

## **Wesley's Wholistic Salvation** **And Its Implications For Personal and Social Holiness**

by Major Ron Millar

John Wesley understood salvation in holistic terms. It was all-inclusive. In its fullest sense, it was neither insular nor individualistic. Therefore, doctrine could never be perceived in isolation from the reality of human life, and theology could never be divorced from the human condition. Midst the theological climate of Wesley's era, he understood the danger of theology becoming a sterile, insular academic exercise reserved for the intellectual or spiritual elite. Theology in and of itself could become aloof and distant from the realities of common every-day human existence, and by extension, so could religion. It could fall into the fruitless pursuit of pandering to questions that secular culture was simply not asking, and be cast aside by the very society it was meant to serve. It could become irrelevant simply because it had lost touch with reality. It could become an end in itself.

To avoid this tendency, Wesley took a holistic approach to the study of theological truth. He established certain criteria against which any statement or action of Christian faith would be measured. These he identified as Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience – what Albert Outler later labeled as the 'Wesleyan quadrilateral'. The Bible was always the foundational authority for Christian faith and practice. Tradition helped bring light and insight as the church's 'memory', but always within the context of Scripture. God's gift of reason helped uphold reasonable interpretation and sensible application of God's revelation. Experience served to verify Biblical concepts within the human spirit, but always consistent with scriptural scrutiny. Except for the primacy of Scripture, none of these were taken in isolation from each other. Each was complimentary to the other. These elements became the standards of doctrine for determining whether a particular specific claim was authentically and credibly Christian.

This holistic approach to theology and doctrine meant that Wesley became established as an intensely practical theologian. Reverend Garry Haller suggests that "a lot of theology in 18th century had a top line: was it spiritual and aesthetically pleasing? Much of it had a middle line: was it intellectually correct? Wesley's theology had a bottom line: does it work?"<sup>1</sup> As Wesley understood and practiced theological discovery and debate, the defining task of the theologian was not so much to formulate elaborate systems, but to help every-day Christians discover, shape, and live out a worldview consistent with their faith claims. "The quintessential practitioner of theology was not the detached academic theologian; it was the pastor/theologian who was actively shepherding Christian disciples in the world."<sup>2</sup> Theology was indeed a social matter.

Theology done in this holistic way inevitably spawned significant implications for the church, and for society, because neither could remain unaffected by it. Individual

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<sup>1</sup> Haller, Gary. "Xtreme Wesley: 'No Holiness But Social Holiness!': Available from <http://www.grandrapidsfumc.org/Sermons/2000326.htm>; Internet accessed July 3, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Maddox, Randy L. 1994. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 17.

Christians could no longer hide behind the safety and sanctity of a personal pursuit for piety. The church could no longer retreat to the security of cathedrals and catechisms, unaware and unmoved by the needs of the world surrounding it. Isolation and blissful detachment from issues and conditions affecting humankind could no longer sustain ecclesiastical credibility. Passive private piety became inconsistent with true obedience to divine purpose. Religion could not be isolated from reality. Theology thus taken seriously required change in people, in organizations, and in society itself. "Wesley believed that theology was intimately related to Christian living aimed to transform personal life and social conditions. The message of the gospel is located in the context of people's lives."<sup>3</sup>

This holistic view of doctrine was imbued with what Ralph C. Wood calls "three indispensable qualities of Methodism: orthodoxy (right belief), orthopraxy (right practice), and orthopathy (true feeling)."<sup>4</sup> Runyon coined these terms, and defines them beautifully. "Orthodoxy refers to ... ideas and opinions that conform to those doctrines that are considered normative for the Christian tradition."<sup>5</sup> Orthopraxy refers to "'right practice' that puts belief into action."<sup>6</sup> Orthopathy is "from the Greek *ortho* (right) plus *pathos* (feelings, affections, and in the larger sense, *experience*), the new sensitivity to and participation in spiritual reality that mark genuine faith."<sup>7</sup>

Clarity and conviction about the foundational beliefs of Christian faith and practice were essential to the Methodist movement. Lying at the heart of Wesley's orthodoxy was the doctrine of the universal atonement. Some protestant reformers had become convinced that the atonement was limited to an elect who were predestined to salvation. But Wesley persisted vehemently that the salvation wrought on the Cross was available for every living human soul. There was no limit to salvation, and no soul beyond redemption. This universal redemption had significant implications for evangelism because it meant that no Christian could legitimately ignore the spiritually lost. No true believer could abdicate responsibility to witness. Wesley himself spent his life on a torrid pace of preaching and evangelizing.

But orthodoxy to be real and relevant needed an outlet. Faith without works is dead, and Wesley recognized that orthodoxy alone is not sufficient. Orthopraxy is required both in personal piety and in social action. "If orthodoxy is the root of the Wesleyan witness, then orthopraxy is its fruit. The Wesleys taught that right doctrine issues in right practice. It is impossible to believe that we have been justified by Christ's atoning

<sup>3</sup> Tangunan, Wilfredo. "John Wesley." *Dictionary of Modern Western Theology I* (1998-1999). Available from

[http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WierdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_430\\_wesley.htm](http://people.bu.edu/wwildman/WierdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_430_wesley.htm): Internet accessed July 4, 2002, 14.

<sup>4</sup> Wood, Ralph C. "Lost In Wonder, Love, and Praise: The Witness Of The Wesleys." *Christian Ethics Today* (June 2002 Issue Online). Available from

<http://www.christianethicstoday.com/Issue/028/028%May-June-200.htm>: Internet accessed July 3, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Runyon, Theodore. 1998. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 147.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 149.

death, they insisted, without living a sanctified life."<sup>8</sup> For the Methodists, the ultimate solution to the human condition was sanctification, because without holiness, no one will see the Lord. Although justification and regeneration are distinct, they are inseparable in terms of complete salvation, just as justification and sanctification are distinct but inseparable. Wesley asserted: "... at the same time a man is justified, sanctification properly begins. For when he is justified, he is 'born again,' 'born from above,' 'born of the Spirit,' which although it is not (as some suppose) the whole process of sanctification, is doubtless the gate of it."<sup>9</sup> For Wesley, justification and regeneration are prerequisites, assumed, and presupposed in sanctification.

Wesley's concern to consistently maintain this holistic understanding of salvation is unmistakable and foundational to his orthopraxy. Randy L. Maddox points out: "This concern is evident in the way he weaves together the juridical emphasis of salvation as forgiveness (justification) with the therapeutic emphasis of salvation as healing the various faculties or dimensions of the human soul (sanctification)"<sup>10</sup> When salvation is viewed in these holistic terms, ministry to the physical needs of people is not seen only as a key to offering them salvation, but as truly a vital and integral part of Christ's saving work. There is a clear connection between holiness of life and works of love.

For Wesley, these are the necessary elements for sanctification: "First of all piety... Secondly, all works of mercy ... feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison or sick ... This is the repentances which are necessary to full sanctification."<sup>11</sup> It is striking how consistently Wesley connects engagements in ministry to and with the poor ('works of mercy') to the existence of an authentic sanctified life. Therefore, social involvement was an inseparable component of Wesley's keystone doctrine of sanctification. "In all this we see that one central aspect of Wesley's rationale for connecting the reality of sanctification (or Christlikeness) in our lives to our active ministry to and with the poor was his conviction of the wholistic nature of salvation – as modeled by Christ."<sup>12</sup>

But there is one more aspect of this holistic salvation that has social implications. Orthodoxy alone was not the complete answer any more than orthopraxy alone was sufficient. "Believing the right things, plus doing the right things, still does not add up to what Wesley considers essential."<sup>13</sup> There must be a third factor. For Wesley, orthodoxy (the universal atonement), and orthopraxy (works of mercy driven by a holy life) were maintained and sustained by what Wood calls orthopathy, "a true feeling of God's presence."<sup>14</sup> Acknowledgement of the emotive aspect of holistic salvation finds its source in John Wesley's own conversion. While reading Luther's commentary on Romans, Wesley felt his heart 'strangely warmed'. That radical transformation of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Wesley, John. "On God's Vineyard" (107). Available from: [wysiwyg://14/http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-107.stm](http://www.gbmg-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-107.stm): Internet accessed July 15, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Maddox, Randy L. "Visit The Poor." *TF Views*, January 2001, 42.

<sup>11</sup> Wesley, John. "Social Involvement"

<sup>12</sup> Maddox. "Visit The Poor", 43.

<sup>13</sup> Runyon, 149.

<sup>14</sup> Wood, 6.

personal, inward spiritual renewal is what stoked the fires of revival that raged through a nation and eventually gave birth to a global Methodist movement. There was no denying the force and effect of it any more than one can deny one's own conversion.

However, there was inherent danger in this emphasis on feeling. People do need to truly experience God to the very depth of their emotions, and really know in their heart that they are born again. But 'feeling' alone can fool us and lead us into all kinds of emotional and spiritual pitfalls. In Wesley's arsenal of argument, there were three ways to keep this wonderful praiseworthy feeling from getting out of kilter. First, orthopathy was always viewed in light of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, as an aspect of accurate and authentic Christian faith and practice, and not as separate from it. This holistic outlook kept all three in check. Secondly, Wesley knew and understood the importance of the internal disciplines of prayer, Scripture, fasting, meditation, and corporate worship if the initial feeling experienced at conversion was to grow into a full-blown profound love and adoration for God and humanity. Thirdly, there was a strong social element to orthopathy. As Wood suggests, "Wesley's orthopathy was profoundly sacramental."<sup>15</sup> Sacraments were designed with the full intention of being celebrated in community with other believers. "*Orthopathic experience is social*. If Christian faith is brought into existence by receiving divine mercy and love, it cannot be contained within the isolated individual. What is received demands further expression; that is its nature."<sup>16</sup> It was clearly a social spiritual exercise.

In addition to Wesley's doctrine, the Wesleyan 'quadrilateral, and the 'indispensable' qualities, there were three other ways in which this holistic salvation espoused by Wesley with their accompanying social implications can be described. First, this holistic salvation includes all of creation. "Wesley understood God's goal as the transformation of this present age, restoring health and holiness to God's creation. God therefore enters into the life of the world to renew the creature after the divine image and the creation after the divine will."<sup>17</sup> God is Lord over all creation, and He is concerned with the redemption of a fallen world, just as He is concerned with the redemption of a fallen humanity. For Wesley, knowing that God highly values and deeply cherishes creation means that humankind must take its responsibility for its ordained leadership and management of it seriously. In his sermon "On the Education of Children", Wesley counsels parents to teach children to respect creation:

*"[Parents] will not allow [their children] to hurt or give pain to anything that has life. They will not permit them to rob birds' nests, much less to kill anything without necessity; not even snakes, which are as innocent as worms, or toads, which, notwithstanding their ugliness, and the ill name they lie under, have been proved over and over to be as harmless as flies."*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Runyon, 163.

<sup>17</sup> Runyon, 169.

<sup>18</sup> Wesley, John. "On the Education Of Children". Available from: [wysiwyg://3/http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-095.stm](http://3/http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-095.stm): Internet accessed July 15, 2002.

As for children, so for adults. Christians cannot be concerned with redemption in such a way that their Christianity means that they withdraw from God's creation. For Wesley, then, sanctifying faith cannot be divorced from responsible treatment and care for the environment. He describes human misuse of the earth – seeing it apart from its existence in God and God's life in it, as 'practical atheism'. Holiness means caring for God's world. This has enormous ecological implications for the church today.

Secondly, this holistic salvation includes all of humanity, and is grounded in the twin doctrines of creation and redemption. "This means that all people are made in the *imago Dei* and through Christ, act for the salvation of others – no human person falls outside the ambit of Christian concern and responsibility (grace)."<sup>19</sup> Wesley illustrates his understanding of the complementary nature of the relationship between the order of creation and the order of redemption through grace as forming the basis for Christian concern for all people (no matter how depraved, disreputable, or degraded) by declaring this testimony: "A poor wretch cries to me for alms: I look, and see him covered with dirt and rags. But through these I see one that he has an immortal spirit made to know, and love, and dwell with God to eternity. I honour him for his Creator's sake."<sup>20</sup> If God is God, and humankind is made in His image – natural, political, and moral image – then each person is significant. Every individual has value. Every human being has a soul to be saved and a life to be restored to that image. To live as a holy, sanctified Christian, then, meant taking into account the fact that our neighbours – including the poor, the slaves, the sick, the unlearned, the unemployed, the addicted, the elderly, those in prison – all are made in the image of God. True holy living required that they be treated as such. This has enormous social implications for the church today.

Thirdly, this holistic salvation includes the entire person – body, mind, and will. One way in which Wesley defined this notion was in terms of the necessity for the Christian to experience and evidence both inward and outward holiness. Inward holiness involved a total commitment to God by centering one's life completely on Him. It meant a genuine experience of regeneration that drove the Christian to personal devotion deepened by prayer and spiritual discipline that was profound and dynamic. It meant transformation of the heart. Outward holiness demanded that the daily life of the Christian would generate clear evidence of the inward change. It meant not only a life of personal piety, but of generous giving, sacrificial service, and continual obedience to God's will. Wesley believed that inward and outward holiness were inseparable. They were two aspects of one holiness. Inward holiness without outward holiness turns the life internally to an existence of empty piety. Outward holiness without inward holiness can result in good works being done for purely humanistic motives.

Another way in which Wesley defines this notion is in terms of 'Christian perfection' or 'perfect love'. Dr. Victor Shepherd states: "Love to God and neighbour was, however,

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<sup>19</sup> Nix, Echol Lee Jr. "Themes In Wesley's Theological Understanding." *Dictionary of Modern Western Theology*. Available from:

[http://pepeople.bu.edu/wwildman/WierdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_430\\_wesley.htm](http://pepeople.bu.edu/wwildman/WierdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_430_wesley.htm): Internet accessed July 4, 2002, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Wesley, John. "On Pleasing Men". *Works*, VII, 145.

the essence of Christian perfection. Any notion of inner sanctity which undervalued human fellowship Wesley regarded as a contradiction of God's work."<sup>21</sup> It could be said with some level of accuracy that one word summarizes the theology of Wesley – he defined what true religion was in terms of love. But sincere love for God by its very nature issued forth a sincere love for humanity. Wesley was well aware of the pietists, who claimed to love God, but felt no obligation to express that love to their brother. He was equally conscious of the deists who claimed to love their brother, but made no confession of love for God. For Wesley, both of these options were not only unthinkable, but unbiblical – even unchristian. He insisted that Scripture describes a God who demands both. One of Wesley's favorite verses was Galatians 5:6: "The one thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." Shepherd concludes: "While love for God was logically prior, love for God always implied love for the neighbour who was alike the beneficiary of God's love."<sup>22</sup>

In fact, it was this love for God and love for your neighbour that was the defining mark of a Methodist. John Wesley himself outlines this with clarity and power in his sermon entitled "The Character Of A Methodist":

"Who is a Methodist, according to your own account? I answer: A Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;" one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; ... His heart is ever lifted up to God, at all times and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. ... "

"And while he thus always exercises his love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, 'That he who loveth God, loveth his brother also.' ... His heart is full of love to all mankind. ... As he has time, he "does good unto all men;" unto neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies: And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison;" but much more does he labour to do good to their souls."

"These are the principles and practices of our sect; these are the marks of a true Methodist."<sup>23</sup>

In that same article he clarifies that though these qualities were to be found in every Methodist, they were not unique to Methodism, but were indeed characteristics that should be apparent in every Christian. This has enormous lifestyle implications for the church today.

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<sup>21</sup> Shepherd, Victor. "John Wesley and Sanctification". Available from: <http://www.victoshepherd.on.ca/Wesley/john.htm>: Internet accessed July 3, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Wesley, John. "The Character of a Methodist". Available from: <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/cahrmeth.stm>: Internet accessed July 6, 2002.

For Wesley, the fulfillment of these principles demanded two things. First, it required the spiritual renewal of the individual through personal holiness expressed through life within the Christian community of faith. Secondly, it insisted upon the renewal of society through social holiness expressed through Christian social service to society.

Perhaps it was Wesley's pre-conversion experience with the Holy Club at Oxford that sparked this notion, but he knew that personal growth was a corporate matter. He was concerned that new converts would not be endangered in their faith by being isolated from the strength of the community of faith. He wanted to ensure that they were protected from incorrect doctrine, and were properly and intentionally nurtured. He understood that spiritual development was not automatic, but that it required training, instruction, discipline, accountability, and plenty of support. One simply could not go it alone as a Christian, and grow. Perhaps this is what prompted him to write so emphatically on this issue. "Christianity is essentially a social religion", says Wesley, "and to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it. ... When I say this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other men."<sup>24</sup>

Historical evidence of the profound truth of those words can be seen by comparing the development of the ministries initiated by Wesley and George Whitfield. Whitfield was a contemporary of Wesley, and was a powerful preacher whose voice thundered out the Gospel to multitudes of eager hearts who responded in droves to his preaching. He preceded his revival campaigns with an aggressive and prolific letter-writing ministry, and hundreds came to his meetings as a result. Wesley was also a remarkably effective preacher who traveled probably a half million miles on horseback as an itinerant evangelist. Both founded Christian movements. Both made remarkable contributions to the development of the Christian church. Yet despite accomplishing much good for the Kingdom, and although a residue of influence encouraged some important ministries, the movement founded by Whitfield faded out. The Wesleyan revival, on the other hand, experienced explosive growth and gave rise to the global Methodist movement and numerous holiness denominations. What was the reason? Perhaps it was because Wesley understood the social dimension of spiritual growth. Personal piety and spiritual growth simply could not be left to chance. By organizing converts and converted alike into groups designed to move its members on to spiritual maturity, it minimized the risk that followers of Christ would drift from their new found faith, and maximized their potential of moving on to a life of personal holiness.

Using his genius for organization, Wesley established a series of fellowship groups that provided instruction, correction, accountability, and a means of spiritual support and direction. This strategy restored the close fellowship and intimate sense of community that had been lost when rural villages were victimized by the mass migration of country populations to the city in the wave of the urbanization that was part of eighteenth

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<sup>24</sup> Wesley, John. "Upon Our Lord's Sermon On The Mount – Discourse IV". *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*. Ed. Albert C. Outler & Richard P. Heitzenrater. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1991, 195.



century industrialization in Britain. In the turmoil of this transition, Wesley lashed out at church leaders who criticized him for his efforts, with a caustic condemnation of his own, exposing what he perceived to be a blatant lack of care and concern within the community of faith:

"Which of those Christians had any such fellowship with these? Who watched over them in love: Who marked their growth in grace? Who advised and exhorted them from time to time? Who prayed with them and for them, as they had need? This and this alone is Christian fellowship: But, alas! Where is it to be found? Look east or west, north or south; name what parish you please: Is this Christian fellowship there? Rather, are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand? What Christian connexion is there between them? What intercourse in spiritual things? What watching over each other's souls? What bearing of one another's burdens?"<sup>25</sup>

In taking this strong stand, Wesley claimed that he was basing his action on the spirit of and example of early Christianity "where catechumens were advised to "watch over each other" and where more experienced Christians "took account of their names ... that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, according to their necessities."<sup>26</sup>

The fellowship groups took three main forms. The first is the class meeting which was comprised of a group of ten to twelve persons guided by an assigned leader, whose responsibility was not only to lead the group, but to visit each member of the class weekly. Although these weekly meetings were compulsory, a member needed only to demonstrate a desire for salvation. No other spiritual prerequisite was required for membership. Groups were widely divergent in their makeup. They were a place where rich and poor, educated and illiterate, employee and employer gathered to discuss spiritual matters as peers and as equals. Members even included people from other denominations.

The second fellowship group was the Band. These were smaller groups of four to six people, and because of the intimate level of the discussions, these were usually gender-specific gatherings. Although every Methodist was a member of a class, participation in a band was voluntary and in fact it is estimated that about one in five Methodists chose to be part of a band. No leader was assigned, and there was mutual accountability, and a high level of trust. It was expected that band members witnessed to a confession of faith and an assurance of salvation. Often, it was in the bands where class leaders had opportunity to be held accountable and to be upheld spiritually. Wesley's intent was that the band's purpose be based on James 5:16: "Confess you faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." A brutal honesty often prevailed in the discussions as spiritual issues were unwrapped. At each meeting, each member was required to submit to the spiritual scrutiny of the band by responding in complete honesty to the following four questions: "1. What known sins have you committed since

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<sup>25</sup> Wesley, John. "Extracts from Wesley's, A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists". Available from: <http://www.wesleyanforum.org/afws/regionalevents/people.htm>: Internet accessed July 6, 2002, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Runyon, 122-23.



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?"<sup>27</sup>

The third main group was the select society. This was a smaller group of about three or four people and was designed for those who were most committed to pursuing after entire sanctification. In addition to the accountability experienced in the bands, members of these select societies also engaged in financial support for the poor and needy through rigorous self-denial and self-sacrifice, and there was a strong disciplinary element.

For Wesley, Christianity was anything but a 'solitary religion'. Holistic salvation, pursuit of personal piety, and growth in the life of holiness was very much a community effort in early Methodism. And how well did it work? Just ask Wesley himself. "We introduced Christian fellowship where it was utterly destroyed. And the fruits of it have been peace, joy, love, and zeal for every good word and work."<sup>28</sup>

However, just as Christianity was not a solitary religion, and had social implications through the classes, bands, and societies, holiness and personal piety was not a solitary pursuit, and had social implications through good works and social service. Wesley felt that holiness that did not make a difference was not holiness at all. Sanctity of life that did nothing to transform society was empty pietism. In 1739, the year after his conversion, John Wesley wrote these prophetic words in the Preface to "Hymns and Sacred Poems":

*"The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. "Faith working by love" is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. "This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also;" and we manifest our love "by doing good unto all men..."*<sup>29</sup>

For Wesley, true holiness results in social action. The Wesleyan message is one of perfect love, a love that is not only made perfect toward God, but toward others also. Just as holiness will manifest itself by purity of thought and behaviour, so it is legitimized and recognized through genuine concern for the spiritual and social well being. Armed with this life transforming conviction, Wesley employed the same gifts he used to establish the system of classes, bands, and societies, and set them to work to change the world.

Certainly, conditions in England during the time of Wesley needed help. Dr. Brook Thelander records Wes Tracy's graphic account of what life was like for many unfortunate people:

*"When the storm that was the industrial revolution howled through the winter of England's world in the eighteenth century, it blew humanity into the cities like maple*

<sup>27</sup> Wesley, John. "The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies (Extracts)". Available from: <http://www.wesleyanforum.org/afws/regionalevents/rules.htm>: Internet accessed July 6, 2002, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Wesley, John. "Extracts from Wesley's, A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists", 2.

<sup>29</sup> Adams, Mark. "Wesley and the Social Gospel". Available from: <http://www.antchurch.com/sermon/WeleysSocialGospel.html>: Internet accessed July 4, 2002, 1.

*leaves before a cold November wind. And it left them, like leaves, piled in random heaps. Housing conditions were such that ten persons per unfurnished room was common. Diseases like typhoid, smallpox, dysentery, and cholera went nearly unchecked. Horse manure was sometimes piled fourteen feet high on both sides of London's streets. In the larger cities, graveyard operators maintained "poor holes" – large common graves left open until the daily flow of corpses finally filled them. Every sixth building in London was an alehouse. Gambling and gin drinking became national pastimes. Sporting events included cockfighting, bullbaiting, and hangings. Children had a choice of either entering the sweatshops or living on the streets. Only one child in twenty-five attended school of any kind. ("John Wesley: Friend of the Poor," Herald of Holiness 80:2 [1991])"<sup>30</sup>*

One main point of attack was to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Wesley challenged his followers to put their personal holiness to work and get personally involved with helping the poor. One way to do that was to visit them. "One great reason why the rich, in general have so little sympathy for the poor, is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is, that, according to the common observation, one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of the knowing it; and then plead their voluntary ignorances as an excuse for their hardness of heart."<sup>31</sup> His message was clear. Holiness demanded that Christians not be satisfied to help at a distance – that they do not 'pass on the other side'.

Another way to put holiness to work in order to help the poor was for Christians to live a life of self-denial. Wesley believed that where your treasure is, there your heart is also. Therefore, for genuine holiness to mean anything at all, it had to invade the pocket book. This concept had enormous implications on how Wesley instructed Methodists to make and spend their money. He outlines his teaching in a wonderful sermon on the topic entitled simply, "The Use of Money". His first instruction was to 'gain all you can'. He says: "Here we may speak like the children of the world: We meet them on their ground. And it is our bounden duty to do this: We ought to gain all we can gain."<sup>32</sup> Wesley cautioned that this 'gaining' was to be done without compromising holiness of life – 'without buying gold too dear', 'without hurting our mind any more than our body', 'without hurting our neighbour', and 'without hurting our neighbour in his body'. "Gain all you can, by common sense, by using in your business all the understanding which God has given you."<sup>33</sup> His second instruction was to "Save all you can. Do not throw

<sup>30</sup> Thelander, Brook. "Invitation To A Journey". Available from: <http://www.epworthchapelonthegreen.org/wesleystudies/journey/invitation12.html>: Internet accessed July 2, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Wesley, John. "On Visiting The Sick." Available from: <http://www.godrules.net/library/wsermons/wsormons098.htm>: Internet accessed July 15, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Wesley, John. "The Use Of Money.". Available from: <http://www.ccel.org/w/wesley/sermons/sermons-html/serm-050.html>: Internet accessed July 7, 2002, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 4.

the precious talent into the sea: Leave that folly to heathen philosophers."<sup>34</sup> Spending habits needed to reflect a holy life. Money was not to be wasted on gratifying the 'desires of the flesh', 'the desire of the eye', 'the pride of life', or by giving it as an inheritance for others to throw it away.

It seems that the Methodists were quite effective in fulfilling these first two instructions. Many of them became quite wealthy and well to do. But it was the third instruction that truly tested the mettle of the depth of holiness in the heart of the Methodist. "Give all you can."<sup>35</sup>, says Wesley. Here again, he provided instructions on how to do it.

"First, provide things needful for yourself; food to eat, raiment to put on, whatever nature moderately requires for preserving the body in health and strength. Secondly, provide these for your wife, your children, your servants, or any others who pertain to your household. If when this is done there be an overplus left, then "do good to them that are in the household of faith." If there be an overplus still, "as you have opportunity, do good unto all men ... For all that is laid out in this manner is really given to God. You "render unto God the things that are God's" not only by what you give to the poor, but also by that which you expend in providing things needful for yourself and your household."<sup>36</sup>

To further put the spending of money into the context of a holy life expended for the benefit of the poor through a life of self-denial, Wesley challenged Methodists to ask these four probing question as a test as to their attitude toward their wealth and how they were using it:

*"(1.) In expending this, am I acting according to my character? Am I acting herein, not as a proprietor, but as a steward of my Lord's goods? (2.) Am I doing this in obedience to his word? In what Scripture does he require me so to do? (3.) Can I offer up this action, this expense, as a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ? (4.) Have I reason to believe that for this very work I shall have a reward at the resurrection of the just?"*<sup>37</sup>

So seriously did Wesley take this principle to heart that he applied it to his own life in a remarkable way. At the height of his popularity and fame, Wesley could have become an enormously wealthy man. Instead he applied his own teaching to his own life and lived on a stipend of twenty-eight pounds a year and gave the rest away to the poor and needy. So seriously did Wesley believe in this concept that he was convinced of its power to really impact society and change the lot of so many unfortunate souls. It is the way Christianity could really make a difference. So seriously was Wesley convinced that this life of holiness and self-denial was an expression of holistic salvation, that he had little patience for those who would enjoy the benefits of the first two aspects of his injunctions (Make all you can, and save all you can) but failed to observe the third one (Give all you can). In a scathing indictment on Methodists who were getting rich without contributing to social needs, he blames the fact that Christianity was making such a

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 7

<sup>37</sup> Ibid7

small impact on society in large measure on the lack of self-denial as an expression of holy living he had observed in some of his followers. He says in his sermon entitled "Causes of the Inefficacy of Chistianity": "O that God would enable me once more, before I go hence and am no more see, to lift up my voice like a trumpet to those who gain and save all they can, but do not give all they can!"<sup>38</sup> To do so, Wesley declares, is to "impiously, unjustly, and cruelly detain from [the poor] what your master and theirs lodges in your hands on purpose to supply their wants."<sup>39</sup> He continues his rampage: "In the name of God, what are you doing? Do you neither fear God, nor regard man: Why do you not deal your bread to the hungry, and cover the naked with a garment? Have you laid out in your own costly apparel what would have answered both these intentions? Did God command you so to do? Does he commend you for so doing? Did he entrust you with his (not your) goods to this end? And does he now say, "Servant of God, well done?" You well know he does not. This idle expense has no approbation, either from God, or your own conscience. ... Whoever does this ought to be excluded from a Christian society."<sup>40</sup>

"Do you gain all you can, and save all you can? Then you must, in the nature of things, grow rich. Then if you have any desire to escape the damnation of hell, give all you can; otherwise I can have not more hope of your salvation, than that of Judas Iscariot."<sup>41</sup>

What more graphic comment could there be to describe Wesley's holistic salvation and its implications for personal and social holiness?

For Wesley, holiness was a verb, and had its greatest manifestation when holy people, gripped by the Holy Spirit, entered the world with a spirit of self-denial and made a difference for God. The impact of his work was remarkable. To help the poor, he not only provided the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, but he organized a means to help people find jobs to alleviate their poverty, and established lending centers where people could borrow money to get themselves back on their feet.

To help the illiterate, he provided schooling for children who could not afford to be educated. He set up boarding schools, vocational training centers, schools in the slums, and adult literacy centers. This was in addition to the Sunday schools and weekly classes related to church life.

To address the needs of the sick, he organized the Sick Visitors Corporation. He divided London into sections and appointed forty-six people to visit the sick in assigned areas three times a week, dispensing needed supplies and providing spiritual comfort. He instituted the first free medical clinic in English history out of which came a free

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<sup>38</sup> Wesley, John. "Causes Of The Inefficacy Of Chistianity". *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*. Ed. Albert C. Outler & Richard P Heitzenrater. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1991, 553

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 556

dispensary in 1746 to help alleviate the miseries resulting from a woefully inadequate public health system that particularly victimized the poor. He published a widely distributed and highly accessible book – "Primitive Physick: Or An Easy and Natural Method For Curing Most Diseases" – in which he outlined home remedies for simple illnesses to help people who could not afford to see a doctor. He even designed a machine that was used in a primitive form of electric shock treatment.

Wesley and his army of Methodists also got involved in the penal system and prison reform. Conditions were appalling beyond description. Wesley commented that, after having paid a visit to the Bristol prison, he could not imagine that 'there could be anything like it on this side of hell'. He set about to aggressively and actively recruit people to help him with his work in the prisons, and as early as 1743, visiting of prisoners was incorporated into the rules of the societies that managed Methodist religious activity and social ministry. In fact in 1778, prison ministry became obligatory for Methodist preachers. This had a huge impact on the well being of prisoners and their families. Marquardt describes the wide-ranging sphere of the ministry of the Methodists to prisoners: "They visited the prisoners to read the Bible and pray with them. They submitted petitions for them, provided ties to their kinfolk and the outside world, comforted and encouraged them, and accompanied condemned prisoners to the scaffold amid the hooting of crowds eager for a spectacle."<sup>42</sup> Wesley also entered the political realm and began to fight for prison reform. So effective were his efforts that he eventually took over the Newgate Prison in Bristol, and established it as a model facility.

Wesley's efforts to engage in social justice is well illustrated in the influence he had in changing the laws of Britain to abolish slavery. In 1774, he wrote what Marquardt calls Wesley's 'theological manifesto' concerning his stance on slavery. "Thoughts on Slavery" was a brief, but frequently used and widely distributed publication that argued for the abolition of slavery. The first section of this pamphlet set out to correct the prejudicial pre-conceived negative notions about the blacks and their land of origin. The second section exposed the oppressive way in which the slaves were procured, the indignities they suffered in the process of being bought and sold, the cruelties they suffered in being captured and transported, and the sheer inhumanity to which they were subjected by the slave owners. He reminded his readers that these people were more than beasts of burden, and that the Creator never intended them to be abused for such a purpose because they were made in the image of God. In the third section, Wesley uttered a passionate plea, using typically colourful and descriptive language, urging the sea captain and slave owners to stop this cruelty, and he held them responsible under God for their actions.

This article had a profound affect on Methodist policy and practice. The first Methodist conference in the United States declared that "slavery was contrary to the laws of God, of man, and of nature, and injurious to the society", and that "it contradicts the instructions of conscience and of pure religion and does that which we would not wish

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<sup>42</sup> Marquardt, Manfred. 1992. *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principle*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 82.

others to do to us or to our folk."<sup>43</sup> In 1784, the conference took decisive action in its opposition to slavery by requiring all Methodists to forsake any connection they had with the slave trade, and to free the slaves they had in their possession, which some had already done.

Although the "Thoughts on Slavery" had a huge impact on Methodism, its effect was largely lost on those who profited by the slave trade, as well as on the lawmakers. "No longer content with public statements of position and sermons, calling for prayer and fasting for the emancipation of slaves, Wesley became more and more involved in supporting the anti-slavery leaders, particularly Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, and William Wilberforce."<sup>44</sup> Although Wesley did not live to see the day when the English Parliament finally outlawed England's participation in the slave trade, his final deathbed letter was an urgent plea written to Wilburforce to keep fighting against slavery until victory was won. "O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it."<sup>45</sup>

For some, it may seem a long distant connection between holistic salvation and the abolition of slavery, but for Wesley, they were inextricably linked. He believed that if Christianity meant anything at all, it meant making a difference in people's lives, both in their spiritual condition, and in their lot in life on earth. Inactive holiness was a contradiction in terms. Silence was no option for sanctity. Religion that left social injustice unchecked, society's needs unmet, and cultural ills ignored was religion that 'walked on the other side'. And for Wesley, it was no religion at all. Wesley's holistic salvation held enormous implications for both the individual Christian and the corporate church. I think he was right!

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 72

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 75

<sup>45</sup> Wesley, John. "Letter To William Wilburforce". Available from:  
<http://gbgm.umc.org/umw/wesley/wilbur.stm>: Internet accessed July 2, 2002

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