

a paper:

THE CHURCH'S HERITAGE OF JOHN WESLEY

Robert Baral Baral
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PREFACE

This paper was written to explore the faith and heritage of The Reverend John Wesley and The Methodists and to gain a deeper understanding of the evangelical spirit of the Anglican tradition, which has been a great blessing to all Christian men!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. BACKGROUND OF JOHN WESLEY
- II. EARLY FORMATION JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY
- III. OTHER INFLUENCES ON WESLEY'S EMERGING THEOLOGY
- IV. JOHN WESLEY'S ALDERSGATE CHAPEL EXPERIENCE
- V. TOUGH TIMES FOR THE EARLY METHODISTS
- VI. JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY
- VII. THE HYMNS OF THE WESLEYS
- VIII. THE EMERGENCE OF METHODISM
- IX. RESISTENCE FROM AND BREAK WITH THE ANGLICAN CHURCH
- X. METHODIST OPPOSITION TO SLAVERY IN AMERICA
- XI. IN CONCLUSION
- XII. REFERENCES

ABSTRACT

Indeed men are saved only by faith in our Lord JESUS CHRIST by Divine grace. But while an externally regimented program of daily Bible reading, devotions and good works can bring one to a pious Christian life, there is also the need for the assurance of faith in the heart of one's eternal salvation. That assurance, when the Holy Ghost descends upon the soul of the Christian man, yields that joy in The LORD that only a man certain of GOD's redeeming love at The Cross for his soul may have.

Such an inward experience The good Reverend John Wesley experienced at a Bible society meeting at Aldersgate, England in 1738 AD. From these two essential halves of the Christian walk was Wesley's Methodism born, becoming a great and glorious enthusiastic light of Evangelical Christian rededication and joyous faith!

DEDICATION

A prayer that the darkened and lukewarm Church on earth in The West will again soon rediscover the Methodism of The Reverend John Wesley, that she might be reinvigorated with a heart to minister to our sin-sick and soul-destroying fallen heathen culture, to the glory of our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

EPIGRAPH

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!
- a hymn by Charles Wesley, brother of John Wesley

I. BACKGROUND OF JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley lived from 1703 - 1791 AD. He was born of a father who was an Anglican parish Priest and a mother who was both pious and fertile. He was born in the English town of Epworth, one of ten surviving children of that marriage. He graduated from Oxford in 1724 AD and was ordained an Anglican Priest in 1725 AD. He served for a short time as “curate” under his father The Reverend Samuel Wesley, then returned to Oxford to teach Greek. There he, along with his brother Charles, formed what became known as the “Holy Club.” The group was labeled insultingly “methodists” and characterized by “rigorous discipline of [Bible] study, devotion and good works.”¹

After a failed effort at preaching, ministering and evangelism in the English Colony of Georgia, he returned home to England in 1738 AD. Deeply depressed and questioning his faith, Reverend Wesley soon found himself at the Aldersgate Bible study that was to reinvigorate his faith and give birth to an Evangelical movement that spans time and place - giving inspiration to Christians even today the world over - Methodism. This paper hopes to effectively take note of the most wondrous and miraculous heritage bequeathed to The Church by this energetic and Holy Spirit anointed - but initially unsure and faltering - The good Reverend John Wesley.

II. EARLY FORMATION JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY

Wesley did not develop this theology overnight, but through a long course of years that culminated in a personal conversion experience of The Holy Spirit. When Wesley was a student at Oxford, he and several fellow Christian students formed a “Holy Club” which emphasized “devotional reading, ascetic practice, frequent communion” and evangelism.² The Holy Club was in fact a rigorous, methodical and pietistic program of Christian living that – in its daily formula of good works – formed one half of what came to characterize Methodism. The other half is based on a “conversion experience” of The Holy Spirit where the heart of the Christian man comes to be immersed in the great joy of being saved from eternal enmity with GOD through the grace and merits of our Lord JESUS CHRIST.

¹ 1, Schmidt, “Glorious companions,” p 116-117.

² 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, “A Religious History of The American People,” p 324.

John Wesley with his brother Charles began his ministry in 1736 AD in the then English colony of Georgia in the New World, which met with complete failure. John's congregants objected to his then worship form which has been chastised as "legalistic, rubrically punctilious ministry, ...baptism by [full body] immersion... [and] rigorous restriction of admission to the Lord's Supper." His departure from Georgia was however precipitated by his unsuccessful love for a young lady and apparent difficult relations with the man she married and her uncle - the "colony bailiff and chief magistrate."³

III. OTHER INFLUENCES ON WESLEY'S EMERGING THEOLOGY

The Almighty had prepared Wesley for his Holy Ghost anointing experience through contact with other piously enthusiastic Christians. Most influential were Wesley's repeated contacts with German Protestant Moravians. The Moravians under Count von Zinzendorf emphasized "GOD's love for man as revealed in CHRIST..., intense concentration on the passion of CHRIST..., " an ecumenicalism that was compatible to almost any Church denomination, pietism and aggressive evangelism.⁴ Wesley's Methodism came to display all these Christian qualities.

It is providential that the same Moravian minister's Bible study group at which Wesley had his Aldersgate anointing experience counseled him to continue to preach GOD's Word when he was unsure about doing so. John Wesley was at this time in 1738 AD deeply effected with his recent missions failure in the American Colony of Georgia. He asked himself, "How can you preach to others who have not faith yourself?" To this Reverend Bohler counseled him, "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith!"⁵

After his "conversion of the heart" anointing experience at Aldersgate in 1738 AD, Wesley pilgrimaged to Germany - to the center of the Moravian movement at Herrnhut under Nicholas von Zinzendorf to seek more of GOD's guidance and infilling. Upon his return to England, he became associated with a Moravian group known as "The

³ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, "A Religious History of The American People," p 228.

⁴ 2, Ibid., p 242.

⁵ 1, Schmidt, "Glorious companions," page 121, "Preaching and faith," John Wesley's Journal of 1738 AD.

Fetter Lane Society,” for which he wrote rules and published a collection of hymns.⁶

John Wesley - along with men such as George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards – then came to be greatly used of GOD to “inaugurate a great evangelical revival in Great Britain... [and] America.”⁷ Wesley was influenced by the writings in particular of Edwards in his accounts of Christian revivalism, which was characterized, “by many signs of charity, moral reform and a deep renewal of faith in... [orthodox] doctrines.”⁸ But the most formative experience in The Reverend John Wesley’s Christian walk was his “Aldersgate Experience.”

IV. JOHN WESLEY’S ALDERSGATE CHAPEL EXPERIENCE

And so we follow Wesley to his anointing experience of The Holy Spirit at Aldersgate, which indeed reinvigorated his faith and helped to reawaken Christianity throughout the English-speaking world of his day and long thereafter worldwide. John’s return to England from his failed ministry efforts in Georgia in 1738 AD afforded him much time to contemplate his spiritual state and religious convictions. His soul was troubled by a certain intense lack of “peace with GOD.”⁹ He then joined a pietistic religious society under the leadership of the Moravian missionary Minister Peter Bohler. It was at one of these meetings on May 24, 1738 AD that John Wesley experienced his “Aldersgate Chapel” conversion experience that was to animate and guide his Christian ministry works and life for the rest of his earthly days.¹⁰

Wesley records events of that day in May of 1738 AD that brought him to the Aldersgate Chapel revival meeting. Twice that day he opened up his Bible to read prophetic Words as if directly from The Almighty Himself: “There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that you should be partakers of The Divine nature” and “You are not far from The Kingdom of GOD.” He further records that same afternoon he was asked to attend a Church service. The hymn there sung he took to be a further revelation from The Creator directly to his heart: “Out of the deep have I called

⁶ 3, Wikipedia Encyclopedia, entry for “John Wesley - The Beginning of Revival.”

⁷ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, “A Religious History of The American People,” p 281.

⁸ 2, Ibid., p 302.

⁹ 2, Ibid., p 324.

¹⁰ 2, Ibid., p 325.

unto you, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice!"¹¹

He later went with resistance to the Aldersgate Chapel that evening. While listening to Martin Luther's introduction to ROMANS, Wesley records that his heart "was strangely warmed," opening the door to the spiritual peace which he so severely had hungered for.¹² This "immediate experience of the heart" was to become a hallmark of Methodism and marked a great turning point in Wesley's Christian life. He went from "nervous compulsiveness" to "a trust in CHRIST's love." He went from feeling as a mere "servant of GOD" to that of "a son" of GOD. He went from what may be called mere external Christian ritualism to internal Christian "enthusiasm."¹³ Wesley tells us: "...while... [the speaker] was describing the change which GOD works in the heart through faith in CHRIST, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in CHRIST, CHRIST alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from The Law of sin and death!"¹⁴

Wesley further wrote that he then prayed mightily for all who had been cruel to him and had persecuted him: "I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart... Then was I taught, that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in The Captain of our salvation... transports of joy usually attend the beginning [of this peace and victory over sin in CHRIST, especially to] those who have mourned deeply."¹⁵

Within a few weeks, Wesley had become overwhelmed with a lasting great joy in The Lord JESUS CHRIST. This newfound spiritual peace and joy invigorated Wesley's faith life, molded him into one of the most powerful preachers The Church on earth has ever known and lead him on a path of Christian outreach to common people that shaped for all times how men seek and find new life at The Cross! Here was the fire that set ablaze Wesley's heartfelt enthusiasm to evangelize the lost of his time with his particular zealous blend of "Protestant and Catholic traditions... a firm belief in justification by faith [combined] with a strong sacramental [faith life] and passionate devotion to the pursuit of perfection inherited from Catholic spirituality."¹⁶

¹¹ 4, Rowell et al, "Love's Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness," p 287.

¹² 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, "A Religious History of The American People," p 325.

¹³ 1, Schmidt, "Glorious companions," p 117.

¹⁴ 1, Ibid.

¹⁵ 4, Rowell et al, "Love's Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness," p 287.

¹⁶ 4, Ibid.

Armed with his Spiritual rebirth experience of the heart and his pietistic program of Methodism, The Reverend John Wesley thereafter “dedicate[d] himself to a life of itinerant preaching, often outdoors, to reach the un-Churched” of his age - the great masses of a new poor urban working class people of England that the established Church was not interested in nor capable of evangelizing.¹⁷

V. TOUGH TIMES FOR THE EARLY METHODISTS

The Wesley brothers and their followers were not well received at first in England. Like his preaching friend George Whitfield, John was not extended many invitations from Anglican Churches to preach. Following Whitfield's lead, John Wesley preached his first open air sermon near Bristol in April of 1739 AD. Thus began John Wesley's phenomenal 50-year career of preaching “in any place where an assembly could be got together, more than once using his father's tombstone at Epworth as a pulpit... entering Churches when he was invited, and taking his stand in the fields, in halls, cottages, and chapels, when the Churches would not receive him.”¹⁸

Wesley was not willing to remain silent, having the fire of GOD's Holy Word burning in his soul, while men suffered from sin and perished from want of salvation! In their early years, Wesley and his Methodists encountered resistance, defamation and outright persecution from both Church and government officials: “They were attacked in sermons and in print and at times attacked by mobs... They were denounced as promulgators of strange doctrines, fomenters of religious disturbances; as blind fanatics, leading people astray, claiming miraculous gifts, attacking the clergy of the Church of England, and trying to reestablish Catholicism.”¹⁹

VI. JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY

Of all these Methodist doctrines, perhaps the two most significant are 1) All men have the GOD-given free will to choose either spiritual life or death in acceptance or rejection of The Lord JESUS CHRIST; 2) The assurance of the salvation experience from a spiritual baptism of The Holy Spirit brings the believer to fullness in faith and

¹⁷ 4, Rowell et al, “Love's Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness,” p 286.

¹⁸ 3, Wikipedia Encyclopedia, entry for “John Wesley - The Beginning of Revival.”

perfection. Wesley concluded, based in no small measure on his own Aldersgate experience, that “justified persons are to go on unto perfection,” which he saw as a process leading to full sanctification in the earthly life needful for all Christians.²⁰

Wesley's theology is best understood as a series of spiritual advances in the life of the Christian man where “the grace of GOD, GOD's undeserved love [to us] and [GOD's] power in our lives” shape our salvation through distinct spiritual stages: 1) Preceding or prevenient grace “stirs our consciences, moves us to do good, and creates a hunger for GOD, eventually driving us to our knees” before The LORD to seek salvation. 2) Justification is the actual salvation we obtained when we confess of and repent from our sins in CHRIST. Here we are acquitted of our sins and become in fact Sons and Daughters of The Living GOD. 3) Sanctification brings a change in us as we grow more each day in the likeness of CHRIST. 4) Perfection is “the process of growth in [Divine] love” in us whereby GOD draws us closer and closer to Himself. 5) Blessed assurance sees us filled more and more with “peace, joy and love” as sons of GOD through CHRIST. Here we are at last conscious of GOD's love, grace and presence within us in a most personal way. As a result, as Wesley put it from his Aldersgate anointing, “I felt my heart strangely warmed.”²¹

Wesley notes in his “Sermon on Christian Perfection” that “there are several stages in Christian life, as in natural” life. He sees the lifetime Christian walk growing ever closer to CHRIST through the stages of justification, sanctification and perfection. According to GOD's Will, different men may attain the assurance of GOD's grace in their hearts in different times, circumstances and manners. Wesley saw in St. John's writings in I JOHN 2 the progress of the believer according to their maturity in The Lord: “newborn babes; little children; young men; fathers.”²²

Consider what Saint John records for us in I JOHN 2:12-14: “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because

¹⁹ 3, Wikipedia Encyclopedia, entry for “John Wesley - Persecutions; lay preaching.”

²⁰ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, “A Religious History of The American People,” p 817.

²¹ 1, Schmidt, “Glorious companions,” p 119-120.

²² 4, Rowell et al, “Love's Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness,” p 290, John

ye have known The Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known Him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and The Word of GOD abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one!"²³

John Wesley proclaimed that 1) Newborn babes and little children have been recently "justified freely... [having just obtained] peace with GOD through JESUS CHRIST." 2) Young men are "strong and The Word of GOD abideth" in them, having "quenched the fiery darts of the wicked one, the doubts and fears wherewith he disturbed your first peace; and the witness of GOD, that your sins are forgiven, now abideth in your heart." 3) Fathers know "The Father, and The Son, and The Spirit of CHRIST" in their souls, having become "perfect men, being grown up to the measure of the stature of the fullness of CHRIST."²⁴

John Wesley preached a sermon at Oxford on June 11, 1738 AD titled "A Sermon on Salvation by Faith" in which he declared, "By grace are ye saved through faith!"²⁵ The sermon suggest Wesley was in fact at this time orthodox in his Protestant theology, which was based on Saint Paul's Words in EPHESIANS 2:8-10: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."²⁶ From this sermon on EPHESIANS 2 Wesley declares: 1) "All the blessings which GOD hath bestowed upon man are of His mere grace... The same free grace continues to us, at this day, life, and breath, and all things. For there is nothing we are, or have, or do, which can deserve the least thing at GOD's hand." 2) "Whatever righteousness may be found in man, this is also the gift of GOD."²⁷

Wesley offers these further points in this sermon: 3) "Wherewithal then shall a sinful man atone for any the least of his sins? With his own works? No... having nothing, neither righteousness nor works, to plead, his mouth is utterly stopped before

Wesley's "Sermon on Christian Perfection, # 1."

²³ 5, KJV, I JOHN 2.

²⁴ 4, Rowell et al, "Love's Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness," p 290-291, John Wesley's "Sermon on Christian Perfection, # 1."

²⁵ 4, Ibid., p 288.

²⁶ 5, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

²⁷ 4, Rowell et al, "Love's Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness," p 288.

GOD.” 4) “If then sinful men find favour with GOD, it is ‘grace upon grace!’... the greatest of all blessings, salvation.” 5) “GOD commendeth His love toward us, in that, ‘while we were yet sinners, CHRIST died’ to save us. ‘By grace’ then ‘are ye saved through faith.” 6) “Grace is the source, faith the condition, of salvation.”²⁸

A major focus of Wesley’s theology often overlooked by Christian history is his strong emphasis on The Sacraments in conjunction with Evangelical revivalism. It is said that “the genius of the Wesleys... lies precisely in the unity which they saw between a Sacramental and an Evangelical vision of Christianity.” This Eucharistic theology is most clearly seen in a large body of hymns written by John and Charles Wesley that “combine a rich Sacramentalism with a joyful Evangelical experience.”²⁹

VII. THE HYMNS OF THE WESLEYS

Many of the several thousands of hymns by John and Charles Wesley closely follow a work on The Eucharist by the Anglican Daniel Brevint in his work, “The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice.” Brevint saw the Eucharist in 3 aspects: 1) It is in a commemorative sense “a memorial of the saving death of CHRIST.” 2) It joins The Church and its members with CHRIST as “a present grace and nourishment for worthy receivers.” 3) It is CHRIST’s completed work at The Cross that assures the Christian man acceptance before GOD The Father - “a pledge which assures our participation in the life of the promised Kingdom of GOD.”³⁰ The Sacramental theology of The Wesleys are reinforced in joyful praise and thanksgiving to GOD in their “Brevint” hymns. The hymn “And Can It Be, That I Should Gain?” in stanza 6 reflects an intense personal assurance in the soul-saving work of our Lord JESUS CHRIST at The Cross on our behalf:

“No condemnation now I dread,
JESUS, and all in Him, is mine:
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness Divine,

²⁸ 4, Rowell et al, “Love’s Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness,” p 288.

²⁹ 6, Sykes et al, “The Study of Anglicanism,” p 313.

³⁰ 6, Ibid., p 313-314.

But I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through CHRIST, my own!"³¹

The hymn "Love Divine, All Love Excelling" in stanza 2 sings of the Christian soul nourished by the ever present grace of GOD in the midst of earthly life's troubles:

"Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit,
Into every troubled breast,
Let us find that second rest:
Take away our power of sinning,
Alpha and Omega be,
End of faith as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty!"³²

Perhaps the best known of the Wesleyan hymns is "O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," the 7th stanza of which in particular sings joyously of the Christian soul saved from eternal damnation and made righteous before Our Father in Heaven by The Son:

"See all your sins on JESUS laid:
The Lamb of GOD was slain.
His soul was once an offering made
For every soul of man!"³³

VIII. THE EMERGENCE OF METHODISM

As John and Charles Wesley encountered stiffening resistance to their desired outreach to the common people of England and America by The Church of England, they increasingly took their sermons and hymns directly them. The numbers reflecting their success are staggering: Charles authored and translated over 4,000 Christian hymns in English, while John traveled over 200,000 miles in England mostly on horseback to preach his stirring sermons. By the time of the deaths of John and Charles, there were over 70,000 Methodists throughout the English-speaking world.³⁴

John Wesley codified his view of the essentials of Methodism in several works:

³¹ 1, Schmidt, "Glorious companions," p 132. A hymn by the Wesleys on "Free Grace," stanza 6 of "And Can It Be, That I Should Gain?"

³² 1, Ibid., p 138-139. A hymn by the Wesleys under "Redemption Hymn No. 9," Stanza 2 of "Love Divine, All Love Excelling!"

³³ 4, Rowell et al, "Love's Redeeming Work – The Anglican Quest For Holiness," p 292-293. A hymn by the Wesleys on "Exhorting, and Beseeking to return to GOD" entitled "O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing!"

³⁴ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, "A Religious History of The American People," p 325.

“The Forty Four Sermons..., Notes on the New Testament... and a condensed version of The Thirty-Nine Articles.”³⁵ He further wrote “Plain Account of Christian Perfection (1777)... and [Methodist] Discipline of 1789.”³⁶ In these works are found basic doctrines of Methodism: “man’s sinful state...; salvation through grace by faith; the universal efficacy of CHRIST’s Atonement...;” opposition to the idea of man’s helpless depravity; that free will enabled men to either reject or accept the grace of GOD; that “Christian perfection” is attainable if a man earnestly seeks it; Christian life as a daily “quest for complete sanctification or holiness; the spiritual conversion experience of “the second blessing of The Holy Spirit;” that justification in CHRIST brings salvation, but sanctification comes by a “fullness of faith;” rejection of Calvinistic predestination.”³⁷

What Methodism did was to take then the pietism and intense devotion of Puritanism and repackaged it for its own time and place, emphasizing a program of Christian morality and “the sinner’s penitential conflict.”³⁸ If we are to characterize Methodism in its purest form, we must again note its “highly organized and extremely centralized Church polity, Arminianism..., Perfectionism..., penitential conflict, conviction of sin, and the experience of regeneration.”³⁹

American Methodism in particular came to be marked by an “emphasis on personal religious experience...; legalistic views on Christian behavior...; doctrinal simplicity.” In fact, mere confession of and baptism in CHRIST were not sufficient for American Methodist Church membership. Required for membership was “the experience of regeneration” a la John Wesley’s Aldersgate blessing of The Holy Spirit. Further requirements were the forbidding of alcohol and notably slaveholding. And again we see the familiar Methodist doctrines that “GOD’s grace is free to all; man is ever free to accept or reject it; and the justified sinner, with the aid of The Holy Spirit, must seek the goal of ‘perfection’ (i.e. freedom from willful sin.”⁴⁰

But Methodism is best described in John Wesley’s own words: “A Methodist is one who has “the love of GOD shed abroad in his heart by the HOLY GHOST given

³⁵ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, “A Religious History of The American People,” p 326.

³⁶ 2, Ibid., p 816, footnote 8.

³⁷ 2, Ibid., p 326.

³⁸ 2, Ibid. p 326.

³⁹ 2, Ibid., p 327.

⁴⁰ 2, Ibid., p 373.

unto him;" one who "loves the Lord his GOD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. GOD is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and There is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee! My GOD and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!"⁴¹

John Wesley himself best explains the source of the intense joy that should be found in the heart of every soul saved in CHRIST which is so characteristic of his Evangelicalism: "He is therefore happy in GOD, yea, always happy, as having in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life, and overflowing his soul with peace and joy. Perfect love having now cast out fear, he rejoices evermore. He rejoices in the Lord always, even in GOD his Saviour; and in the Father, through our Lord JESUS CHRIST, by Whom he hath now received the atonement. Having found redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of his sins, he cannot but rejoice, whenever he looks back on the horrible pit out of which he is delivered; when he sees all his transgressions blotted out as a cloud, and his iniquities as a thick cloud. He cannot but rejoice, whenever he looks on the state wherein he now is; being justified freely, and having peace with GOD through our Lord JESUS CHRIST..."⁴²

IX. RESISTENCE FROM AND BREAK WITH THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

Wesley soon found himself at odds with the established Church of England due to his "enthusiasm" and field preaching. This is ironic because Wesley was very much a traditional Anglican in the basics of his theology. "He received Holy Communion regularly and... urged his followers to do the same." And "he valued order and tradition." What caused intense resistance by established Anglican Church authorities to Wesley was rather 1) his "enthusiasm," which Church officials viewed with great suspicion and insecurity; 2) his willingness to preach outside the established Church directly to the English people.⁴³

The advent of The Wesley brothers and Jonathan Edwards was indeed providential in particularly England, as society was undergoing a great upheaval in

⁴¹ 7, John Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist," #5.

⁴² 7, Ibid., #6.

the decades leading up to The American Revolutionary War. This was a social and spiritual upheaval with which the Church of England structure found itself unable and unwilling to adapt to: 1) The industrial revolution brought with it the opening of many urban factories. 2) Agriculture was on the decline as a way of life and existence for many. 3) There was a massive rise in working class urban populations. 4) This produced a sudden large rise in urban poverty and destitution as a result. These “vast numbers of people among the poor and laboring classes had never heard The Christian Gospel and were entirely untouched by the ministry of the established Church.”⁴⁴

John never intended for Methodism to become a separatist movement, but the split with the Church of England eventually came about after both brothers died. In America during and after the Revolutionary War, this need became apparent for political reasons as well. The Methodist Church may trace its first official formation in the “Christmas Conference of 1784 AD.”⁴⁵ In 1784 AD John Wesley took 3 steps that ensured a likely eventual formal break with established Anglicanism, particularly in America: 1) He issued a “Deed of Declaration” containing “rules and regulations for the guidance of the Methodist societies. 2) He ordained his aide the Anglican Priest Thomas Coke as “superintendent” - in effect a Bishop - over all Methodist organizations in the now independent American nation, empowering him to administer The Sacraments. 3) He ordained clergy into Holy Orders within the Methodist organization.^{46 47}

Yet John Wesley's own words show his spirit of Christian Ecumenicalism inherent his view of Methodism, which sprang from his lack of desire to see a split with the Anglican Communion: “...refus[ing] to be distinguished from other men by any but the common principles of Christianity... I renounce and detest all other marks of distinction. But from real Christians, of whatever denomination, I earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all... Dost thou love and fear GOD? It is enough! I give thee the right hand of fellowship.”⁴⁸

⁴³ 1, Schmidt, “Glorious companions,” p 117.

⁴⁴ 1, Ibid., p 118.

⁴⁵ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, “A Religious History of The American People,” p 650.

⁴⁶ 2, Ibid., p 326.

⁴⁷ 8, John Wesley, “Island of Freedom,” Theologians, 11th paragraph.

⁴⁸ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, “A Religious History of The American People,” p 381.

X. METHODIST OPPOSITION TO SLAVERY IN AMERICA

From its first formal official conception in 1784 AD, the Methodist Church in America openly, forcefully and clearly condemned slavery. In fact, slave dealers and slave owners were specifically and formally excluded from Methodist Church membership. In America, particularly in the pre Civil War South, there was sadly however “a steady accommodation” of slavery.⁴⁹ Wesley wrote in great detail of the horrors of American slavery, chiding all those who had anything to do with the abject inhumanity of this monstrous and unchristian institution that raped Africa and despoiled The New World with human suffering. Wesley compiled large amounts of testimony from first hand eyewitnesses as to the brutality of slavery in The Americas that stirred many to work for its abolition.

Wesley records: “When the vessels arrive at their destined port, the Negroes are again exposed naked to the eyes of all that flock together, and the examination of their purchasers. Then they are separated to the plantations of their several masters, to see each other no more. Here you may see mothers hanging over their daughters, bedewing their naked breasts with tears, and daughters clinging to their parents, till the whipper soon obliges them to part. And what can be more wretched than the condition they then enter upon? Banished from their country, from their friends and relations for ever, from every comfort of life, they are reduced to a state scarce anyway preferable to that of beasts of burden... Did The Creator intend that the noblest creatures in the visible world should live such a life as this? Are these thy glorious work, Parent of Good?”⁵⁰

William Wilberforce was a wealthy Evangelical laymen converted in 1786 AD to Methodism and became “dedicated to the abolition of the slave trade and the reformation of morals.” Wilberforce came to lead “an Evangelical lobby in Parliament whose members were nicknamed ‘The Saints.’”⁵¹ This was most important in the life of the English world, as he became stirred in great part by Wesley’s pious influence to at last secure in 1807 AD the outlawing of the slave trade in the English Empire.

The last letter John Wesley wrote was on February 24, 1791 AD to Wilberforce, in which he counseled him to take courage in GOD in the fight to abolish slavery: “...I

⁴⁹ 2, Ahlstrom and Hall, “A Religious History of The American People,” p 650.

⁵⁰ 9, John Wesley, “Thoughts Upon Slavery,” # 7.

see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy [of slavery] which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature [without GOD's help]. Unless GOD has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if GOD be fore you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than GOD? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in The Name of GOD and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.”⁵²

XI. IN CONCLUSION

This paper began by glimpsing into the remarkably providential background of The Reverend John Wesley. By The Ever Providing Hand of The Almighty, Wesley was blessed to be born into a devoutly Christian home that prepared him for his time at Oxford, where he banded together with a handful of like-minded pious young men to form his “Holy Club.” Here the first half of Methodism was shown him by a rigorous daily program for Christian living that boasted of regular Bible study, devotions and good works. Armed as an Anglican Priest, GOD showed Wesley that such ritualistic pietism is not enough to apply externally to the lives of lost men by sending him to the corrupted and troubled English Colony of Georgia in the distant New World. Failure in his missionary efforts there were the fiery furnace in which his mechanical Christian faith was tried by the King of All Creation, and it was shown Wesley that it was found wanting.

What GOD knew Wesley needed was, as that lamenting prophet of old - Jeremiah - wrote upon Divine direction in JEREMIAH 31:33, as “The LORD saith, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts!”⁵³ Through the Holy Ghost anointed and blessedly joyous Moravian Christians placed in Wesley's path, he came to hunger for their heartfelt inner assurance of gladful joy in CHRIST. And so The Loving and Merciful One lead Wesley to that Bible study meeting one evening at Aldersgate where his heart was converted by the descent of The Holy Spirit upon his soul

⁵¹ 6, Sykes et al, “The Study of Anglicanism,” p 34.

⁵² 10, John Wesley, “Letter to William Wilberforce.” Wesley wrote this letter to that great English parliamentarian and activist Wilberforce to express his likewise strong opposition to slavery in 1791 AD.

and - as he later recalled - "my heart was strangely warmed!" Thus The good Reverend John Wesley was given the second half of his Methodistic faith - that priceless thankfulness of a rejoicing heart assured of its forgiveness of sins and eternal rescue from the flaming pits of never ending hell by the merciful and loving grace of JEHOVAH Himself at The Cross - by as it was then known, "Enthusiasm!"

Not surprisingly, the devil himself conspired with all his fallen forces of darkness to keep men like John Wesley from reaching those of his time and place that the then Established Church knew not how nor cared to reach. But The good Reverend prayed for opportunities to preach The Gospel of our Lord to a people lost in sin and sadness, and as Isaiah prayed and received - the windows of Heaven were opened and the rain came down in great blessing upon all the land! To his fellow man who knew not CHRIST, Wesley preached them into justification, "for by grace are ye saved - it is the gift of GOD!" And to the little children, the young men and the fathers already secured in CHRIST, Wesley preached the Christian life's walk of sanctification, perfection and blessed assurance! Thus did this remarkable servant of The Most High storm the very gates of hell as a faithful soldier of The Cross with his Methodistic enthusiasm and program for pious Christian living!

The Church on earth and in Heaven, Christians of all denominations and the world of men have since been blessed by the Christian labours of John Wesley and his fellow harvesters of souls under the banners of CHRIST! We are bequeathed by John Wesley, his brother Charles and like men a testimony of pietistic Evangelical Christian faith, a mountain of glowing Christian sermons, libraries of soul-enriching Christian books, thousands of spirit-uplifting Christian hymns and testimonies of saved lives and souls the multitudes of which exactly only The Good LORD knows. But most of all, we are left with the glorious reminder that, by our faith in The Lamb of GOD Who saves us by His blood, our home in Heaven is secured - there to dwell with GOD Almighty forever! Here then is the reason for that inner assurance of joy that Wesley discovered to have "strangely warmed my heart" at Aldersgate!

O, let us then for gladness leap at the reading of these Holy Words in I PETER 1:3-4: "Blessed be the GOD and Father of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, which according to

⁵³ 5, KJV, JEREMIAH 31.

His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of JESUS CHRIST from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you!”⁵⁴ For can not all who are the saints of CHRIST our Lord rejoice with the Wesleys in the words of their beloved hymn, “O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing:”

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my GOD and King,
the triumphs of His Grace!⁵⁵

In The Name of The Father, and The Son, and The Holy Ghost, AMEN!

⁵⁴ 5, KJV, I PETER 1.

⁵⁵ 11, Hymnsite.com. # 057, “O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing!” by Charles Wesley.

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