

**John Wesley:
A Call to the Modern World**

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Is it possible to understand, and more importantly, to answer secular political concerns with a pure Christian worldview? Can politically active Christians form a Christian political response for environmental, trade, taxation, and social entitlement issues?

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Introduction

In the latter part of the Twentieth Century there has developed a phenomena unique on the American public scene. From this nation's founding, Christianity has been as much an influence on the public spirit as it has on the private spirit of the individual. That is until recent times, when the Christian worldview has been systematically assailed under various guises, both secular and religious. Among them the separation arguments of the ACLU, the eradication and prohibition on Christian values within the U.S. public schools,

and the apostasy (primarily feminism, homosexuality, and other like social agenda issues) of many mainline Christian churches. But countering that trend and gathering strength is a movement of evangelical Christians into the public political sphere.

By and large these politically active evangelical Christians have sought allies among political groups that hold conservative political views, i.e. those who hold freedom, economic capitalism, and morality as prime values. And for the media these supporters have been primarily grouped together under the headings of what have now become known as the "family values" issues.

Unfortunately, as formed now, this alliance will not in the end bode well for this political evangelical Christian movement. While the values of the secular conservatives and of the evangelical Christians may be held to be in common in most areas, their acknowledged source, the basis of their two worldviews is different. For many secular conservatives the source of those values are Man-centered, but from a Christian view this is clearly the same humanist mistake made by the more politically liberal. An example of this assertion being demonstrated is the continuing call within the conservative political ranks for moderation from within the "Christian right" on issues such as abortion. The desire of the secular conservatives is for the political ranks to be more inclusive and the rhetoric to be more moderate.

This moderation is generally discussed under the rubric of a "big tent" philosophy. Granted this call for moderation may be more of a media phenomena designed to form a wedge between the two groups, then it is a real issue. Nevertheless, given the secular worldview of these traditional political groups this weakness within the secular conservatives on Christian concerns is a troubling preview of things to come. The secular conservatives exhibit the same inability as liberals to understand what the concept of a sovereign God means to an evangelical Christian.

Yet, this bonding of two disparate groups is proceeding, with Christians increasingly drawn to accepting a secular conservative stance on most issues in order to gain support for the Christian "value" issues. For example an evangelical is asked, and expected to support, a big business and global economic stance. This borrowing of a secular conservative stance on economic, environmental, and governmental issues is primarily due to the lack of a consistent and systematic Christian theological response for the secular conservative and liberal political philosophies abounding today. Is it possible to understand, and more importantly, to answer secular political concerns with a pure Christian worldview? Can politically active Christians form a Christian political response for environmental, trade, taxation, and social entitlement issues?

Yes, such a theological response is possible. We can look for it's roots in the Protestant Reformation, and we can find it's practical applications in an 18th century English Christian revival. And with that assertion it will undoubtedly be asked why Christians should be impressing their worldview on the political establishments? Is it not enough to render to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's, in other words, let current secular political thinking handle political issues?

The answer to why insist on a Christian response in the political arena can also be addressed by examining the Reformation message contained in this 18th century English revival. For many of our perceived unique 20th century problems can be viewed as not unique at all when examining 18th century England. In fact, a unique perspective can be formed by comparing our emerging world of the 21st century, with the political and social environments of France and England in the latter part of the 18th century.

In the 18th century the forces that were at work across the English channel in France, which were soon to erupt into a bloody revolution, were also boiling in England. Given the abject poverty, both materially and spiritually, of the populations of both countries, violent revolution had to be expected. Yet only in France, the home of Voltaire and Rousseau, did a fearful revolt occur. It is instructive to understand the difference in outcomes between that of a humanist philosophic revolution and a Christ centric revival. For the Wesley led Christian revival in 18th century England formed the middle class citizenry necessary to stabilize England in that country's political as well as social environments. While, in contrast, from the humanistic philosophic

foundations of the French revolution there arose Napoleon and a weakness of national spirit that, in this century, has lost two consecutive world wars.

In the revival message of John Wesley there was not only the message of grace and salvation, but the truth of God's sovereignty over the world, His creation, and it's institutions. That message urged these new Christians to be a part, an active part, of their world. To demonstrate through their faith and their actions the conviction of God's truth. Wesley urged them to not only take this Reformation message of faith, grace, and sovereignty into their own hearts, but into the "heart" of the institutions in which they had daily contact.

Was this a message of coercion? Absolutely not! This message was about personal faith, personal involvement, and the formation of that faith into a worldview that filtered all things through God's message for His creation.

By focusing on the folk theology of the leader of the English revival, John Wesley, this book will attempt to define a systematic Christian response to current political philosophy, and to provide the guidance of a Biblical and Christian worldview to this worthwhile modern Christian movement during this critical time in American history. A movement which is arguably arriving on the scene reminiscent of that found in 18th century England and France. For we also are at that critical crossroads of solving our problems through a humanistic philosophic tradition, or by turning once again to the God of our Fathers to bless our nation.

Clearly the social programs that have increased in this nation over the last forty or fifty years have their root in a man-centered philosophy. The central idea behind them all is that man, through his creation of a powerful state, will be able to solve the problems of this sinful world. Today , on the eve of the 21st century, we seem prepared to declare these national governments incapable of pushing solutions through to a satisfactory conclusion. But true to the humanistic worldview, while national governments may have failed, the humanist answer is that obviously a global government will succeed.

There is another answer. An answer whose time has come once more. I will develop some of that answer in the pages that follow, with the hope that others will add their voices and ideas to this, and in faith and understanding begin to alter the course of this great nation. To begin, let's first briefly relate John Wesley to the earlier Reformers and to the Reformation.

Chapter 1

A Reforming Faith

John Wesley's position of importance in sparking a revival of the Christian faith in 18th century England is well established. From the time of his Aldersgate experience in the year 1738, right up to the time of his death in 1791, Wesley was a tireless leader of Methodism and the Christian revival it sparked. In a time of great social upheaval in that island nation, Wesley's revival reached millions with a message of hope and salvation in Jesus Christ. What becomes as readily apparent in studying Wesley's influence, is the political and economic importance his preaching and message would hold for the nation of England.

What is not as well established is Wesley's role in bringing a Reformation message to 18th century England. While he was not a systematic theologian on the level of Luther or Calvin (in point of fact, Wesley was first and foremost a preacher with a Revival of unparalleled size to manage), he nevertheless espoused a theological message so powerful and so clear in it's convictions that a nation, and indeed the world, felt its impact. And as with the Reformation this impact went beyond the personal spiritual dimension and was equally felt in the national spirit.

Granted the Protestant Reformation was an event acknowledged to begin in the 16th century, but it is arguable that it did not end until sometime in the 19th century. Obviously that is an argument that would take a book in itself to present. And given the lack of time and resources to do that, I will simply state it, but will also state that the basic direction of this book will be to show that Wesley took a Reformation theology, and at the very gateway to the modern industrial world, presented that theology in such a manner as to speak Christ and the Christian worldview with power and reason to the modern world. In that view then, while Luther and Calvin brought the world back to a personal faith in Christ through a reformed faith. John Wesley took that message of reformed faith, and shaping it for this dawning new era, presented a Reformation message not only for the Church universal, but for every involvement of the individual believer's life.

In other words, Wesley's message not only spoke of a personal life-changing faith, but also of an institutional life-changing faith. In this regard he is as faithful a reformer as Luther or Calvin. And he is as critical to our understanding of the Gospel for our modern era as they.

Generally, however, each reformer is accorded a separate position and are seen in their relation through disagreements rather than through agreements. While viewing these three men from our modern vantage point it may be easier to find the differences between them, but here a cautionary note must be added that our modern judgement not be clouded by the distortions applied to each man's intended position by overzealous followers. With this in mind, it is arguable that there is more in common between Luther, Calvin, and Wesley than first meets the eye.

To begin, any understanding of Christianity must be based squarely upon a God who is actively revealing Himself to man. From this it seems a logical step to view the Reformation, as well as Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, in the light of God's revelations. That does not necessarily mean that God's revelation was of a whole nature to each of these men. Rather, that each was the recipient of a part of the whole, each compatible with the other.

For example, much has been made of John Wesley's fight with the Calvinists as marking Wesley's rejection of Calvin's theology. A more even-handed approach offered by George Cell states that Wesley rejected the overextended position of Calvin's followers, not Calvin's theology itself. It was Calvin's follower's that gave Wesley the label of being an Arminian. Wesley accepted all disparaging labels and tried to turn them to his good, but while he was far from Arminius he was only a "hair's breadth" from Calvin. It is far more realistic to argue that Wesley and Calvin are to be viewed as presenting a unified message, rather than contradicting each other in major areas of their theology. This will be discussed in a little more detail later in this chapter.

There appears to be good reason for viewing John Wesley as the focal point of the Reformation message for the modern world. Unlike the world of Luther and Calvin, Wesley's world was clearly changing in ways that we, from first hand experience, can easily relate. Economic and social dislocations were occurring at a rapid rate. The Industrial Revolution was breaking down the old sense of community, and forcing people into urban areas. All the complaints that we currently hear ourselves make about the state of our modern society were occurring in Wesley's 18th century England as well. The revival message of John Wesley was dedicated to a Biblical faith, to an unmerited God given grace and favor, and to a holiness in all worldly activities. This is a message steeped in the Reformation, but with particular value for us in the modern world. In the pages that follow, this view of Wesley will be clarified, with the end result being the strengthening of the Wesleyan message for all aspects of the world.

"Wesley brought the whole Christian world back to religion as experience; in religion, experience and reality come to the same thing"

In other words, as we experience Christ in our lives, that reality must permeate every aspect of our daily reality.

It would also appear that Luther and Calvin, as with Wesley, acknowledge a link between religion and experience, and "introduce the principle of private judgement into Biblical theology and assume the active mind to be essential to the practical religious use of the Scriptures." Private judgement was one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Reformation, distinctively at variance with the position of the Roman Church. To be a reformer meant acknowledging the personal experience of faith in Christ as the essential life changing event for believers.

This means for all three men, that it was through private judgement that Christianity was brought into the realm of individual experience. It is important to note that for all of their perceived differences, each of these reformers never denied, nor differed, in their view of the individual's experience of faith as being the bedrock of Christianity. However, it is Wesley's particular emphasis on experience as the way to confirming the "truth values of the Christian faith" that will be of interest later.

For the present, however, it is possible to argue that these three men concurred in their ideas of a God-given faith in Christ, and in their views on the experience of faith in the individual's life. Especially in Wesley's case, because for him the Calvinist idea of a God given grace and Luther's views on salvation through faith come together powerfully.

From Luther, Wesley discovers the "experience of faith." "Thus Luther has put before us the forever open and inexhaustible book of Christian experience as far and away the best commentary on the word of God in the Scriptures. ...Wesley in a far freer climate of thought and action renewed Luther's limited appeal to the joint witness of Scripture and experience, gave it a richer, fuller development and shifted much more of the burden of proof from the sense of the Scripture to the 'sure testimony of experience'."

From the individual's experience of God through Jesus Christ came, for Luther and even more so for Wesley, the power of the Christian experience. While the Christian experience is evident in Calvin's thinking, it is on the idea of the predestining efforts of God's grace that we can find basic agreement between Wesley and Calvin. "The whole and sole point to the first great manifesto of the Revival which proclaims the sovereign significance of saving faith is that man's salvation must in it's totality be construed primarily as the gift and grace of God."

This for Wesley is an electing grace which chooses man so that he may choose God. In effect, man is predestined to the freedom to choose or to reject God. Predestination, thus considered, is less concerned with the number of the elect as it is with the freedom assured to be of the elect.

It is not the case that Wesley found agreement with the Calvinist position of an elect for salvation and an elect for damnation. Rather, Wesley found in Calvin's position some clear insight into the workings of God's grace. A grace that did elect, did seek after all men for salvation; it is a prevenient grace that comes to woo man to his salvation.

"Grace is always interpreted as something more than mere forensic pardon. Rather, it is experienced as actual influence -God's love, immanent and active in human life. Its prior initiative makes every human action a re-action; hence, it is 'pre-venting.'"

Is this prevenient grace the same as predestination? For Wesley it was, as long as it was not interpreted as an unconditional election by grace.

"This election I as firmly believe as I believe the Scripture to be of God. But unconditional election I cannot believe;..."

Wesley is able to come to the very edge of Calvinism by ascribing all good to God's grace, and by also ascribing all free will to God's grace. While it is clear that Wesley was in disagreement with the extreme Calvinist position, it is also clear that Wesley believed in a God given gift of grace.

Clearly, of course, there is not complete agreement between the positions of Luther, Calvin, and Wesley. Neither is it the intention of this brief discussion to attempt to argue such. Instead it is being argued that there is enough common theological ground between Luther, Calvin, and Wesley to say that they shared a common word and a consistent revelation of the Reformation. Furthermore, due to his adherence to a Reformation message and his areas of agreement with Luther and Calvin, Wesley is the focal point for the Reformation message to our Modern world. He is to be awarded this position not because of the totality of his revelation, but because of the openness of his revelation to God and to that which had come before.

Luther and Calvin provided Wesley a foundation upon which to continue the Reformation; a foundation more analogous to a fertile field ready for planting than to the groundwork needed for constructing a building. In other words, Wesley was able to bring his revelation, his teaching, to England partly through the preparations of Luther and Calvin. And what is the importance of this? Only that Christianity, based as it is on revelation, should be seen as having a consistent and progressive message for the world. And that Wesley, in that tradition, is also consistent and progressive, -- to the point that he transformed England through his teachings. Teachings in which he instilled a fullness of faith not explored by either Luther or Calvin.

Christian Perfection was one of the major contributions of Wesley to the Reformation. It was this perfection which Wesley believed showed the power of God over a sin-bound world. And, for Wesley, this same power implied that the institutions of the world, while sinful in one sense, could be converted by a practical Christianity into servants of the word of God.

"Wesley lived his life on the frontiers of practical Christianity. For him the problem of problems was to get the principles of Christianity put into practise."

Putting those principles into practice could be accomplished by attaining to perfection in the Christian life and through a Christian's full participation in the worldly affairs of man. Wesley, preaching within a climate prepared beforehand by Luther and Calvin, expounded a line of thought that revealed a new dimension to Christianity. A dimension that was not only true to all that had come before in Christian circles, but also dealt effectively with the emerging problems of a political and economic world. In effect, it may be said that Luther and Calvin began the Reformation, but it was through Wesley that the Reformation was spread into our modern economic and political world.

This writing is an attempt to explore the relevance of Christianity for the modern economic and political world. Specifically, an attempt will be made to develop Wesleyan thinking in such a way as to show its relevance, and thereby Christianity's, for a sound political philosophy. In Chapter II, Showing Faith to the World, Wesley's thinking on the responsibility of Christianity to the world will be explored in some detail. Specifically, this chapter will develop what it means to Wesley for Christians to be a part of the world, but not to be overcome by the world. In Chapter III, Christian Perfection in the World, the original and sometimes controversial Wesleyan subject of Christian perfection will be explored. This chapter will be devoted to developing the idea of perfection, and will explore a specific criticism of that idea. In Chapter IV, Christian Attitudes in the World, a more detailed examination will be given to the manifest attitudes and behaviors of Christians who participate in the world. In particular, a detailed look will be given to the ideas of Christian fellowship (see note 31 p.13), brotherly love and, stewardship. In Chapter V, John Wesley's Message for the Modern Economic World will be explored in a practical way. This final chapter is an important one because of Wesley's impact on his own time, a time noted for its turmoil and unrest, and his possible impact on ours.

Chapter 2

Showing Faith to the World

To begin to understand Wesley's thinking concerning Christians and their responsibility in and toward the world it will be helpful to consider the following:

"Ye are the light of the world! Ye are 'a city set upon a hill, and cannot be hid.' O'let your light shine before men! Show them your faith by your works (Mt. 5:14-16)."

A basic premise of Wesley's thinking on the Christian experience is contained in this quotation.

That premise is that Christians should accept the responsibility of being a part of the world and, at the same time, of being so fundamentally different from the world that others are drawn to understand their difference. For it will be through this attempt to come to an understanding of a Christian's differences that many will also be drawn to Christ. The implication in this is that the Christian experience is so important and so beneficial, simple exposure to it is all that is necessary to change anyone or any worldly institution for the better. Wesley's development of thought on being a part of the world so as to evangelize the world will be the subject of this chapter. With particular attention to his emphasis on the justification of the individual and, through the individual, worldly institutions.

For John Wesley, being Christian meant recognizing two things: first, the present worldly existence, and second, the need for the redeeming power of God in that existence. Christians, denying their place in the world, unconsciously denied the relevance of Christian principles for the world.

"Many eminent men have spoken thus; have advised us to 'cease from all outward action;' Wholly to withdraw from the world; to leave the body behind us; to abstract ourselves from all sensible things; to have no concerns at all about outward religion, but to work all virtues in the will; as the far more excellent way, more perfective of the soul as well as more acceptable to God."

Wesley rebelled against such thinking. That Christianity and the power of faith was for the few and the elite, was just the kind of thinking that Wesley and the Reformation spoke directly against. Christianity was not a mystical existence, but a real and powerful force in and overcoming of the world. Practically, the Christian experience, built upon an individual's faith, was not only accessible to an individual, but was also able to transform worldly institutions.

"The revival under Wesley was more of an ethical than a theological movement. It produced important consequences for the Political and economic life."

Wesley's prime concern was the change to the inner man, through a personal faith, that produced a change in the world. To Wesley this was an especially important message; Christians, through a personal faith in the Son of God, can come to know a power that can transform a world.

To understand how important this message really was for Wesley, it is necessary to consider the era in which it was taught. Wesley was faced with a country that had a very rigid class structure. Predominately poor, the lower classes were unruly and irresponsible; prone to violence, there was little to keep revolt from fomenting. Further, Wesley was faced with rising industrialization that seemed to offer little for the lower classes, and, in its effect, was actually supporting the rigid class structure already present. To the majority of people the world looked to be out of their control, and in control of impersonal forces that they could do little but follow.

The Church itself was perhaps a contributor to these impersonal forces, placating the consciences' of the upper class by advancing the argument that some were picked through providence to be rich and some to be poor.

"Theology was therefore called upon gratefully to salve the conscience of the possessing and to reconcile the poorer groups to the injustice of their lot. ...where the argument of providence convinced the unpropertied that their position was divinely determined, reassured them of their religious worth in spite of their condition, and bade them look to the distant future for redress, there would be the strongest assurance of contentment and obedience."

This was an environment dedicated to maintaining the status quo:

"The existence of the typical attitude of the governing classes towards the mass of the people in the eighteenth century was thus rooted in (1) the helplessness of the unpropertied; (2) the irresponsible character of the poor; (3) the physical structure of the community; (4) the unnatural alliance of forces issuing from the Revolution of 1688; (5) the domination of a Calvinistic tradition; and (6) a national system of economics which was built upon exploitation of labor."

Is this not a familiar sounding scenario? In this closing decade of the Twentieth century there is a multitude of polling information that strongly indicates that American's feel that their well being is out of their hands and is controlled by forces, political and economic, that they are powerless to influence. The new Theology, steeped in a secular worldview, argues that not only is providence against the people, but that only the power of the state can break them free.

Wesley approached his environment with a belief in salvation by faith, through an individual's faith, and in a belief that God was seeking to redeem the whole world through His grace. Christianity gained power through faith, and increased in power by acting on that faith.

"When I say, this (Christianity) 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..."

The Christian experience while foremost an individual one, was also meant to be a public experience, drawing strength from application in the world and from fellowship with other believers. It was individual in the sense that it entailed a personal relationship with Jesus. It became public as Christians objectified that personal relationship in their lives before the world.

To Wesley's thinking, man was a fallen creature, sinful and cut off from God. In this state, man was lost; in his personal life, in the life of the family, and in the life of his institutions. Man, in his sinful state, built his world in his own image; that image being a broken and separated one. God, however, in his grace and love for mankind, sought a redeeming work in man. In this, Wesley "was immovable in the belief that an objective atonement is the life principle of the Christian message and the all-inclusive differential of genuine Christianity." Wesley would argue that an objective atonement was necessary due to man's historic fallen state, and to man's real need to be saved from the death worked in his life through the power of sin.

This atoning grace of God came to the individual through a "saving faith." This belief Wesley shared with the early reformers; "For the doctrines of man's sinful depravity and moral bondage were shared equally by Luther and his acknowledged disciple Calvin. And Wesley set himself to a renewal in its fullness of the early Reformation doctrine of justification by faith and its presuppositions." This renewal was a necessary one because of the neglect of the Church, and because the Church had responded with nothing to placate the state of the majority of people in England at that time.

This renewal sought by Wesley was more than just a social renewal, it was a spiritual renewal, because for Wesley there was more to the power of a saving faith than what is necessary for the individual. Wesley believed faith could reach through the individual to a work of redemption in those institutions made in the sinful image of man.

In Wesley's mind, Christians "'are the salt of the earth'" and it is their very nature "'to season whatever is round about'" them. That the world round about Christians was becoming increasingly economic in nature, did not alter Wesley's injunctions to work for the salvation of worldly institutions. In the words of Wesley:

"Much more the words of our Lord; who is so far from directing us to break off all commerce with the world, that without it, according to His account of Christianity we cannot be Christians at all." In other words, the Christian was to participate in worldly institutions with the view toward a work of salvation for those institutions. A Christian's actions were to be such as to bring the saving grace of God, present in their own lives, into full view

and interaction with worldly institutions. This was a major contribution of Wesley's revival, that a Christian needed to conduct his life beyond that expected by the world, and even the Church, but in such a way as to be meeting the utmost will of God. As Wesley says: "For what end do you conduct your worldly business? 'To provide things necessary for myself and my family.' It is a good answer as far as it goes; but it does not go far enough. For a Turk or a Heathen goes so far; does his works for the very same ends. But a Christian may go abundantly further: his end in all his labor is, to please God; to do, not his own will, but the will of Him that sent him into the world; for this very purpose, to do the will of God on earth as angels do it in heaven. He (a Christian) works for eternity..."

Living in the world as a factory worker, a cobbler, a shop keeper, or a merchant, meant living within the finite bounds dictated by a worldly institution. Trapped in a fallen body, in a fallen world, and within a fallen institution, there is little wonder that many religions have taught withdrawal as the means to escape from the world. Indeed, there is little wonder that in an era that saw the ascension of impersonal forces and the almost institutionalized injustice of the economic system, few felt any hope in their lives. Economic forces appeared far too rigid to break. An industrialized civilization had arrived, but injustice and an economic and a spiritual rigidity resulted in the creation of a large class in society that was regarded primarily as being of "'an abject mind...a mean, sordid spirit, which prevents all attempts of bettering their condition'."

Nevertheless, in Wesley's mind an individual need not remain in this abject state, caught in the trap of service to an unjust economic and political system, living in a state of moral, spiritual, and economic poverty. Instead, each man as a Christian, and as far as he would will it to be, was to rise above this lowliness of life and serve the eternal with his labors; each Christian "works for eternity."

The common laborer, trapped within the acceptance of his lot in life, labored under the assumption that his life and spirit are locked into their present state. In this case the whole man, spirit and body, are trapped with no way to reach beyond the present. It is no wonder then that such a man is seen as "a mean, sordid spirit." On the other hand, a Christian within the same economic system could be led to see above his labors, to see instead the works of eternity. A Christian could see his labor as serving the sovereign God, and the eternal here on earth. In this case labor was no longer based upon injustice, but was open by the freedom of serving a just God. The result of such a message was profound.

"'Many thousands now living in the manufacturing towns,' declared a pamphleteer in a typical opinion, 'before they heard the Methodists...were supplied by their parishes, but after coming under the influence of the movement they acquired self-respect that made them repel the very suggestion of public aid.'"

Respect can come from recognizing and participating in the eternity shaping aspects of other worldly action (Christian actions) in a worldly situation.

Being in the world meant that the Christian would not be excused from, or expected to avoid, worldly participation or labor, only that the results were to be oriented toward the eternal goals of God's will.

"He commands all things, both in heaven and earth, to assist man in attaining the end of his being in working out his own salvation." All things, as far as they answered to this command, attained to the same high status. The importance of this for Wesley being, to work for the things eternity, to work for the salvation of souls. The attraction of the Wesleyan message was due primarily to this almost single minded adherence to the Christian's calling to the salvation of the world. Salvation and the equally important Wesleyan concept of sanctification will be explored in greater depth later, but for now the idea of working for eternity needs to be explored. To be able to participate and labor in the world as a Christian required this new end goal, and for Wesley that process began with faith. As has been discussed above, salvation by faith was a cornerstone to the Reformation and to Wesley's own thinking.

"'But every man is constrained to seek for another righteousness or justification, to be received at God's own hands. And this justification or righteousness which we receive of God's mercy and Christ's merit, embraced by faith, is taken, accepted and allowed of God for our perfect and full justification.'"

So an important effect of individual faith is the need to seek after the salvation of others. Faith spawns works. As faith increases so does the desire to do good works. Only through faith can man be justified, and only through justification and an increasing faith can man carry out good works.

"...as light cannot be hid but will show itself at one place or other, so true faith cannot be (hid) but will break out and show itself by good works. ...faith will be always doing some good work, which shall declare that it is living."

Faith must be a living faith, that will lead to works of salvation for all men.

Retracing again John Wesley's thinking on a Christian's faith, he said that first comes that "full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22).

"This is not only a belief of the articles of our faith, but also 'a true trust and confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ and a steadfast hope of all good things at God's hand,'...He will be our protector and defender and not withdraw his mercy finally from us, if we commit ourselves wholly unto him, hang only upon him and call upon him, ready to obey and serve him."

Then from this full assurance of faith will flow the desire, even the need, to do and carry out the work of God. Not that the works are then becoming more important than the faith, only that through faith and its working in the life of man can good works be accomplished through the opportunities that arise.

And those opportunities can arise only as far as the Christian is involved in the world. "All of creation," as Wesley had said, is under the command of God to work for man's salvation, and of course this applies even more so for those that already know God's salvation. Now this is important, for it is only through justification by faith that an individual can find salvation (not by works), but it is also through the works of those already justified that others can be brought to the point of faith. It is clear that Wesley placed salvation by faith above all else, but it is equally clear that he felt a growth in faith and bringing others to the point of accepting God's grace could be accomplished by good works. This is so because of the nature of good works, i.e., a sinful nature necessarily blocks out those good works directed to fulfilling God's will. Therefore, true good works can only flow from those justified through faith, that is through forgiveness of sin. "Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins and, what is necessarily implied therein, our acceptance with God."

Once the Christian is justified by faith then he is to seek opportunities whereby the fruits of that faith may be borne. For Wesley, those opportunities arise through involvement with the world's institutions. As will be seen in a later chapter, Wesley included the economic institutions as a principle case for Christian involvement. In fact, Wesley stressed these opportunities to such an extent that he drew considerable criticism from the Calvinists of his day that he was urging salvation through works. Of course this criticism was felt to be unfounded by Wesley:

"But I have constantly declared just the contrary, and that in all manner of ways. I have continually testified in private and public that we are sanctified as well as justified by faith."

Still, this would continue to be a point of contention between Wesley and the Calvinists, primarily because the Calvinists could never accept anything that remotely resembled man working out his own salvation. Salvation was a gift of God worked out through his grace, and to this belief the Calvinists firmly clung. However, this view of salvation was never very far from Wesley's position.

"I think on justification just as I have any time these seven and twenty years and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him an hair's breadth."

What was most important in Wesley's thought? Faith in the saving power of God's grace. Salvation was not worked out by doing good works, but by the struggle to come to that moment when you first willed to believe.

Good works are indeed a necessary outgrowth of the working of faith in the life of a believer, but are only paramount when opportunity permits. Justification must come first, and then good works can come to increase faith and holiness through the sanctification of a believer's life.

What of Wesley's thinking on man in the economic and political institutions of the world? Only that this man must become justified through faith, but once justified he is afforded opportunities to do the works of faith which are the working of God's will in the world. This has the twofold purpose of bringing the Christian experience to the fore in man eyes, and in leading the believer to a spiritual perfection of the soul and a deeper understanding of God's purpose. Being born into the world the Christian must live within its framework or structure. If that structure happens to be economic or political in nature, then so be it. The Christian should participate fully, but without following the prevailing worldly thinking.

These then are the key foundational elements to understanding John Wesley's message to modern man: Being man you are necessarily born into the world where you will lead a life of sin and death. "Yet I hear a voice (and is it not the voice of God?) saying, 'Believe and thou shalt be saved. He that believeth is passed from death unto life'." Worldly man was to seek after his salvation; a salvation that could only come through faith. Only then as a believing Christian would the all in all economic and political worldliness fade away to be replaced by a desire to work for eternal ends. Once that desire dominates a life then and only then does the true end of man's labors become apparent, that being to serve the will of God. Laboring for the eternal, i.e. serving the will of God, goes hand in hand with a transformation in the Christian's life that Wesley referred to as "perfection." This is one of Wesley's most important, and controversial, concepts and it will be discussed more fully in the next chapter. For now it is important to note that as Christians worked toward perfection, Wesley urged them to "Live thou today. Be it thy earnest care to improve the present hour. This is your own; and it is your all."

Chapter 3

Showing Perfection to the World

Wesley encouraged Christians living in the world to participate in the economic and political institutions of the world, but he also cautioned against becoming of the world and thereby placing those institutions above God. This is still an important injunction today. Equally important was Wesley's urging to seek after the eternal, to follow after the goals of God's will and to do the works of that will. The result of so following God's will would be a corresponding move toward what Wesley called 'Christian Perfection.'

More specifically, Christian perfection meant for Wesley that which:

"in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; and by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so renewed in the image of our mind, as to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."

As can be seen from the quote above, and from earlier discussions in Chapter 2, the Christian's ability to discern the eternal will of God and to find perfection, was in having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That is to say, to meet the full and real person of Jesus, with both human and divine natures in one man. Wesley argued that no one was capable of following God's will unless, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, he took on the inward nature of Christ.

"I believe it (perfection) to be an inward thing, namely, the life of God in the soul of man; a participation of the Divine nature; the mind that was in Christ; or, the renewal of our heart, after the image of Him that created us."

The importance of following the eternal will of God and of becoming perfected in Christ is that there will be an increase of love in the Christian. Man, in his worldly state, is attracted to the material possessions that can be had through the world, and it is to them that man's love is attached. Since material possessions are

conditional as well as perishable, it is not wise to love the things of this world too much. While Wesley did urge Christians to participate fully in the world he also urged them to follow after the will of God, and to become perfect as Christ was perfect.

"Question: What is Christian perfection." "Answer: The loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all thoughts, words, and actions are governed by pure love."

Love was the result of perfection. To become perfect in love should be the aim of every Christian. First by loving God, then by a logical extension loving each fellow man. In other words, first love the eternal and infinite God to find the way to better love your neighbor.

"This is the sum of Christian perfection: it is all comprised in that one word love. The first branch is the love of God: and as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. 'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets;' these contain the whole of Christian perfection."

From the above quotation it is easy to see the mind of Wesley concerning perfection and a Christian's participation in the world. By loving and seeking after the eternal God (with "all our heart, mind, soul, and strength"), the Christian of necessity was committed to obey God and to "love thy neighbor."

"Whereas a Christian (inwardly) is a child of God, one who sincerely obeys him out of love."

And while faith in God was of central importance to Wesley, it was the high position accorded to love that was the driving force behind the Wesleyan idea of perfection.

"...that faith itself -- even Christian faith, the faith of God's elect, the faith of the operation of God -- still is only the handmaid of love. As glorious and honourable as it is, it is not the end of the commandment. God hath given this honour to love alone. Love is the end of all the commandments of God. Love is the end, the sole end, of every dispensation of God, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things."

Therefore, to fully demonstrate this love necessitated that the Christian participate in the world's institutions. By living in the world and by participating in its institutions, the Christian was consciously challenged along each point of contact to establish that explicit love of God and of his fellow man.

For Wesley, love was a perfecting and purifying state. As love increased, sin was to decrease, until a moment in time, instantaneous and specific, occurred which indicated unquestionably the perfecting of the individual through love and the end of conscious sin. For some this instantaneous moment occurred when "first they did believe," while for others it might be at any point, even up to the moment of death, before this "instantaneous, deliverance from all sin" occurs.

"Certainly sanctification (in the proper sense) is an 'instantaneous, deliverance from all sin;' and includes 'an instantaneous power then given, always to cleave to God.' Yet this sanctification (at least, in the lower degrees) does not include a power to think a useless thought, nor ever to speak a useless word."

This concept of Christian perfection attracted a lot of attention, as would be expected of any idea claiming the term "perfect" for human existence.

"Thus, in the early days of the Revival, and with no great effort to mitigate the confusion which was bound to attend the use of the term 'perfect' when applied at any level to human experience, Wesley asserts the notion of a dynamic fulfillment in Christian life which is, like faith, a gracious gift of God."

Confusion, of course, did follow this Wesleyan idea from the moment of its conception into modern times. The problem was not, however, the claiming of "perfection" for humanity, for many would claim the same for Christians in the day that they entered "into glory," but it was Wesley's seriousness for claiming perfection while still in the world that caused problems.

"Wesley, however, was adamant on the point that if 'perfection' is a human possibility at all, it must at least be possible in the span of human life and, consequently, correlated with the whole process of Christian maturation and hope."

Of course, Wesley's first and final authority was the Holy Bible and to this he felt that he held true. Citing many examples where Scripture indicated that Christians could attain to perfection from sin, he especially focused on those found in 1 John:

"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not. But he that is begotten of God keepeth himself and that wicked one toucheth him not." (1John 5:15)

From 1 John and in other scripture, Wesley did find a backing for his concept of perfection in this life, but there were still many who found objection to this idea. Specifically, Wesley was criticized by the Calvinists of his day as setting perfection too low. Wesley responded to this criticism in a tract entitled "Thoughts on Christian Perfection."

"Q.9. I am sure (that) to set perfection too high is to make nothing of it. But is it not worse to set it too low? A. It cannot be worse than 'to make nothing of it,' but it is bad enough. Therefore, let you and me steer between the two extremes and set it just as high as the Scripture does. It is nothing higher and nothing lower than this: the pure love of God and man -- the loving God with all our heart and soul and our neighbour as ourselves. It is love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, words, and actions."

Still, for all his explaining, Wesley's teaching on the concept of Christian perfection was labeled "enthusiasm." The implication being that those that asserted their perfection did so falsely and in such a manner as to cause more harm than good. Also, in this century, Newton Flew, John Kent, and others have picked on what they consider to be a more obvious defect in Wesley's position:

"the stress on 'the conscious and deliberate intention of the agent is the most formidable defect in Wesley's doctrine of the ideal,'... One cannot safely define perfection as the absence of conscious sin."

This argument, based on this "most formidable defect," arises from what is felt to be a confusion in Wesley's thinking on the distinction between voluntary and involuntary sin. "One cannot safely define perfection as the absence of conscious sin." To admit to the possibility of any sin, even unknowing sin, is to admit to the impossibility of perfection. However, this criticism, in light of Wesley's own teachings, appears to have missed the mark. By focusing on sin, both voluntary (conscious) and involuntary (unconscious), Kent and Flew miss the true target of Wesley's perfection -- man's sinful nature.

Consider Wesley first of all as he sets the stage for perfection being possible in every Christian:

"...the disciple is not above his Master. Therefore, if I have suffered, be content to tread in my steps. And doubt ye not then but I will fulfil my word, 'For everyone that is perfect shall be as his Master.' But his Master was free from all sinful tempers. So, therefore, is his disciple, even every real Christian."

And then Wesley on what is changed or different about a perfected Christian:

"Every one of these can say with St. Paul, 'I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Gal. 2:20) -- words that manifestly describe a deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin. This is expressed both negatively, 'I live not' (my evil nature, the body of sin, is destroyed); and positively, 'Christ

liveth in me,' and, therefore, all that is holy and just and good. Indeed, both these 'Christ liveth in me,' and 'I live not,' -- are inseparably connected,..."

For Wesley it was clear that sin was not an event; event meaning in this case both the voluntary and involuntary, or conscious and unconscious, aspects of sin. Instead, sin was actually a way of life and an all encompassing human nature, an actual predisposition to sin.

In this view then it is equally clear that Christian perfection was never intended by Wesley to be just the elimination of sin as an event. Rather, Christian perfection was intended as the elimination of sin as nature in the Christian life. Man is unable to eliminate his own sin, this principle being the very basis of Christianity; the principle that Christ died for the sins of all mankind is the same as saying that Christ died for the sinful natures of all mankind. Therefore, to truly understand Wesley on this point of sinlessness/perfection is to see that Christian perfection is not tied to the elimination of sinful events. Rather that perfection comes through the elimination of sinful nature, i.e., the predisposition to sin.

Christianity, in its simplest, is a personal relationship with the Son of God. Through this relationship the true nature of God is revealed, and this nature is one of pure and perfect love. Therefore, to know God with all of one's being is to know that pure and perfect love. This is what Wesley most strongly urged.

"The loving God with all our heart, soul, strength and the loving all men as Christ loved us, is, and ever was, for these thirty years, the sum of what I deliver, as pure religion and undefiled."

It is through this relationship growing toward a full love of God, that Christian's are able to give up their sinful nature for a Christ-like nature.

To know God with all of one's being is to know a perfect, and perfecting love. Perfecting love, because to know such is to attain to its example in all worldly living. Wesley was urging Christians to be Christ-like in their love, both for God and their neighbor, but not in their ability to eliminate all sin in their lives.

"I, myself, believe that such a perfection is inconsistent with living in a corruptible body: for this makes it impossible 'always to think right.' While we breathe, we shall, more, or less, mistake. If, therefore, Christian perfection implies this we must not expect it till after death."

Clearly then, Wesley does not argue for sinlessness as to every event in a Christian's life, for in any man's life there will always be the element of mistake.

"Absolute or infallible perfection I never contended for. Sinless perfection I do not contend for, seeing it is not Scriptural."

Instead, Wesley urged the attaining of perfection through a change of nature, that is to say giving up a life centered on a nature of sin. The Christian died to this old self and received a new nature, Christ based and filled with the love of God; the Christian is resurrected with Christ. Jesus as man was also tempted of sin, but He did not sin; Jesus as God had foreknowledge of all events, therefore He did not mistake. It is in the perfection of Christ as regards sin that Wesley was speaking; "for since He was tempted in that which He was suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Hebrew 2:18)."

The question now becomes, what does Wesley consider to be a Christlike nature?

"I want you to be all love. This is the perfection I believe and teach."

In attaining to a Christ-like nature the Christian is brought face to face with God's love. A love demonstrated by Christ's sacrifice unto death for the sins of all mankind. Based on this, Christian's have all the example and incentive they need to accept God's love and, as new creations, to become like Christ in all things.

"Above all, remembering that God is love, he is conformed to the same likeness. He is full of love to his neighbor: of universal love, not confined to one sect or party, not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions...But his love resembles that of Him whose mercy is over all His works."

Through this sanctifying love, and a progressive growth toward perfection, the Christian is able to remove from his nature those thoughts, motivations, and desires that once led him into sin. A love for God, as it becomes foremost in a Christian's life, reorders that life and brings it into subjection to God's will and nature. This universal love of God, and the desires of His will, replaces such disordered love as: greed -- the love of money; gluttony -- the love of food; and self love. By becoming perfect in love the Christian is able to discard his old sin-based nature or will, and take on a Christ-like nature sustained by a God of love. This is the important point for Wesley, not that the Christian be incapable of an act of sin or mistake, rather that the Christian desire with his whole heart to love God and his fellow man.

"But is there no sin in those who are perfect in love? I believe not; but be that as it may, they feel none, -- no temper contrary to pure love, -- while they rejoice, pray, and give thanks continually. And whether sin is suspended, or extinguished, I will not dispute; it is enough that they feel nothing but love."

It is, therefore, a perfecting event based on God's love that Wesley teaches. An event that not only can change a man in an instant, but in Wesley's opinion can also influence the world. For Wesley, the attaining of perfection is not an event to be hidden from the world, but is to be brought into the full view of all.

"...this universal, disinterested love is productive of all right affections. It is fruitful of gentleness, tenderness, sweetness; of humanity, courtesy and affability. It makes a Christian rejoice in the virtues of all...It is the parent of generosity, openness, and frankness, void of jealousy and suspicion. It begets candor and willingness to believe and hope whatever is kind and friendly of every man; and invincible patience, never overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good (Rom. 12:21)."

Wesley desired this perfection for all Christians, and he urged all to seek after it. The importance of this seeking attitude was not just in the end result of perfection, but was in the increasing presence of love that each Christian felt which could, through their participation in worldly institutions, be demonstrated to the world. And this, most assuredly for Wesley, included the worldly economic and political institutions. The next chapter will explore in more detail the attitudes and behaviors Wesley expected as a result of this increasing presence of love.

Chapter 4

Christians and the Economic World

It has been discussed in an earlier chapter, but it bears repeating, Wesley's first concern was for the justification of the people. Only when he was assured that an individual had come under the influence of God's grace and was justified did he urge them to seek after the deeper grace of sanctification. This process of sanctification, as taught by Wesley, leads to the fullness of sanctification which he called perfection. The progressive growth of grace, from the Christian's first turning to repentance to that final instantaneous event of perfection, Wesley likened to a house.

"Repentance is the porch of religion, Faith is the door of religion and Holiness is religion itself."

All events, repentance, justification, sanctification, and perfection, were seen as being under the roof of God's grace. Earlier chapters dealt with the journey from the porch into the house. This chapter deals primarily with actually living in the house, that is, in dealing with the life of holiness. Specifically, Wesley's injunction to live and participate in the world and its institutions meant an increasing interaction with the growing economic and political institutions of the world. This chapter will deal with Wesley's recognition of that fact and with his reconciliation of a life of holiness with an economic and political life.

"Again: in what manner do you transact your worldly business? I trust with diligence; whatever your hand findeth to do, doing it with your might: in justice, rendering to all their due, in every circumstance of life; yea, and in mercy doing unto every man what he should do unto you. This is well: but a Christian is called to go still further, to add piety to justice; to mix prayer, especially the prayer of the heart, with all the labor of his hand. Without this, all his diligence and justice only show him to be an honest Heathen; and many there are who profess the Christian religion, that go not farther than honest Heathenism."

Clearly, for Wesley, a Christian was to be more than someone who did "good," since anyone could do as much. What Wesley wanted, as discussed in some detail in Chapter 2, were Christians who worked for the eternal, and thereby conducted their worldly business with an eye to eternity. How was this to be fulfilled? By the simple acceptance of the nature of Jesus:

"...his eternal, essential, immutable, holiness; his infinite justice, mercy, and truth: in all which, He and the Father are one..."

and the acceptance of His atoning sacrifice.

Specifically, this acceptance of the nature and sacrifice of Jesus was what Wesley called justification, and justification was the result of the atonement.

"Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins and, what is necessarily implied therein, our acceptance with God. The price whereby this hath been procured for us (commonly termed the 'meritorious cause' of our justification) is the blood and righteousness of Christ;..."

To Wesley, this atoning act of Christ's sacrifice was an objective act of God's essential righteousness and mercy; a necessary act which man, to be justified in God's sight, must totally accept. Therefore, in Wesley's view, God's "love obligated Him to the gift of his only Son for the salvation and blessing of men." Accepting Christ was, in this view, an objective necessity for salvation. Yet while in agreement with this, there seemed to Wesley something beyond the objective, because reason alone could not bear witness to the full meaning of the atonement without appealing to experience.

"It is the peril of a purely objective view of the atonement that it may be much less an ethical tonic to human behavior than chloroform to the conscience." This objective view alone did not produce that change in nature that Wesley sought through perfection. Wesley carried a strong feeling that there was a deeper meaning to the atonement, a meaning that could only be fully conveyed to Christians through the experience of Christ's atoning sacrifice. As George Cell states:

"What he (Wesley) appears most concerned about was not the conformity or nonconformity of his ideas with the teaching tradition of the Church, though he had the greatest respect for it, but rather to apprehend to the utmost by experiential thinking the riches of divine grace. He sensed in the atonement an ocean of meaning."

In Wesley's thinking, this deeper meaning went further than the objective nature of salvation. It appears that for Wesley the atonement, and its experiential nature, had implications for Christian holiness, i.e., Christian perfection.

"He really thought the blessing of salvation consisted in freedom from sin, an earnest pressing on and real progress in Christlikeness, not in any divine complacency with our unrighteousness. If God punishes, it is to make us better. If he forgives, it is to make us better. Holiness is the sole and final cause of atonement."

And of course Holiness has implications for the way a Christian leads his life before men. Again, this relates back to the nature of Christ, that is, as Christ lived so should all Christians. His nature being conducive to all holy behavior:

"It includes love, reverence, resignation to his Father; humility, meekness, gentleness; love to lost mankind, and every other holy and heavenly temper; and all these in the highest degree without any defect, or mixture of unholiness."

With a Christ-like nature a Christian could begin to realize the eternal results flowing from his life, those being an increasing love for God and for his neighbor. Also, and more importantly for Wesley, a growing desire to see other's come to recognize their need for Christ and for justification in the sight of God. Wesley sought first to see lost souls saved, and then secondly to see saved souls sanctified; sanctified even unto perfection. The way a Christian conducted his worldly business could be the means of drawing men to salvation, while also serving to indicate an indwelling Christ-like nature.

Having said that, it becomes necessary now to explore those outward behaviors which Wesley said indicated the indwelling nature of Christ. Of these behaviors, brotherly love, righteousness, and stewardship are most encompassing of Wesley's thinking on the matter. These outward behaviors were important to Wesley because of his injunction to live in the world and to be a light unto the world.

"Your holiness makes you as conspicuous as the sun in the midst of the heaven. As you cannot go out of the world, so neither can you stay in it without appearing to all mankind. Ye may not flee from men...."

In this light, according to Wesley, the Christian was to act, in his private life and in his public life, in such a way as to demonstrate the abundance of his love.

"Love cannot be hid anymore than light; and least of all when it shines forth in action, when ye exercise yourselves in the labor of love, in beneficence of every kind."

In business this beneficence was to be demonstrated through the manner in which the businessman conducted himself toward competitors, toward customers, and toward society as a whole. While in politics it dealt with the way government was conducted for the citizenry.

"Do you not make a gain of anyone's ignorance, or necessity, neither in buying nor selling? Suppose you were engaged in trade: Do you demand, do you receive, no more than the real value of what you sell? Do you demand, do you receive no more of the ignorant than of the knowing?...Do you demand no more than the usual price of goods of any who is in pressing want?"

In a time of want and need, which characterized Wesley's era, it was hard to be asked to place another, not only on an equal basis with yourself, but actually ahead of self. Yet this is what Christian brotherly love demands, and this is what Wesley urged on all Christians in their economic pursuits.

"We (Christians) cannot, consistent with brotherly love sell our goods below the market price; we cannot study to ruin our neighbor's trade, in order to advance our own."

The Eighteenth century was a time of both political and economic awakenings. Locke's development of the rights and personal values of the individual had just begun to have some influence. However, it was through the system of economics that real change began to take place.

"The movement of events, however, fostered the trend to economic innovation. With the extension of commercial organization there developed a growing irritation against governmental paternalism which shaped public policy for the gain of a few."

This growing self interest still left unresolved, and in many ways increased, the helplessness and hopelessness of the largest class in England, the poor.

"No accurate record exists to measure the size of the group, but that it was terrifyingly large was indisputable. Economists at the end of the Seventeenth century like Petty and Gregory King gave it as their considered estimate that more than half of the entire population were a liability on the nation."

Considered in the light of these facts Wesley's message of brotherly love, delivered from the mines of Bristol to the slums of London, should have fallen on deaf ears. As shown in Chapter I, the reverse was the case. So too would it appear that Wesley's message of brotherly love would align him against the economic institutions just taking shape. Again the reverse was the case. In fact, Wesley urged Christians to be: "Ferverent in spirit, not slothful in business"

and:

"Every man that has any pretense to be a Christian will not fail to school himself rigourously to the business of his calling..." John Wesley believed that the actions associated with carrying out worldly business were not exclusive of brotherly love. On the contrary, for Christians to engage in worldly business but to exclude their call to do eternal works was the very worst that could occur. All that could possibly come to a Christian operating with a strictly world-oriented economic view was a destructive materialism.

"It is absolutely impossible, unless by that power to which all things are possible, that a rich man should be a Christian, because riches seduce men to concentrate upon material satisfaction."

It was Wesley's desire that Christians should devote themselves heartily to their worldly business, but not to the extent that material things became the end of that pursuit. Remember the Christian works ultimately for the eternal. So instead, the ends of their pursuit were to be as the love and compassion of a Christian for his fellow men, just as Jesus loved, labored, and sacrificed Himself for all mankind.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do you do it with your might? And do you do all as unto the Lord, as a sacrifice unto God, acceptable in Christ Jesus? This, and this alone, is the old religion."

Wesley argued that just as Christ loved man enough to give up His life for man's salvation, so should Christian's love enough to give of themselves, their time, and their possessions to help spiritually and physically those around them.

"Again: a true Protestant loves his neighbor (that is, every man, friend or enemy, good or bad) as himself, as he loves his own soul, as Christ loved us. And as Christ laid down his life for us, so is he ready to lay down his life for his brother...Have you anything to reprove this? Are you not herein even as he?"

What caused the various economic pursuits of Wesley's day to be uncaring, unloving, and in most cases detrimental to the welfare of man, was the clinging materialism to which men fell prey. Wesley therefore urged Christians to pursue their worldly pursuits, not for self-serving ends, but for Christ-serving ends. Such an end being found by loving your neighbor as "you would love yourself" or "as Christ loved us." The Christian conducts his worldly business in such a manner as to bring others to a point of repentance, and therefore to justification before God.

Dealing with the world in a spirit of brotherly love is just the first aspect of doing business as a Christian. In the second, a Christian is also called to conduct his business in all righteousness. As used by Wesley, righteousness is closely tied to the activities of brotherly love; righteousness is the state of the inner Christian man. It is also possible to describe righteousness as being closely akin to justice. Except where justice is usually an external manifestation of an inner state, righteousness is the inner state of the Christian's heart.

"Do you live in no practice for which your own heart condemns you? If you are not an adulterer, if you are not unchaste, either in word or deed, are you not unjust? The grand measure of justice, as well as mercy, is, 'Do unto

others as thou wouldst they should do unto thee.' Do you walk by this rule? Do you never do unto any what you would not they should do unto you?"

Righteousness in the heart of the Christian leads to a desire to deal justly with ones fellow man.

The beginning of righteousness is faith; that faith which leads to the justified life of the Christian. Only by receiving God's grace could righteousness be "imputed" into the hearts of man.

"If, in the faith that justifies and pardons, righteousness is imputed (as Wesley taught and believed), then the ultimate aim of such justification is that righteousness also be imparted."

Thus, to deal righteously with another, as God had dealt righteously with those justified, was the calling of the Christian. In so carrying out this call the Christian saw others in the same light as he saw himself. This light being the indwelling nature of Christ in each Christian. Therefore, for a Christian to deal righteously with himself and with others it is necessary to see the nature of Christ in everyone. In other words, the Christian should be pure in heart, as Christ was pure, and should deal with all men in love and justice.

"Thus, to do no harm, to do good, to attend the ordinances of God (the righteousness of a Pharisee) are all external: whereas, on the contrary, poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst after righteousness, the love of our neighbor, and purity of heart (the righteousness of a Christian) are all internal."

The third behavior indicative of the indwelling Christ for Wesley is best called stewardship. The motivation behind stewardship is the realization that all that is given to man is given through the grace of God, and man thereby is accountable for placing everything into the service of God's will.

"Having first gained all you can and, secondly, saved all you can, then give all you can. In order to see the round and reason of this, consider: when the possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being and placed you in this world, he placed you here not as a proprietor but a steward. As such he entrusted you for a season with goods of various kinds, but the sole property of these still rests in him, nor can ever be alienated from him. ...And He has told you, in the most clear and express terms, how you are to employ it for him in such a manner than it may be all an holy service, acceptable through Christ Jesus. And this light, easy service he hath promised to reward with an eternal weight of glory."

To truly understand Wesley's thinking on stewardship, it is beneficial to note that he in no way considered material things as bad in themselves. The bad in material possessions came about through their improper use, and the importance that was placed on their ownership.

"'Let the world be as corrupt as it will,' challenged Wesley, 'is gold or silver to blame?' to which the obvious answer was, 'The fault does not lie in the money, but in them that use it.'" Possession of material wealth was given to the individual by God for use according to His purposes. The choices directing that use indicated the degree to which a Christian understood and followed the will of God. To be a steward for God, was to accept the responsibility for the use of wealth, but not the ownership of that wealth.

"'Above all,' it was said, although God 'has committed to our charge that precious talent which contains all the rest -- money--' it is indefinitely to be desired only 'if we are faithful stewards of it'"

The Christian, according to Wesley, could labor and earn material wealth, but should never view wealth as his to own and to hold.

"The essence of ownership is therefore defined to be not control for personally chosen ends, but control for the fulfillment of a definite moral purpose."

Clearly Wesley understood the danger for Christian's in accumulating wealth.

"And it is an observation which admits of few exceptions, that nine in ten of these decreased in grace in the same proportion as they increased in wealth. Indeed, according to the natural tendency of riches, we can not expect it to be otherwise"

It is equally clear that Wesley recognized that the very characteristics he was so urgently pressing for Christian's to develop were the very ones responsible for the accumulation of wealth.

"For wherever true Christianity spreads, it must cause diligence and frugality which in the natural course of things must beget riches, and riches naturally beget every temper that is destructive of Christianity."

This tension between wealth and Christian character could only be resolved by developing those characteristics necessary for becoming God's steward. That is to say, if Christian character is conducive of all that goes into creating wealth, and if the accumulation of too much wealth is destructive of Christian character, then the concept of stewardship is the only one that speaks directly to the uses to which wealth needs to be put.

In his sermon *The Use of Money* Wesley urged Christians living within the economic framework "to gain all you can, to save all you can, and to give all you can." Thus he recognized the necessity of working and living within the world, but at the same time recognizing the need for Christian stewardship. Again, as in his dealings with brotherly love and righteousness, Wesley urged Christians to live up to the nature of Christ in the way they handled material wealth. The first step to this was in viewing wealth from the perspective of a God-given gift. A Christian could earn all that was possible, but never was he to see it as in any way reflecting on his own good offices. Instead, all credit was to be given exclusively to God.

"Gain all you can by common sense, by using in your business all the understanding which God has given you."

A second way for a Christian to demonstrate the indwelling nature of Christ is through the use of wealth. A Christian was urged to meet the needs of himself and his family, but beyond that he was to avoid spending just to please other men.

"Lay out nothing to gratify the pride of life, to gain the admiration or praise of men...Rather be content with the honour that cometh from God."

While gaining and saving wealth is a necessary prerequisite, giving away wealth is the important practical application of serving God's eternal ends that Wesley stressed.

"All this is nothing if a man go not forward, if he does not point all this at a farther end."

As mentioned earlier, Wesley's teachings encouraged an increase in those Christian characteristics, within the individual, that were most conducive to an improvement in the work ethic. These characteristics corresponded directly to an accumulation of wealth. If this accumulation was allowed to proceed to a logical conclusion, then it would lead to a decrease in those same characteristics. The answer to this paradox for Wesley lay in the practice of Christian stewardship, that is in giving away the surplus wealth to those less fortunate.

The Christian, of course, is suppose to take care of the needs of his family and himself, but not to the extent that goes beyond need; not to the extent of overabundance. Instead:

"If you desire to be a faithful and a wise steward, out of that portion of your Lord's goods which he has for the present lodged in your hands... 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...there be an oversurplus left... 'do good to the household of faith'...'do good unto all men'."

By doing good to the "household of faith" and "unto all men" the Christian was making a statement about the God he served. That he is a trustworthy steward of his God's gifts, and he understands that God provides for all of his needs and for the needs of others less fortunate. John Wesley was convinced that by giving away surplus, the Christian was serving God by giving back to Him, through meeting the needs of others, that which was His to begin with.

Giving as a Christian steward therefore served two purposes. First, it removed that overabundance of wealth that proved to be detrimental to the continued spiritual growth of the Christian. Second, Christian stewardship demonstrated a commitment and a desire to follow and serve the eternal will of God. Both of these purposes served to set Christians apart from the typical worldly thinking about material wealth. And being thus set apart, Christians were able to draw attention upon themselves and upon the works of their God.

Earning material wealth so as to serve the eternal ends of God's will was an acceptable reason for engaging in the economic pursuits of the world. For Wesley, it was more in keeping with Scripture to believe that God intended for Christian's to stay free of worldly encumbrances, but not to withdraw from the world. Christians, by remaining in the world, could serve and work for the eternal will of God. A will which was directed in all ways to His children's good.

"But employ whatever God has entrusted you with in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree, to the household of faith, to all men! ...Give all ye have, as well as all ye are, a spiritual sacrifice to him who withheld not from you his Son, his only Son--so, 'Laying up in store for yourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that ye may attain eternal life' (1Tim. 6:19)"

Chapter 5

Christians and the Political World

As the preceding chapter has shown, John Wesley attempted to give the Reformation message a personal and practical meaning for all men, a message that urged Christians to be in the world, but not of the world. This message might be expressed as follows: God is with you. And He is, through His love and His grace, reaching out with salvation for every individual. All that is necessary is for each person, through faith, to accept that offer of salvation. And for each person through that acceptance to open to their lives the power of God to cleanse them unto Holiness, and to lead them out into the world for His glory.

As indicated earlier, this is a message that in no essential way broke with the Reformers of the past, but only brought them forward into Wesley's present. In most ways then it was not a new and unheard message. It did, I have argued, take the Christian faith to a length and depth that neither Luther nor Calvin ever explored. Wesley gave Christians a clear view of the fullness of faith found in the perfecting influence of God's love. Not only was Wesley's message profound for Christians of all times, but it has an impact all the greater for our modern world because of the era in which it was expounded.

John Wesley lived at the dawn of our modern world. It was during Wesley's time that the "new type of manufacture" became truly noticeable. Mining of iron and coal, necessities for manufacture, took on tremendous growth. The economic world of the English people became increasingly oriented toward the towns, mines, and factories.

"A new era was dawning for the industries of England, and indeed, owing to the impulse given by England, for those of the entire world. Every year new technical processes were increasing the productivity of human labor. Every year witnessed the employment of larger numbers. The equilibrium of society was overthrown to the detriment of the country districts, and to the advantage of the towns which were rapidly increasing both in number and in size."

This is the world that we in the Twentieth century can easily recognize as the infancy of our own. Clearly Wesley must have also recognized in this birth of the modern world a certain inevitability of growth and dominance. For in no way did he seek to preach a return to an earlier and more understandable era, but he boldly urged Christian men and women to move into this new era and make it their own.

Furthermore, Wesley's ministry was itself a model of what he asked of others. He took his preaching straight into the teeth of the modern world. He ministered to the lower class of society in the mines and factories where the need was the greatest and, to his surprise, so was the reception.

"At four in the afternoon (April 2nd) I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the (Bristol) highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people.' The next day he preached in the fields at Baptist Mills (a Bristol suburb),... The reaction of the people was amazing,... Here were great crowds of eager listeners, who apparently were hearing the gospel in his preaching, whose behavior was visibly affected, whose lives were being 'revived'."

Thus Wesley's ministry took shape among those individuals that typically go unnoticed by society, at least until their discontent takes a more explicit form. How powerfully a ministry speaks to a situation can be most accurately judged by the changes that are wrought there. Wesley's ministry and preaching were powerful indeed:

"It was in the year 1739 that John Wesley and George Whitefield began to preach Methodism. It was a period of general disturbance. A political was aggravated by an economic crisis. On all sides there were strikes and riots. Similar conditions a half-century later must have given rise to a general movement of political and social revolution. In 1739 the revolt assumed a different form. The discontented workmen flocked to the sermons of three clergymen and their disciples. The popular ferment took shape as an outburst of enthusiastic Christianity."

Wesley's ministry broke through the status quo. And while the forces maintaining the status quo have been considered already in Chapter I, it is important to recall one thing. All aspects of society political, economic, and religious - had combined in withholding any sense of value from the lower class of England. Wesley, on the other hand, preached a message that brought value back to the individual, the value that comes from the indwelling nature of Christ Jesus.

The effectiveness of this message can best be judged by a comparison. Elie Halevy, England in 1815, offers a comparison between England during the Wesley era and France leading up to the French Revolution. During this time, both countries suffered from the increasing pressures of a rigid class structure and an institutionalized status quo. And both countries heard messages directed against the status quo, but in France, in contrast to the Wesleyan message, the fruits of an anti-religious philosophy were being worked out to a logical conclusion.

"The anti-religious philosophy of the eighteenth century, and the French Revolution which embodied that philosophy in action, had given the problem of toleration a new aspect. The modern Babylon was no longer Rome but Paris, Anti-Christ no longer the Pope but Voltaire."

While the events in France proceeded toward revolution and the eventual rise of Napoleon, the events in England proceeded toward greater individual freedom and humane conditions for all.

"Why was it that of all the countries of Europe England has been the most free from revolutions, violent crises, and sudden changes? We have sought in vain to find the explanation by an analysis of her political institutions and economic organization. Her political institutions were such that society might easily have lapsed into anarchy had there existed in England a bourgeoisie animated by the spirit of revolution. And a system of economic production that was in fact totally without organization of any kind and would have plunged the kingdom into violent revolution had the working classes found in the middle class leaders to provide it with a definite ideal, a creed, a practical programme. But the elite of the working class, the hardworking and capable

bourgeois, had been imbued by the evangelical movement with a spirit from which the established order had nothing to fear."

That the established order had nothing to fear from violence appears to be quite true. However, to imply that this indicated evangelic acceptance of the status quo was emphatically false.

John Wesley preached an active Christianity, vigorously maintaining the Lordship of Christ over all aspects of life.

"Wesley perceived that much of the prevailing economic distress was due to the denial of social opportunity and he excoriated the complacent critic who attributed it to the viciousness of the poor. On occasion he frankly questioned the system which made distress unavoidable..."

But Wesley did more than question. Chapter I showed Wesley's approach to this environment of distress to be one directed to preaching the message of salvation through faith, and a message that God was seeking to redeem the whole world through His grace. Wesley's avowed goal, as discussed in Chapter 3, was to see each Christian attain to a life of perfection. For Wesley, it would be through these changed lives that the world itself would be changed. Thus in Chapter 4 specific behaviors, or characteristics of the life of holiness and perfection were discussed. These behaviors or characteristics were of utmost importance as a means to demonstrate to the world the changed nature wrought in the Christian's life. What good was Christianity and a life of holiness if the world did not take heed? Fortunately, Wesley's message was not easily ignored.

"It was 'particularly in the great manufacturing towns' that the preaching of Methodism had revealed its full effect in creating a standard of self-respecting conduct. 'Yet if any doubt it'... 'let them go to Kingwood and Cornwall; let them go to Newcastle, Coleford, Wednesbury and Whitehaven; let them go to Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester and Liverpool; let them go to Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Chester; let them go to Norwich, Bath and Bristol - and they will soon be satisfied that multitudes, 'once dissolute and undependable, 'are now sober, holy, Christian men'."

For Wesley, urging Christian men and women out into the world was the best way to attract attention and to be a "light unto the world."

A recognition, if not an understanding, of the Wesleyan message came from all quarters. The Royal Navy and Army openly received Methodist ministers into their camps and barracks, noting the improvement in attitudes in their Methodist soldiers and sailors over what they had been before they became Methodist. Drunkenness, once a severe problem among the laboring class, was radically curtailed under the teaching of Wesley's message. Thus it was becoming increasingly clear that the message of John Wesley was changing lives and benefitting the worldly institutions. The conclusion being drawn was that the Wesleyan message of salvation and justification by faith, and his urging Christians to a life of perfection, was indeed transforming individual lives. These transformed lives in turn were exerting a profound influence over all aspects of English life. This profound influence included the desire to bring others into the Wesleyan and Christian fellowship. This, desire never slackened regardless of the circumstances.

For example, even as the Methodists improved their own lot in the world they did not forget their Christian duty of stewardship.

"Indeed, there is an abundance of testimony that the advent of affluence was frequently accompanied by a corresponding increase in acknowledged responsibility to social needs. Members of the societies vied with each other in the presence of unusual suffering 'saying - nothing that we have will we call our own in this season of distress."

Giving away large portions of their income, some as high as fifty percent, was not uncommon among the Methodist. With such practices, and such startling results, it is little wonder that the English upper class was completely mystified by Wesley's Methodist. One thing was clear to them, however, John Wesley's message

was stabilizing the country. And in the hindsight of the Twentieth century, it is even clearer, that without John Wesley it is doubtful that England would have survived a storm of revolution to play out its role in history.

"Uniting their influence with that of industrialism, they fashioned the character of the English middle class, dogmatic in morals, proud of its practical outlook, and sufficiently powerful to obtain respect for its views.... The ruling classes watched the growth of this new power, whose nature they could not comprehend. They knew that the British Constitution did not give them sufficient strength to repress a general rebellion. And they perceived that the development of industrialism was rendering the social order more unstable and multiplying industrial and political crises. So they called to mind the French Revolution and the American War of Independence and feared 'Methodism' almost equally with Jacobinism. Had they understood the situation better, they would have realized that Methodism was the antidote to Jacobinism, and that the free organization of the sects was the foundation of social order..."

Wesley preached to this economically oriented modern world and demonstrated clearly that it was possible to live a holy and Christian life within. But more than that, he demonstrated that in living a transformed Christian life, men and women could make their world a radically better place to live.

Thus John Wesley brought the good news to the Eighteenth century. Is this also good news for the Twentieth?

Indeed it is. By preaching a practical Christianity, Wesley confronted, head on, the two conflicting views of man's worth or value, that is worth as ascribed by economics versus worth as ascribed by Christianity. Economics is concerned with man as consumer, wage earner;-and producing unit, and these set the terms of an individual's worth or value. Christianity is set over against this as demonstrating the worth or value of man through what God has given to man in the sacrifice of His Son. There is an obvious tension between these two sets of values, a tension noted by Wesley:

"For wherever true Christianity spreads, it must cause diligence and frugality which in the natural course of things must beget riches, and riches naturally beget every temper that is destructive of Christianity."

What economics and Christianity say has worth or value will clearly be in conflict. Why is this relevant for the Twentieth century? Obviously, enough people of the Twentieth century are well versed in the values of economics. In the Western countries of the world, and in some notable others, the principle occupations of the people are within some form of the business structure. Even agriculture has become big business in many Western countries. Economics dominates the headlines. Questions about inflation, recession, and unemployment can become the topic of conversation almost anywhere at almost anytime. Economics is perhaps today's most dominant influence.

In today's world, people seek after money with almost reckless abandon, regardless of who is benefitted and who is hurt. In a similar situation two hundred years ago John Wesley spoke these words:

"The fault does not lie in the money but in them that use it. It may be used ill; and what may not But it may likewise be used well; it is full as applicable to the best as to the worst uses. It is of unspeakable service to all civilized nations in all the common affairs of life. ...In the hands of His children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked."

Money and material things, valueless in themselves, only find value as man assigns it.

Man finds value in things and calls this system economics. God finds value in man, affirms that value with the sacrifice of His Son, and this is Christianity. In recognition of God's values, John Wesley could openly urge men and women to participate in the world while maintaining that they need not be overcome by the world. That is to say that Christians were always to keep and obey God's values while out in the world. Things were valuable only as far as they helped others to improve their lot in life and to recognize a need for their own justification and salvation. This value system is, of course, recognizable from Chapter III as Christian

stewardship. Man has a need for a system within which to conduct trade and commerce. This fact was fine with Wesley, as long as the values assigned by that system were God's. Stewardship entails ascribing the values of God's will and the values of the eternal, to man, money, and material things. Therefore, stewardship supplants the values of economics, but lets the form of the system remain. A Christian could be successful in business, employing sound business principles, and still maintain God's values within his business. Again, as discussed in Chapter III. Wesley's injunction to gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can could be adapted to most business practices. That is, a Christian can run a successful business, gaining and saving enough to cover expenses and growth, and still maintain the level of giving of a good steward of God's wealth.

Again, all that is necessary to be a good steward of God is to first, understand the necessity of God's gift, the sacrifice of His Son, for each individual. As Wesley urged, all men must be justified in God's sight, that is, saved by faith. Second, to be a good steward requires man to open his life to the cleansing of God's love and to expectantly seek that instantaneous event of perfection. Third, and implied by the above, is the need to accept God's values in place of man's values; the Christian works for the eternal. However, considering the Twentieth century, is this a relevant message for today?

It is indeed relevant. First, because it urges Christian men and women out into the world, out into business and industry; where, if history is any indicator, their Christian virtues will flourish along with the business or industry in which they are engaged.

"In one more particular, highly important, the operation of religious forces was productive of that 'economic rationalism,' as Sombart phrased it, which is the soul ' of modern business procedure. It is the spirit of enterprise and of constant improvement which had to be set on foot before capitalism as the deliberate, farseeing organization of free labor could be developed."

Secondly, the Wesleyan message is relevant because it deals with man's sinful nature in a unique, but expectant way, by urging men and women to holiness and Christian Perfection. "If sin implies sickness, then holiness implies health." For Wesley, all men needed a healing in their lives, a wholeness that comes from loving God with all one's heart, mind, and soul. While others taught this as a distant possibility only coming after death. Wesley urged men to be expectant and to seek holiness in their lives daily, for in seeking it could be granted in an instant.

How was man to seek perfection daily? By seeking to be more Christlike in every aspect, expressed inwardly and outwardly, in his life. As Lawrence Mullen states:

"In all our attempts to define the nature of Christian holiness, nothing expresses the meaning quite so well as Christ-likeness. No theological jargon can add to the essential concepts that are here exemplified in the divine person, the Son of God, Jesus, who was holy and sinless and who commanded us to be followers of Him."

So as Jesus was among men as a man, and as he was also holy, then so too can each person be holy as far as they are imitators of Christ. Imitating Christ implies first of all loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind, thereby also loving man as God does. Secondly, it implies dealing righteously, and in justice, to all men. This is especially true for those in business, those dealing with competitors, workers, and society. And thirdly, it implies being a good steward for God and being about the work of eternity and God's will. More specifically, this means to use your time, talents, and economic gains to do God's work in the world. In the three preceding Chapters, John Wesley's writings and preaching were explored in three areas. First, I explored his reasons and justification for urging Christians out into the world. Second, I explored his explanations, and expectations, for the working of faith and holiness within each person. And third, I explored his expectations for Christians in living the life of faith and holiness, and in the demonstration of that life perfected in love.

These constitute Wesley's call to the modern world. It is both a call to the Christian faith and a return to the true values of God. To love God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind is the faith of the Christian. To love

your neighbor as you love yourself is the work of the Christian. Together they constitute Wesley's unique call to the modern world.

"From the beginning they had been taught both the law and the gospel. 'God loves you: therefore love and obey him. Christ died for you: therefore die to sin. Christ is risen: therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore: therefore live to God, till you live with him in glory.' So we preached, and so you believed. This is the scriptural way, the Methodist way, the true way. God grant we may never turn therefrom, to the right hand or to the left.