^2 = \frac{(|fo - fe| - .5)^2}{fe} + \frac{(|fo - fe| - .5)^2}{fe}$$

Note that since the degree of freedom (df) is one (1) the $-.5^2$ Yates correction factor is added to the standard Chi-squared formula.

Table 5 presents an analysis of the positive, negative and neutral responses of the whole class. It shows that for the pre-test the null hypothesis is established when measured by the X^2 critical value of 6.63, or 99%. The pre-test score could not reject the null at 98% (5.41) either, but if the X^2 critical value level were reduced to 3.84 or 95% the null would be rejected. On the other hand the post-test score rejects the null hypothesis by a wide margin even at the 99% level. This score is a strong

indicator that the students perceived the course to be significantly helpful.

TABLE 5
CHI² ANALYSIS AND SUMMARY OF THE PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

	Responses			Actual X ² Score	Critical X ² Value	Degree of Certainty	Null Hypothesis	
	Pos.	Neg.	Neu.				Estab- lished	Rejec- ted
Pre-Test	35	58	66	4.68	6.63	99%	X	
Post-Test	67	26	67	17.20	6.63	99%		X

Table 6 tells a curious story. Table 5 displayed a quite satisfactory gain for the group as a whole. The individual student X² analysis shows us that the "significant" gain registered by the group was really made by only three of the eight students. These three recorded scores that rejected the null at the convincing 99% level. True seven out of eight recorded improved positive-negative scores, but the X² test shows that four of the gains must be regarded as "not significant." When 62.5% of the students record no significant improvement the success story undergoes considerable qualification. The remarkable perceived improvement by 37.5%, however, is somewhat encouraging. It is also encouraging to note the response to a question informally added to the post-test. It was, "If you were to take this test a year from today do you think you would score higher or lower? All eight answered, "higher." It is hoped that some of the positive practices started in the course will come to fruition in the future lives of the students. How much progress can be made in certain areas of spiritual formation in twenty-three days?

TABLE 6

CHI² ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENT RESPONSES TO THE
PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST

Student ID No.	Responses*			Actual X2 Score	Critical X2 Value	Degree of Certainty	Null Hypothesis	
	Pos.	Neg.	Neu.				Estab- lished	Rejec- ted
1234								
Pre-Test	1	6	13	2.28	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	6	4	10	.10	3.84	95%	X	
2456								
Pre-Test	5	13	2	2.72	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	11	1	9	6.75	6.63	99%		X
3259								
Pre-Test	2	7	11	1.76	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	13	1	6	8.64	6.63	99%		X
6413								
Pre-Test	5	1	14	1.50	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	5	3	12	.12	3.84	95%	X	
8745								
Pre-Test	3	13	4	5.06**	3.84	95%		X**
Post-Test	5	10	5	1.06	3.84	95%	X	
9263								
Pre-Test	5	5	10	0	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	7	4	9	.36	3.84	95%	X	
9785								
Pre-Test	3	10	7	2.76	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	4	3	13	.28	3.84	95%	X	
0416								
Pre-Test	12	1	7	7.68	6.63	99%		X
Post-Test	18	0	2	16.04	6.63	99%		X

* Positive, Negative, Neutral

** This student rejected the null hypothesis by perceiving that his previous religious training and experience had had a significant impact upon him -- a negative impact that kept his score below the unbiased expected frequency.

The χ^2 analysis of the course objectives are charted in Table 7.

The pre-test scores indicate that in regard to the clusters of questions pertaining to the several objectives the students as a group were unable to even come close to rejecting the null hypothesis which stated that their previous life and education had not been significantly effective in terms of knowledge and skill in the practice of spirituality.

TABLE 7

CHI² ANALYSIS OF THE PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST IN TERMS
OF THE OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

OBJECTIVE	Responses		Actual X2 Score	X2Critical Value Score	Degree of Certainty	Null Hypothesis	
	Pos.	Neg.				Estab- lished	Rejec- ted
AFFECTIVE (Items 2,5,9, 12,13,14,16)							
Pre-Test	12	20	1.53	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	23	8	6.32	5.41	98%		X
COGNITIVE (Item 3)							
Pre-Test	1	5	1.50	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	7	1	3.12	3.84	95%	X	
PSYCHO-MOTOR (Items 1,2,3, 4,6,7,8,9,10, 11,15,17,18, 19)							
Pre-Test	26	36	1.30	3.84	95%	X	
Post-Test	46	17	12.44	6.63	99%		X
OBJECTIVE- RELATED QUESTIONS AS A GROUP							
Pre-Test	39	61	4.4	6.3	99%	X	
Post-Test	76	26	11.76	6.3	99%		X

On the other hand the psycho-motor objectives were perceived to have been successful enough to strongly reject the null at the 99% level of certainty. The affective objective rejected the null hypothesis at the 98% confidence level. The cognitive objective failed to reject the null at the 95% level — even with its 106.5% gain in the numerical summary. It received a 7 to 1 positive response, but the X^2 analysis is slow to grant validity, even at this ratio, for so small a sample. Even with this considered the cognitive objective failed by about half the value of the correction factor in the formula.

When the numerical summaries and the X^2 analyses are considered together there is strong evidence which indicates that the course of study was more effective than ineffective.

Student Evaluation of the Teacher,
the Teaching and the Course

An evaluation questionnaire supplied by the Dean's office was given on the last day of the class. This instrument gives the students the opportunity of anonymously evaluating the teacher, the teaching and the course itself. Part I of the instrument is meant to evaluate the teacher and the teaching. Twenty-two factors and a summary question are presented for evaluation. Students rated each factor on a six point Likert scale. The optimal end of the scale is counted as "6" the least desirable end is valued at "1". The highest score possible is "6.0," the lowest "1.0."

Table 8 displays the student's evaluation of the teacher and the teaching. The teacher received the highest rating possible on "knowledge of the subject" (14); "speech communication" (8) "fairness" (7) and "sense of humor" (3). High marks were also recorded on "flexibility," (4) and "interest on the subject" (13). The lowest score, 5.25, was received on "organization" (16) and "motivation-innovation" (20).

A summary question is offered at the end of this part of the questionnaire. The answers to the summary question and the composite average serve as internal checks and balances. Note the similarity in the composite average of items 1-22 which is 5.66 and the summary question score of 5.5.

TABLE 8

STUDENT EVALUATION OF THE TEACHER AND THE TEACHING

Scoring: Students ranked each item on a Likert scale from 1 to 6. Six (6) was the highest ranking; one (1) the lowest.

	SCORE 1-6
1. Is he/she actively helpful when students have difficulty?	5.62
2. Does he appear sensitive to students' feelings and problems?	5.75
3. Does he appear to have a sense of humor?	6.0
4. Was he flexible?	5.87
5. Does he make students feel free to ask questions, disagree, express their ideas, etc.?	5.75
6. Is he tolerant of opposing opinions and willing to recognize the limits of his own knowledge?	5.5
7. Is he fair and impartial in his dealings with the students?	6.0
8. Is his speech adequate for teaching?	6.0
9. Does he exhibit mannerisms which detract from effective presentation of the material?	5.62
10. Does he belittle students?	5.75
11. Does he tell students when they have done particularly well?	5.5
12. Does he dwell upon the obvious?	5.62
13. Is he interested in the subject?	5.87
14. Does he have an extensive, accurate, and up-to-date knowledge of the subject?	6.0
15. Does he use enough examples or illustrations to clarify the material?	5.75
16. Does he present material in a well-organized fashion?	5.25
17. Does he relate material to other fields, present day problems and culture?	5.5
18. Did he follow an outline?	5.37
19. Is he innovative and creative in presenting course material?	5.62
20. Does he creatively present course material to motivate speculation, synthesis, evaluation and innovation in student responses?	5.25
21. Does he present an adequate theological basis for material conveyed?	5.62
22. Does he identify and give possible solutions to theological problems raised by course material?	5.5

SUMMARY OF TABLE 8

Composite average of student rankings, items 1-22	5.66
Summary Question: "Considering Everything how do you rate this teacher?"	5.5

Table 9 presents the students' evaluation of the course itself. The composite rating of the course was 5.53 out of a possible 6.0. The aspects of the course receiving the highest markings (5.85) were "fairness in grading" and the textbook (which was written by the instructor). The "amount of work" question drew the lowest mark (5.0). Several students believed too much work was required. The summary question yielded an over-all rating for the course of 5.71.

TABLE 9

STUDENT EVALUATION OF COURSE: THE WESLEYAN WAY TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Students ranked the components of the course on a 1-6 Likert scale. Six (6) was the highest possible score; one (1) the lowest. Six questions and a summary question are charted.

	SCORE 1-6
1. Are the objectives of the course clear?	5.57
2. Is the amount of work required appropriate for the credit received?	5.0
3. Were the assignments clearly defined, reasonable and coordinated with class work?	5.42
4. Was the assigned reading difficult?	5.5
5. Are the grades assigned fairly?	5.85
6. How would you rate the contribution of the textbook to the course?	5.85

SUMMARY OF TABLE 9

Composite score: items 1-6	5.53
Summary Question: "Considering all of the above qualities which are applicable (including others that you added), how would you rate this course?"	5.71

The scores recorded in the preceding paragraphs indicate that the students in the course, *The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation*, considered it to be much more of a success than a failure.

How To Do It Better

Teaching a new course is usually a learning experience for the teacher whether the students learn anything or not. The responses of the students to the evaluation instruments at a buzz session at the end of the course on "how to do it better" and my own reflection indicate some ways to improve the course the next time it is taught.

1. It may be advisable to narrow the scope of the course and try to do fewer things more thoroughly. The version I developed in this was a "survey" of Christian spirituality in the Letters.

2. It would be worthwhile to consider making *The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation* a three semester hour course rather than two.

3. A course like PM198T probably should be over a whole semester rather than in an intensive short term like the January Interterm at Nazarene Theological Seminary. The heightened pace of an intensive course, in my judgment, conspires against the reflection on and repeated practice of the new spiritual disciplines being introduced.

4. The class functioned as one small group in all the "Christian conference" activities. Though there were only nine persons interacting,

even smaller groups would have been more desirable, or so the students indicated. Perhaps Wesley was correct in his belief that the preferred "band" size was four or five persons.

5. The students liked the balance between content and practice, but they were probably correct in saying that they were expected to read more than they could realistically achieve. Perhaps precisely limited reading assignments would be in order.

The students also indicated that some things were done correctly. They appreciated the freedom to speak openly without reserve and without disguise, the mutual vulnerability between student and teacher, the combination of content and practice, and the group dynamic approach to processing content. All of these, it is hoped, will be preserved and the preceding adjustments added to the next edition of the course.

For Further Study

A major portion of this project has been, according to its design, descriptive. A great deal of profitable study still beckons. This project has articulated the spirituality of the Letters as analyzed by one person. It is hoped that my conclusions and interpretations will be criticized and verified or modified as other scholars delve into the Letters. Perhaps their interest might be piqued in response to the articles and the book based on this project that are in the process. Further, examination of Wesley's letters will come if Frank Baker, now nearing his eighty-second birthday, is able to complete the remaining volumes (only one is now in print) of his edition of the letters in the Oxford/Abingdon edition of The Works of John Wesley. Baker's research has turned up seven or eight hundred previously unpublished Wesley letters. Any future spirituality built on the letters must include these.

Further, any Wesleyan spirituality based only on the Letters cannot be the ultimate Wesleyan spirituality. Other documents must be melded into the foundation sources. Serious gaps can occur and be perpetuated if only the Letters are allowed to speak. For example, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper had a more significant role in Wesleyan spirituality than is evidenced in the Letters. The sermons, essays, the journals and especially the hymns must be consulted for their contribution to spiritual formation and spirituality. The sort of work done in this project with the Letters must be done with all the available primary sources.

In addition, to serve the Wesleyan spirit the needs of this generation, the contributions of current spiritualities, the resources of the Christian faith, the heritage of the Wesleyan faith tradition, and the contribution of culture must be combined to create a truly Wesleyan spirituality for this age. And once synthesized it cannot be set in concrete, codified, and legalistically applied. New needs, and contributions of culture, emerging social conditions, continued theological dialogue, new emphases from among the biblical and traditional resources of the Christian faith demand an on-going synthesis. In that sense the shaping of Christian spirituality in the Wesleyan spirit is a task that though never quite completed beckons one onward with much promise toward renewed goals.

Putting the heart of the discoveries of this project in popular form for the possible benefit of typical lay Christians is a significant part of the further study needed. This idea forms part of the purpose behind the article prepared for The Preacher's magazine which serves sixteen thousand clergy (mostly pastors) and the book planned for Beacon Hill Press.

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¹ In listing works included in A Christian Library I have used two forms. When the name of the original author is included in the title of Wesley's abridgement the work is listed with Wesley as author. When the original author's name is not included in the title of Wesley's abridgement the work is listed with Wesley named as editor.

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