

TOWARDS AN INCARNATIONAL CHRISTIANITY:  
THE PERFECT EXPRESSION OF RELIGION  
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*Introduction*

In the first chapter of the General Epistle of James, the author suggests that those who consider themselves “religious” are called to live a religion that must be expressed in ways that demonstrate that their existence or reason of being goes beyond superlative concepts, philosophical thoughts and moralistic constructs that never affect the real needs of the people who are truly suffering in the present time and in our geographical location. James insists that the perfect religion (i.e. that which Jesus requires from each of us, his servants) is the one that seeks to actualize a true embodiment of Jesus’ behavior and love by “*looking after orphans and widows*” and in procuring to stop the “*pollution of this world*” through a constant search for the perfection that comes through the redeeming, sanctifying and vivifying work of Jesus Christ (James 1:27)<sup>1</sup>. Jack Jackson affirms that the creation Wesley’s Holy Clubs and other instruments of eighteenth-century Methodism was related, at least in part, to the desire of their members to focus on establishing practices that were centered on their mutual encouragement, on a devotional life of prayer and the study of the Holy Scriptures and in a deep desire to “enflesh” Christ within their social context through a Christian praxis that included visiting the needy, those who were sick or in prison and helping the poor and the destitute<sup>2</sup>.

In his allocution, Wesley sustains that the true religion is the one that embodies Christ’s presence as an instrument to transform the life of our neighbor (i.e. to transform the life of all the constituent members of society) and, eventually, to transform the social environment in which we live. Therefore, Christianity cannot subsist in isolation, because one of the “*fundamental branches of the religion of Jesus Christ*” is related to establishing peace and holiness through our “*living and conversing*” with other “*men.*”<sup>3</sup> This means that, for the true servant of Christ, to detach from all the expressions of mercy, holiness and divine love becomes impossible, because these become the primary means through which we incarnate (i.e. embody) Christ in real and tangible ways that are conducive to the transformation of our social environment.

In his eighty-fifth sermon, sermon entitled “On Working out Our Own Salvation,” Wesley proposes that no follower of Jesus Christ has a valid excuse for not fulfilling the requirements established by Christ, because the work God effects in each life through the action and power of his Eternal Son enables them to carry out that which is “*impossible for men*” (Matthew 19:26) (i.e. living in the power of God’s transforming love), while at the same time they are enabled to work in tandem with the action of his power, since the true Christian comes

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical references come from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Jack Jackson, *Offering Christ: John Wesley’s Evangelistic Vision* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2017), 99.

<sup>3</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 5, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 24:298.

to be constituted “*workers together with him*” in the process of salvation together with him (2 Corinthians 6: 1-2)<sup>4</sup>. Then, Wesley concludes, it is necessary for the believer to “*fight the good fight of faith*” and makes his or hers the call to live a full life (1 Timothy 6:12), to agonize over “*entering through the narrow gate*” (Matthew 7: 13) of service and obedience to Jesus, to deny his own comfort and privilege to take up the cross of Jesus Christ “*daily*” (Luke 9:23) and thus go after God’s “*calling and election*” (2 Peter 1:10) to fulfill the requirements of the religion that is perfect and without blemish.

Theodore Runyon points out that, in our Wesleyan interpretation, religion cannot be seen or understood as the means of escape used by humanity to reach a more tolerable celestial plane. On the contrary, Wesley presents religion in terms of a “*redemptive enterprise*” that seeks to establish a new creation on the basis of a “*faith expressing itself through love*” (Galatians 5:6), thus bringing “*holiness and happiness to all the earth.*”<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Wesley’s insistence on the defense of the inalienable human rights given by God to all the constituent members of British society, his work among the poorest and most vulnerable members of eighteenth-century England, his insistence on the equal rights of women in the Church and in society in conjunction with his emphasis on responsible Christian stewardship as a means to meet the needs and thus be able to eradicate the ubiquitous social evils must be seen and interpreted as fundamental elements for the construction of this new society that is centered on seeking this perfect expression of the religion that is modeled and required by Christ.

*The True Religion is the One Expressed Through Our Good Works*

In his seventh sermon, sermon entitled “The Way to the Kingdom,” Wesley explains that the nature of religion is not constituted by the forms of tradition or worship, nor by the rituals and ceremonies and liturgies instituted by the different Christian denominations, and not even by the extrinsic actions that can be carried out by men and women of faith. Rather, Wesley underlines, true religion is related to that deep transformation that resides “*in the hidden man of the heart*” and that is manifested by means of physical actions that are conducive to demonstrate the love God has manifested to us in Christ Jesus through those works that seek to show the true path to salvation and transformation<sup>6</sup>. This implies that the physical expression of the transformation that Christ has accomplished in our hearts has to be externally expressed in a true religious manifestation that seeks to eliminate vices, immorality, injustice and sin by introduction of the good works prescribed by the Holy Scriptures and that were modeled by Jesus Christ.

In line with the Wesleyan Christological interpretation, the Christian call to justice, to goodness and to humility needs to be understood as the “*ethical imperative*” of faithfulness and holiness that should impel all the servants of Jesus Christ towards an “*uncontainable devotion for*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 85:513.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 168.

<sup>6</sup> Wesley, *The Works*, vol. 5, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 7:78.

*works of kindness and mercy*” and towards a “*sincere participation in the collective efforts to alleviate the needs and the suffering*” of our brothers and sisters<sup>7</sup>. Truly, this is the physical expression of the call to a radical obedience to Christ that flows from the heart of the true believer in terms of good works (i.e. the concrete actions leading to a genuine religious and social transformation), since these are an integral part of the identity of the true servants of God. Coinciding with the Scriptural mandate, Wesley reminds us that God summons every Christian to an unreserved obedience and to a response marked by a faithfulness that impels him or her to collaborate with Christ in the establishment of true justice and equity for all humanity<sup>8</sup>. In other words, the true believer is required to participate in the process of transforming society through the works that were established by Jesus Christ, since a faith that cannot be demonstrated through tangible works of justice and mercy is a faith that is useless or a faith that is completely dead (James 2:26).

Using the words written by the psalmist in Psalm 85:10—11, Wesley states that the true religion is the one that is concerned with embodying the redemption and salvation effected by Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary through the energetic and definitive practice of the elements of social justice and peace. Wesley notes that the true religion is the one that is concerned with seeking the cessation of all war and hostility, with avoiding all bloodshed, with stopping destruction, with eradicating all extortion and all unfair treatment directed towards the poor and with eradicating all theft and pilfering and in stopping all the manifestations (patent and latent) of injustice in society<sup>9</sup>. On the basis of these assertions, true religion (i.e. that true expression of faithfulness and obedience to the call of Christ) is the one which is actualized in a manifestation of justice that brings forth the truth “*from the earth*” and that allow God’s “*righteousness to look down*” from heaven in a tangible way, right here in our present social context (Psalm 85:11). Wesley continues explaining that, in the shadow of this justice established by Jesus Christ, the earth is no longer filled with “*cruel habitations*” because God has destroyed the wickedness of men, and now they are full of peace and the joy that is reached only through faith in Jesus, the Son of God<sup>10</sup>.

Wesley was convinced that genuine Christian ministry (i.e. the physical expression of the true religion) must be expressed through good works done in the name of Jesus Christ, through works that attended to all the needs of human beings in integral ways and through expressions that encourage all Christians to imitate this type of holy expression<sup>11</sup>. On the basis of the need for a ministry that addressed all aspects of human life, Wesley established a religious system that integrated Christian doctrine, theology and praxis to respond effectively to the divine call of transforming humanity through the message of Jesus Christ. This is why the Wesleyan societies

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<sup>7</sup> Paul A. Mickey, *Essentials of Wesleyan Theology: A Contemporary Affirmation* (Grand Rapids: The Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 159.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-160.

<sup>9</sup> Wesley, *The Works*, vol. 5, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 4:46.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:46-48.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Yrigoyen Jr. and Ruth A. Daugherty, *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart & Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 102.

and all the other interconnected groups of eighteenth-century Methodism focused on the practice of doing good “*both in words and in works*,” tried to be sensitive to the needs and physical circumstances of their neighbor, proclaimed a message that “*announced the divine judgment*” against evil and injustice while “*bringing hope and healing*,” practiced good stewardship of all of their resources and served their society through the grace and mercy established by Jesus Christ<sup>12</sup>.

Although Wesley preached that salvation is not obtained through the constant practice of good works since it is obtained only by grace through faith in the perfect Son of God (Ephesians 2:8-9), these (i.e. good works) become the tangible manifestations of a genuine and fruitful faith and the physical demonstrations of the devotion, the obedience and the service of the believer, because true faith “*is full of good works*” and seeks to “*do good unto every man*” as a visible demonstration of the transformation that Christ has operated in the lives of those who approach God through faith in Jesus, the Christ<sup>13</sup>. In his literary anthology of the works of Wesley, in a direct quote from the treatise entitled “*Love of Man*,” Alice Russie states that the author of Methodism considered that the true follower of Jesus Christ is the one who demonstrates a constant and active zeal in doing good, the one who “*embraces every possible opportunity to do good and to prevent, remove or minimize evil*,” the one who seeks to do good with all his or her strength, the one who tries to occupy his time by communicating a message of hope and peace, the one whose motives are directed by the love of Jesus Christ and the one who seeks to share the true religion “*with the foreigner*”<sup>14</sup>. So, for Wesley, the true religion is the one that is expressed through a life of Christian service that seeks to rejoice with those who rejoice, that seeks to suffer with those who suffer pain, that feels compassion for the sick, that shares everything with others with goodwill and the one that seeks to transform all levels of society through the love and power of Christ in a definitive way<sup>15</sup>.

In his “*Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*,” Wesley writes that the new birth must be seen as a transformation or internal change “*from all sin to all holiness*” and that this change must be seen expressed in the nature, attitudes and actions of the true believer who has experienced this transformation<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, the marks of this new birth (demonstrated and substantiated in his eighteenth sermon) must be evident in the lives of all those who are “*born of the Spirit*” (John 3: 8). Wesley explains that the natural result of this transformation that is operated in the life of the believer through the power and action of Christ is intimately related to loving our neighbor (i.e. all and every man) “*as yourselves*” (Mark 12:31) and with an burning passion that impels us to practice justice in all our actions and in all our conversation. Therefore, the true religion is the one that drives its followers towards living their lives as tangible

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>13</sup> Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 126-131.

<sup>14</sup> Alice Russie, ed., *The Essential Works of John Wesley* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 2011), 1307.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1308.

<sup>16</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament: Fourth American Edition* (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason Publishers, 1818), 225.

demonstrations of the “*labor of love*” established by Jesus Christ, towards living in a continuous obedience to his commandments and towards actively expressing the mercy of the “*Father who is merciful*” (Luke 6:36) and that sent his Son to die on the cross in a true embodiment of love, mercy and grace.

*The True Expression of Religion Calls Us to Meet the Needs of the Poor*

On April 9, 1789, in his sermon number one hundred and fourteen, sermon entitled “The Unity of the Divine Being,” Wesley declares in front of an audience gathered in Ireland, in the city of Dublin, that the true religion must be defined in terms of seeking after and developing the “*right tempers toward God and man*”<sup>17</sup>. Wesley argues that these “*tempers*” can be summarized in two ways: in a “*gratitude*” that is directed towards our “*Creator*” and “*supreme Benefactor*” and in a “*benevolence*” that is directed towards all our neighbors<sup>18</sup>. Clearly, these statements and these positions held by Wesley are a reflection of the words spoken by Jesus in Matthew 22:37—39; a discourse where Jesus declares that the most important commandment is to love God and seek to live in complete dependence of Him as primary objective and to love our neighbor (i.e. take care of them and seek to satisfy their needs) as a secondary or concomitant objective with the first. On the basis of these statements, Wesley declares that the transformation operated by the love of God manifested through the redemptive work of Christ in the life of every believer encourages him or her to practice the works of love directed towards our brothers and sisters in an attitude of humility, in a genuine benevolence and in gratitude towards our Creator, since the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ impels us, necessarily, towards the zeal for good works.

In his book “Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics,” Theodore W. Jennings states that, through his concern for addressing the physical and economic needs of the less fortunate in society, Wesley provides a practical foundation that eventually nourishes and sustains a Christian praxis centered on ministering to the needs of the most marginalized members of English society and that transforms, not only the social environment and their lives, but also the lives, hearts and understanding of those who that have been commissioned by Jesus Christ, thus becoming “*instruments of divine mercy and justice*”<sup>19</sup>. Following this same line of thought, Theodore Runyon explains that Wesley was convinced that the responsibility of the true community of faith was inextricably linked to establishing nexuses of love, of service and of help with the poor. He writes that, two centuries before the proponents of the Liberation Theology “*discovered the preferential option for the poor*” in the second half of the twentieth century, Wesley was already promulgating, prescribing and practicing it together with his eighteenth-century Methodists<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Wesley, *The Works*, vol. 7, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 114:269.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 114:269.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 57-58.

<sup>20</sup> Runyon, *The New Creation*, 190-191.

Wesley suggests that, to be a member of the true Church of Christ (i.e. to be a true Christian and, by extension, a son or daughter of God), the believer must live in accordance with the all-encompassing law of divine love. This implies that those who declare to have been transformed by the love and power of Jesus Christ should, with all humility and meekness, fulfill the requirement of bearing “*with patience*” the burdens, the pains and the needs of the neediest members of society (i.e. the poor) “*in love,*” as portrayed by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:2. Wesley explains that this responsibility entails helping those who are injured or hurting, crying and grieving with the afflicted, bearing the burdens of our brothers and sisters, reducing their difficulties by all possible means, demonstrating a genuine alterity in their sorrows, their afflictions and their illnesses and striving to “*lift up their sinking heads*” and “*strengthen their feeble knees*” with the message of hope of the gospel and through the active use of our economic resources<sup>21</sup>.

In his sermon number one hundred and sixteen, sermon entitled “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” Wesley argues that one of the main causes of the problems faced by the eighteenth-century Anglican Church was related to the ostentatious economic prosperity of its laity and clergy, with its excesses and luxuries that bordered on the obscene and sinful and with its consequent reluctance to attend to the needs of the poor, even though its constituent members had sufficient resources to easily meet their needs<sup>22</sup>. Wesley suggests that, even when the insensitive people may find this hard to believe, the Biblical precedent shows that the responsibility of the Church is linked with supplying and meeting the needs of those who are less fortunate in our environment. In his interpretation, the book of Acts shows that the Early Church focused its attention and its efforts on meeting the needs of all the people, in such a way that none of them lacked anything since they distributed their resources to “*to anyone as they had need*” (Acts 4:35).

Wesley was so convinced of this truth that, both in his writings and in his preaching, he spoke regularly against the dangers associated with riches and with the excessive concern for obtaining material goods and against the excesses in dressing and in eating, while he exhorted everyone to make good use of their resources and to become responsible stewards of what God had entrusted to their hands. Through many of his writings we can see that Wesley was convinced that the believer could not afford to cover his or her body with ostentatious dresses or to squander his or her resources on exquisite food when there was so much need present in their social environment. According to his interpretation, allowing for these luxuries was simply robbing God and the poor, since true religion (i.e. the tangible expression demonstrated by true believers) must be expressed in a concern and a holy action that is aimed at alleviating the needs of our brothers and sisters. For these purposes, Wesley writes:

“Render unto God,” not a tenth, not a third, not half, but all that is God’s, be it more or less; by employing all on yourself, your household, the household of faith, and all

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<sup>21</sup> Wesley, *The Works*, vol. 6, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 74:399.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 7, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 116:285-286.

mankind, in such a manner, that you may give a good account of your stewardship when ye can be no longer stewards; in such a manner as the oracles of God direct, both by general and particular precepts; in such a manner, that whatever ye do may be “a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour [sic] to God,” and that every act may be rewarded in that day when the Lord cometh with all his saints<sup>23</sup>.

In other words, each person is responsible to render unto God that which is proper, and what is proper is to serve the whole of humanity as a physical expression of the transformation that Christ has operated in our hearts. Therefore, true religion requires that we live in continual obedience to the divine oracles, that we love our fellow “men” as an expression of our service and spiritual act of worship to Christ, and that we become responsible stewards of the resources he has entrusted into our care through our acts of love and service directed to the poor.

### *Establishing an Incarnational Christianity is Our Responsibility*

A simple analysis of the first chapters of the book of the Acts of the Apostles clearly demonstrates that the Early Church understood its Christian responsibility in terms of providing a religious system that emulated the postulates instituted by Jesus Christ. For this reason, we find the establishment of a community where alterity and communion were an integral part of their daily activities (Acts 2:42), where there was agreement of direction and provision (Acts 2:44), where needs did not exist because the goods and properties were not held as individual or exclusive but were seen as elements of their corporate life (Acts 2:45), where bread and food were shared with joy and generosity with all the constituent members of this society (Acts 2:46), where there was no greed or excessive pursuit of possessions because everything was shared within the community (Acts 4:32) and where Jesus Christ was the agglutinating entity that compelled those that were most fortunate to divest themselves of everything they possessed in a tangible show of love for the benefit of his less fortunate brethren (Acts 4: 33-35).

Wesley understood that the example demonstrated by the Early Church was the example that the church of eighteenth-century England had to follow, since the need of embodying the love, the mercy and the grace of Christ continued to be relevant and necessary in the complicated and painful social reality of their times. Although there was no specific commandment that required or demanded the sale of material possessions to meet the needs of those that lived within their social environment, that was exactly what the Christians of the Early Church did because they did not need anyone to tell them that this was the appropriate response to the obvious needs of their brothers and sisters. Why? Wesley argues that the transformation effected by Christ in the lives of this early Christians resulted in them not needing an external commandment because “*the command was written on their hearts*” and it was naturally expressed in an embodiment of the “*degree of love which they enjoyed*” in Christ<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, Wesley explains that, in the same way in which the transforming power of Christ

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., vol. 6, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 50:135.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 61:256.

was active in the lives of these early Christians, we are also called to emulate these expressions of God's love for all mankind and of his mercy extended over all the work of his hands.

In his ninety-ninth, sermon entitled "The Reward of the Righteous," Wesley states that the embodiment of the presence, the power, the grace and the love of Christ must be understood as the true principle upon which perfect religion needs to be built, since this dynamic of incarnation (i.e. making the presence of Christ tangible through the continued practice of good works) is the "*highest part of that spiritual building whereof Jesus Christ is the foundation*" and the highest of "*all Christian graces*" that is properly expressed through the "*direct... love of our neighbor*" (1 Corinthians 13)<sup>25</sup>. The system or method designed and established by Wesley was effective in embodying Christ's grace and love, because it contained an integral response "*to the personal and social conditions*" that were present in the Wesleyan ministerial context<sup>26</sup>. Henderson states that the Wesleyan response to the ubiquitous problems present in their society sought to embody certain basic principles that were bulwarks in the praxis established by Wesley as an instrument to bring about a true social and religious transformation. Among these principles of incarnation held by Wesley and that must be emulated by the Church of Christ we find the following: recognizing that human nature can be perfected through the divine grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ and mediated by his Church, learning to do the will of God at all times, understanding that humanity can be perfected by participating in groups designed to model Christian temperaments, recognizing that the spirit and practice of early Christianity can and should be recaptured, learning that human progress will occur when we help people to actively participate in the means of grace, understanding that the Gospel must be presented to the poor, recognizing that social evils cannot be resisted or tolerated but must be overcome through good, together with knowing that the primary function of spiritual leadership to equip others so they can lead and minister to the needs other's<sup>27</sup>.

Now, for Wesley, to embody the love and presence of Christ is not limited to providing food and clothing or to attending the needs of those who are sick or in prison. Wesley points out that the true Christian is also called to "*administer help of a more excellent kind*" by fulfilling their responsibility of meeting the spiritual needs and desires of their neighbor<sup>28</sup>. These responsibilities are fulfilled when we actively seek to instruct our brothers and sisters in the rudiments or the "*first principles of religion*," when we strive to understand the "*danger*" of the condition in which they find themselves living "*under wrath and curse*" of God because of their sin and when we proactively direct them to Jesus Christ who is "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29)<sup>29</sup>. In other words, we fulfill the responsibility of embodying Christ when we seek diverse opportunities to comfort those who suffer pain and those who suffer under the weight of sin and injustice, when we seek opportunities to strengthen

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 99:130-131.

<sup>26</sup> D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Nappanee, Indiana: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 127.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 128-129.

<sup>28</sup> Wesley, *The Works*, vol. 7, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 98:120.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 98:120.



the minds of those who have been enslaved by incorrect and perverse patterns of thought, when we seek opportunities to vivify those who are worked and heavy laden by the daily pressures of this world, when we seek to build up those who have begun to walk in the faith and when we seek to encourage everyone to “*go on to maturity*” (Hebrews 6: 1) and on to the holiness that is only found in Christ.

Wesley affirms that this love of God, which is manifested and actualized in the life of the believer through the power and action of Christ, should naturally compel him or her towards the practice of what he calls works of piety (i.e. the practice of spiritual disciplines that lead the believer to a greater spiritual depth through prayer, Scripture reading and frequent participation in all means of grace); an action that naturally provokes in the believer a greater measure of love directed towards his or her neighbor, which in turn must compel him or her towards the practice of the works of mercy (i.e. attending to the physical as well as spiritual needs of our neighbor). Therefore, on the basis of these assertions, the Church of Christ must be predisposed toward the proactive practice of embodying Christ through those good works that meet the present needs present within its social environment (i.e. feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, caring for orphans and widows, etc.), since there is no greater joy in this world than the “*joy of doing kindnesses*” of Christ in the lives of those who need to experience his love and the transformation that only he can bring about<sup>30</sup>.

It is evident that one of Wesley’s primary emphases was found in establishing a praxis of Christian love that was centered on the embodiment of a Christ who desires to radically change the lives of all human beings as well as the unjust social and economic systems that have been established by men and women who follow their selfish and evil desires and that are established by a multiplicity of underlying manifestations of sin through the presentation of a Gospel that seeks the transformation of the individual and his social environment. Using the Scriptures, Wesley demonstrates that the desire of God is anchored in the regenerative, saving and transforming action of Christ manifested and actualized in the lives of the men and women that conform the visible manifestation of the mystical body of Christ here on earth. In other words, Wesley argues that true Christians are called to delineate and to establish systems that seek to proactively embody the love, the grace, the mercy and the transformation mediated by Christ, in order to inaugurate a new physical manifestation of the eternal kingdom of God right here on earth. Therefore, in a real way, the Church of Christ has a responsibility to embody the presence and the power of Christ through her motives, her words and her actions in order to foster and establish a radical and sustainable transformation in our society.

### *Conclusion*

The words written by the author of the General Epistle of James help us to remember the importance of establishing a ministerial praxis that not only focuses on addressing the spiritual aspects that are necessary to fulfill a faithful presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Beyond

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., vol. 6, *Sermons*, vol. 2, 84:500.

this, his gentle words resound piercingly to establish that a faith that focuses exclusively on tending to the spiritual aspects that are necessary to become partakers of the salvation obtained by Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary is a faith that has no power to bring about a true salvation and transformation, since a faith that does not compel the believer towards the “*good works*” that produce, embody and sustain a true and sustainable social transformation is a dead faith (James 2: 14-17). James establishes that not attending to and ignoring the physical needs of our brothers and sisters who are naked or in need of their daily sustenance (James 2:15) sheltered under the subterfuge of prayers and good wishes, is simply incompatible with the divine desires and with the transformation that Christ has operated in the lives of those who approach him through faith (James 2:16). In an amazing way, the message conveyed by the author of this epistle encapsulates the Wesleyan exhortation of an evangelistic presentation that seeks to embody this same transforming presence of Christ outlined by James.

Clearly, Wesley endeavored to demonstrate that Jesus’ commandment of loving God with all our heart and with all our strength and to manifest this love in tangible ways by loving our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-38) is a indispensable element in the life of the Church (i.e. in the life of every believer) because, according to the declarations found throughout the Johannine literature, a love that is directed towards our brothers and sisters is the true expression and genuine demonstration of our love for God (1 John 4: 7, 1 John 4: 8, 1 John 4:20, etc.). Therefore, Wesley concludes that it is necessary that every believer becomes a true lover of humanity, in complete fulfillment of the example of Jesus Christ. In the Wesleyan interpretation, loving our neighbor is intimately related to a holy disposition that move us to participate in the fight against the injustices that are present in this world, to practice the good works (i.e. both works of piety and works of mercy) prescribed by Jesus Christ and enumerated in the Holy Scriptures and to establish a sustainable social transformation through the religious conversion of the individual, the family, the community and eventually of the whole nation consigned through the power and action of Christ.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of living in a society where corruption, violence, hatred, discrimination, lack of alterity and all the other despicable permutations of sin were the order of the day, Wesley maintained that the only viable solution to these ubiquitous social evils was found in the establishment of a society where God’s divine justice, where the possibility of a full transformation through the salvific action of Christ, where love directed towards our brothers and sisters and where the generous sharing of the resources given by God must become the central element of life, in obedience to the supreme example of Jesus Christ. On the basis of these assertions, we can determine that doing good (i.e. obeying the imperative of Jesus Christ) must become the manifestation and expression of a community that has been radically transformed by the love and by saving and regenerating action of Christ. It is for this reason that the societies and the interconnected groups of Methodism organized by Wesley understood their primary responsibility in terms of doing good, of being instruments of mercy and divine love, of fulfilling the divine will and of allowing the light of Christ’s salvation to shine brightly in their midst. Therefore, in addition to doing good through the constant practice of works of mercy, the true believer has also been commissioned to become a spokesman for the Gospel of Jesus Christ,

since this is the only means established by God to change the lives of all fallen humans and, thus, bring about a sustainable social transformation.

Then, it becomes necessary that we recognize that we have been commissioned to become a community of faith (i.e. a Christian community ) that is willing to fulfill the divine commandment and mandate of becoming salt and light (Matthew 5: 13-16), of satisfying the needs of our brothers and sisters and of becoming examples of God's divine love as a palpable demonstration of the transformation that Christ has effected in our lives. In the same way that Christ did not consider his condition of equality with God as an impediment to surrendering his life as the perfect sacrifice leading to the salvation of humanity (Philippians 2: 6-11), Wesley invites the Christian community to reject the comforts and the privileges of their economic and social position, to invest their economic resources in tending to the needs that are present within their social environment and to demonstrate the change that has been operated in their lives by Christ through the action of their Holy Spirit through the continuous practice of external actions of love.

According to Wesley, the biblical exhortation to “*do good to all*” as we have the opportunity (Galatians 6:10), must become the motivation that drives every believer to pursue, by all means possible, the establishment of systems and ministries that seek to satisfy the needs of those who are suffering because, in doing this, we fulfill the commandment of Jesus Christ<sup>31</sup>. What is this commandment? Wesley argues that the commandment of Jesus Christ is related to the idea of loving our neighbor, of showing them our compassion and solidarity in their pain, of tending to the needs of those who are orphan, of comforting the widow in their afflictions, of caring tenderly for those who suffer every kind of affliction and to mixing our compassionate tears with those who cry under the weight of the injustices and the ubiquitous sins of this world<sup>32</sup>. In a real way, this vivid picture painted by Wesley tangibly reveals to us what the ministry (i.e. the redeeming action) of a community of faith that seeks to embody the love, the grace and the mercy of Christ should be like. I believe it is abundantly clear that, for Wesley, the perfect expression of religion was centered on establishing a Christian praxis that embodied the presence and the love of Jesus as the irrefutable way of transforming society. This Christian embodiment is actualized through the constant practice of good works and through the exposition of the message of the Christ who came to seek and to save what had been lost, through the establishment of systems that seek to serve and restore the lives of those who suffer in our society and through the fulfillment of our Christian responsibility of becoming defenders of those who cannot defend themselves and protectors of those who are weak through the actualization of the love of Christ.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., vol. 7, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 87:10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Vol. 6, *Sermons* vol. 2, 84:500.

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