

## Crisis, Process

by Jonathan Evans

John Wesley discovered righteousness not mystical quietism, nor in work-righteousness but by encountering the Holy Spirit. (Leslie R. Marsten, "The Crisis-Process Issue in Wesleyan Thought" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Vol. 3 Spring 1969), 3 - 4.

On May 24, 1738 John Welsey received an assurance of faith at an Aldersgate society meeting, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken my sin, even mine." [John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Journal May 24, 1738 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing House, 1986) 1:103.]

"The first sowing of this seed I cannot conceive to be other than instantaneous; whether I consider experience, or the word of God, or the very nature of the thing; however, I contend not for a circumstance, but the substance: If you can attain it another way, do. Only see that you do attain it; for if you fall short, you perish everlastingly." (Wesley, *Works* 8:48)

"And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit: there is a *real* as well as a *relative* change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel "the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"; producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money, together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper; in a word, changing the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into "the mind which was in Christ Jesus." (Wesley, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" *Works*

This experience became the initiation point of holiness in Wesley's "way of salvation," *via salutis*, also referred to as the **order of salvation**.

Somehow, he [Wesley] could never grasp the fact that people, formed by the traditions of Latin Christianity, were bound to understand "perfection" as perfectus (perfected)—i.e., as a finished state of completed growth, ne plus ultra! (nothing beyond). For him, certainly since his own discoveries of the early fathers, "perfection" meant "perfecting" (teleiosis [in Greek]), with further horizons of love and participation in God always opening up beyond any given level of spiritual progress. (Albert Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* pp73).

Wesleyan theology was outworked in the participation in the means of grace and the Methodist structures. Snyder observes that examining Wesley's organization, particularly class meetings of Methodists are important in understanding his views on sanctification. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 149.

From the time of our being born again, the **gradual work** of sanctification takes place.

We are enabled “by the Spirit” to “mortify the deeds of the body,” of our evil nature; and as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God. We go from grace to grace, while we are careful to “abstain from all appearance of evil,” and are “zealous of good works,” as we have opportunity, doing good to all men; while we walk in all His ordinances blameless, therein worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth; while we take up our cross, and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead to God. It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification; for a full salvation from all our sins—from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief; or, as the Apostle expresses it, “go on unto perfection.” John Wesley Wesley, Works, 6:46.

Synthesize crisis and process:

"It need not, therefore, be affirmed over and over, and proved by forty texts of Scripture, either that most men are perfected in love at last, that there is a **gradual work** of God in the soul, or that, generally speaking, it is a long time, even many years, before sin is destroyed. All this we know: But we know likewise, that God may, with man's good leave, 'cut short his work,' in whatever degree he pleases, and do the usual work of many years in a moment. He does so in many instances; and yet there is a gradual work, both before and after that moment: So that one may affirm the work is gradual, another, it is instantaneous, without any manner of contradiction. (John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*)

This is what he says in his sermon on “The Scripture Way of Salvation”:

1 Thessalonians 5:11: “Encourage one another and build each other up,” a process of encouragement in the spiritual pilgrimage of spiritual life development.

“Going on to perfection” has a consistent and clear end in view: 1) love (of God and neighbor), 2) trust (in Christ and the sufficiency of His grace), and 3) joy (upwelling in the heart from the “prevenience” of the indwelling Spirit). This is “holy living”: to love God (inward holiness) and neighbor (outward holiness) with all your heart, to trust securely in Christ’s merits, and to live joyously “in the Spirit” (Albert Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* pp.72)