

# Beyond Market Logic: Ecclesial Practices for Mission

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## in the Wesleyan Tradition

The growing dominance of global markets and the increasing desire to consume have led to an invasion of Western culture by commercial values. Recent developments in the market economies of capitalist societies have made it possible for a "market logic" to occupy the way we understand culture itself <sup>1</sup>. All of these developments have created new discussions about the nature of late capitalism and the consequences of globalization<sup>5</sup>. Wesleyans may enter these discussions by acknowledging the unique theological resources they bring to the mission of Christ's church and that can shape alternative communities of faith.

The emerging critique of late capitalism among academics can dazzle with intellectual delight and yet remain disconnected from ecclesial practices which transform lives according to the purposes of Christ. Any critique of late capitalist culture can end up becoming end-itself, unless one supplies the missionary impulse of the gospel. In Wesleyan terms, a capitalist critique can serve very different ends other than spreading scriptural holiness across the lands. Wesley's practice of ministry provides spiritual resources for understanding how believers can offer an alternative to the dominant logic of late capitalism. The theological and missional resources available in Wesley can supply the full wealth of conviction in shaping a radically different people through the traditional practices of piety on the one hand (e.g., fasting, study of Scriptures, worship, prayer, Christian conferencing, etc.) and through the ongoing taxonomy of spiritual formation in the church on the other (e.g., experiences of God's grace, the shaping of virtues in the life of holiness, and the intentional formation of doctrinal

identity).<sup>3</sup> These practices are pertinent to understanding how the missional impulse in the Wesleyan tradition helps the church to flourish in the world despite the onslaught of late capitalist culture.

The practice of mission within the Wesleyan tradition, then, does not wait to get the critique "right" and then move into mission. Rather, a Wesleyan missionary praxis carries within itself its own internal self-criticism. The church offers the gospel of Christ to the world and moves into mission in the power of the Spirit. It is the kind of missionary praxis that remains critical and yet committed to practicing the means of grace. This means that the church's missionary emphasis cannot go in the direction of a docetic spirituality on the one hand, remaining above the suffering of the world, nor can it go simply in the direction of humanitarian relief, neglecting the coming good news of God's reign in Christ. The missionary thrust of the church in the Wesleyan spirit must become embodied in specific ecclesial practices to convey the full range of character in the Christian life<sup>4</sup>.

To develop this full range of character, however, there are two practices that can especially capture the distinctives of a missional thrust within a Wesleyan framework. First, Wesley provides theological resources in the service of mission and in the practicing of the means of grace, more specifically, his understanding of the Eucharist. There is a Eucharistic ethic in Wesley's thought and practice that provides the logic for church's mission within a global market mission field, which prophetically critiques, pastorally comforts, and evangelistically transforms. The missionary task of the church must be to transmit the gospel of Christ in ways that build up the church's witness. There are resources in Wesley that illuminate the logic of those forces which are deforming of God's image in persons and creation and that can highlight how the global market may offer avenues of material growth among the poor. Wesley's Eucharistic ethic provides a realistic model for healthy partnerships, not sick domination. The practice of taking up alms for the poor at the Lord's Supper, for example, as practiced among Irish and British Methodists, and dropped in the American setting, supplies a model

of critique and transformation. The practice of Eucharist also becomes the impetus for the practice of vital stewardship in a new missionary context.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Wesley's understanding of stewardship provides an ecclesial discipline to those who believe. There is the expectation that going on to Christian perfection involves how money is earned, saved, and given.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the dominant logic of capitalism works out of a mindset of consumption, Wesley provides both a mindset and a practice of sacrifice. Wesley does not operate out of a sophisticated critique of the emerging modern capitalistic system simply to critique it, but looks to offer a disciplined way of life in the midst of it so that the gospel can be shared with all, regardless of economic income levels<sup>7</sup>. Here, the practice of stewardship is not simply a matter of giving but a sacrificial way of life to assist all God's people to flourish, even amidst a global market.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Postmodern Condition Within Capitalist Economy**

The postmodern condition coincides with the rise of late capitalist economy. The changes taking place in culture are bound to the new changes emerging in economics. We produce, circulate, and consume items at a faster pace. The service sector of McDonalds, for example, has replaced the factory-based assembly lines of Ford as the mainstay of economic development. Shopping malls supplant factories. A whole new way of relating has been born which moves toward treating persons as commodities, without ethical concern or significance. The purpose of life is to circulate money and to buy and sell goods and services. Break open these patterns of relating and the market culture comes into view.<sup>10</sup>

But how does the logic of the market become embedded in the culture? Here, accumulating more and more goods take on greater importance. The old and rigid modes of manufacturing dissolve into new and faster modes of media and technology. The defining mark of economic life is how global financial markets assume dominance to accumulate capital at the expense of traditional mores and norms in

local communities.<sup>11</sup> The pace of postmodern life is frenetic.<sup>12</sup> Two driving forces converge: sameness and diversity. Kentucky Fried Chicken establishments can now be seen on the streets of Peking, while growing Hispanic and Asian populations move into a once-homogeneous Midwest to secure employment. Instability becomes the norm as goods and services and money are circulated at greater speeds.<sup>13</sup> The particular identities of communities, however, are undermined as the logic to produce and accumulate more leads to a logic to consume more; so promotion and advertising triumphs over ethics. Madison Avenue creates new commercial images to legitimize the increasing demand for the circulation of money itself.<sup>14</sup>

In his book *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey argues that a kind of "creative destruction" becomes embedded within capitalist economies.<sup>15</sup> There is the tendency to over-accumulate during times of growth, increasing the likelihood to consume on the one hand and expand production through more efficient means on the other. However, a real danger also exists with these new economic patterns to retreat from moral concerns toward more cosmetic appearances.<sup>16</sup> The growing economic task is to create new markets, while producing ever more commercial images to entice people to consume. Everything is transformed into a commodity to buy or sell. Even labor is treated as a commodity. Harvey writes, "Cultural life in more and more areas gets brought within the grasp of the cash nexus and the logic of capital circulation."<sup>17</sup> A self-destructive logic ensues.

And nowhere can we see this kind of self-destructive logic more clearly than in the way late capitalism encroaches upon social-cultural relations — e.g., church, family, education. Persons can shop for churches the way they shop for toothpaste. Youth obtain an education not to gain knowledge for the sake of knowledge but to advance up the economic ladder. Ties which bind persons to place and tradition are overpowered by the profit-making role of the market economy. Thus personal identity gets tossed to and fro in a sea of upward mobility and change. The self becomes literally schizophrenic, with no historical link to the past or among the varied experiences in the culture.

Persons wander through all kinds of worlds without a clear sense of location, asking 'Which world am I in today and which of my personalities do I deploy today?'" <sup>18</sup> Particular identities are consumed not sustained.

## Theological & Missional Resources

The above analysis provides a backdrop for probing the theological resources available in the Wesleyan tradition to understand the missionary work of the church. Wesley's theology and practice of ministry supply a helpful starting point for exploring how the church can flourish despite the onslaught of postmodern culture.

Key to Wesley's ministry and theology is the shaping of people through the traditional practices of piety, or "the means of grace." In his famous sermon in 1739 "The Means of Grace," Wesley attacks quietist forms of piety that had crept into the Societies.<sup>19</sup> The challenge to those who were seeking the Lord at the Bristol gathering was not to sit in "stillness," but to practice those means "ordained of God" to their true appointed end: a heart renewed after the image of God.<sup>20</sup> God has provided channels through which the power of God's preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace may be appropriated and experienced. Persons are not to remain passive waiting on the Lord but are called to remember that the true end of religion is a heart devoted fully to God.<sup>21</sup> Apart from the Holy Spirit, these practices remain empty; in the power of the Spirit, they communicate the merits of Christ's death on the cross and move persons toward righteous living.<sup>22</sup> Thus holiness, as Wesley envisions, consists of embodying practices or disciplines for the purpose of relating more deeply to God.<sup>23</sup>

Wesley's concern is with the witness of the church. The church is truly in mission when it is *acting* in the power of God's love for the world.<sup>24</sup> Wesley shares in his sermon "The Witness of the Spirit,"

That the testimony of God must, in the very nature of things, be antecedent to the testimony of our own spirit, may appear from this single consideration: We must be holy in heart and life before we can be conscious that we are so. But we must love God before we can be holy at all, this being the root of all holiness. Now we cannot love God, till we know he loves us: "We love him, because he first loved us:" And we cannot know his love to us, till his Spirit witnesses it to our spirit. Till then we cannot believe it; we cannot say, The life which I know live, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.<sup>25</sup>

This is the power out of which the church lives for others. The impulse to bear witness to God's self-giving love in Christ comes from the Holy Spirit's working in the hearts of believers. The church is propelled into mission for the sake God's redeeming love.

This is important. Colin Williams contends that Wesley's view of holiness is woven into his ecclesiology: the gathering together of believers into small societies for mutual discipline and growth is essential to the church's life and mission.<sup>26</sup> Scriptural holiness is spread across the earth when persons in the church enter into a disciplined way of life for the sake of conforming to Christ. This entails understanding how God works in persons' souls and how the Holy Spirit can lead them on to Christian perfection. The Scripture way of salvation entails uncovering the logic of God's sanctifying grace in moving persons from sinfulness to holiness and opening up persons to the experience of new birth.<sup>27</sup> Salvation is the ongoing movement of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers whereby idolatrous patterns, habits, and practices of sinfulness are broken and transformed into life-enriching patterns, relations, and virtues of holiness.<sup>28</sup> Conversion is a process, marked by moments of new birth and perfection, and enjoined by the commitment to practice the means of grace through the loving fellowship of the church.<sup>29</sup>

This entails that salvation is not effected through human effort. Christian perfection is not a collection of perfect acts.<sup>30</sup> Wesley states in his sermon on "The Circumcision of the Heart" that holiness implies being cleansed from sin and, by consequence, "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.'" <sup>31</sup> Richard Heitzenrater argues that virtue in the Wesleyan tradition should be understood as the wellspring of the holy life, involving self-examination and discipline. The mark of a true follower is to have the mind of Christ and to walk as Jesus walked (Philippians 2:5 and 1 John 2:6).<sup>32</sup> True religion is not found in outward signs so much as in the heart, that is, in the love of God and neighbor. This, for Wesley, is "the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue."<sup>33</sup> Persons are inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written Word. Persons "think, speak, and live according to the 'method' laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>34</sup> This is the character of a Methodist.

This is also the key to the formation of doctrinal identity. The characteristics of Wesleyans are to be found in learning and practicing those doctrines which mark the apostolic and catholic nature of the church through the ages. What distinguishes Wesleyans is their faithfulness to what is consistent with the principles of Christianity as a whole.<sup>35</sup> The crux of the matter is how believers practice what they preach. Wesley states:

Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion, the next, the door; and the third, religion itself.<sup>36</sup>

The grammar of holiness sets the church apart for mission in the world. It is a grammar that has its roots in the early church where the apostles devoted themselves to the preaching of repentance and faith (Acts 20:21).<sup>37</sup> The call to live a holy life is always developed in relation to the doctrines of

original sin, justification, and sanctification.<sup>38</sup> To lose this focus is to lose what makes the church the church. It is to lose the reason for the church's mission itself.

## Wesley's Missionary Praxis

There is in Wesley's theology and ministry a life-transforming impulse that drives the church into mission in the world. The sanctifying and perfecting grace of God empowers the church to offer the gospel to others and to live a life of holiness. Wesley exhorts in his sermon "On Perfection":

The sum of Christian perfection...is comprised in that one word, Love. The first branch of it 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." ...These contain the whole of Christian perfection.<sup>39</sup>

The motivation to model Christ and to move into service on behalf of God in the world comes from the Holy Spirit's working in the hearts of believers. Persons may go about doing good but the nature of true religion may be absent -- i.e., love of God and neighbor. The key to the life of holiness is believing that the Spirit is acting to convict persons' hearts and renew in persons God's image, forgiving sins and setting right the wrong.<sup>40</sup>

But within Wesley's theology there is also the internal or prophetic self-criticism that is able to guide the church in mission. In Wesley's life and thought, the practice of mission does not mean waiting to "get things right" and then moving into mission, thinking that if the analysis is correct the church can proceed with a green light. Rather, moving into mission means remaining critical of present historical conditions that deform life while remaining committed to practicing the means of grace which promise the restoration of life after God's image. Spreading scriptural holiness means to pattern one's life after



the likeness and life of Jesus Christ. And whatever destroys or deforms this pattern of likeness is sin.  
[41](#)

Thus the missionary praxis Wesley puts into motion is life-enhancing and transforming. Especially at it pertains to the poor and disenfranchised, Wesley's missionary praxis is geared toward imitating Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> The Christian life involves a life of devotion in cultivating virtues as well as a life of outreach in combating evil.<sup>43</sup> Wesley's critique of slavery, child labor, and prison reform, to name a few, is well-known. However, the focus on Wesley's insistence on practicing the means of grace provides the key to unlocking the mystery of the kingdom in terms of the church's mission: through practicing the means of grace, believers can begin to assume the full stature of Christ. Yes, the Holy Spirit bears witness to the human heart to draw persons closer toward unity with God, but the Spirit also awakens the heart to the needs of others. In practicing the means of grace, persons realize anew the vices which can denigrate the soul and society. Persons wake up to the reality of sin in life and to the power of sin in themselves and in the world. Thus breaking the power of cancelled sin is vital to setting the prisoner-sinner free for joyful obedience and service to others.

Wesley's missionary praxis faces sin head on (structurally and personally) and moves to challenge persons to live a disciplined way of life amidst the suffering of the world. Disciples are not to flee from the world but are to join God in the world as they act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). There is a reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide persons into sharing what they have in common with those in need (Acts 2:42-47). In addition, there is the instruction of the Holy Spirit to remind the church that mission is always for the sake of Christ and that the ultimate mission (in Wesley's terms) is the spreading of scriptural holiness across these lands. To reduce mission to humanitarian aid, while important, cannot serve as the primary motivation to the praxis that Wesley instigates on behalf of the least of these. The mission, to be sure, is wholistic and holistic, enriching mind, body, and soul, but the mission must also focus on the coming good news of God's reign in

Christ. In particular, the mission must focus on the important truth that "Christ loved me, and gave himself for me." <sup>44</sup>

## Wesley's Missional Ethic

At the heart of Wesley's missionary praxis is the missional ethic to love God and neighbor in the pursuit of scriptural holiness in the world. Wesley's praxis involves a prophetic spirit of critiquing injustice while offering the power of the gospel to transform lives. And nowhere is this combination of the prophetic and evangelistic more clearly focused than on Wesley's economic ethic.

Much has been written about Wesley's concern for the poor and the way he regarded the use of money.<sup>45</sup> At the core of his order of salvation is the stewardship ethic, summed in three simple rules, to "earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you."<sup>46</sup> Wesley's fears regarding the way riches can destroy the life of holiness were founded upon the idolatrous effects the love of money has on the soul. "The love of money," he writes, "is the root of evil; but not the thing in itself."<sup>47</sup> Wesley rejects, then, some aspects of what is emerging in his day as capitalism, and offers an alternative logic for its renewal. Ronald Stone writes that "Wesley knew that his world was controlled by business oligarchies and large landowners, and that he preferred to minister to the lesser classes and to the poor."<sup>48</sup> Business could be used for good. However, the accumulation of surplus capital was considered wasteful.<sup>49</sup>

This is where the proverbial rubber hits the road in Wesley's pursuit of holiness and in understanding the implications for the church's mission in a capitalist society. Manfred Marquardt has argued that in Wesley there is a "diligence, thriftiness, and contentedness" to the way Christians are to live.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, Wesley came to realize that the upward migration of Methodists to new economic and social levels followed a "secularization of the three 'simple rules'" he advocated throughout his life and

ministry.<sup>51</sup> There was an uncoupling of the first two rules from the all-important third. Marquardt rightly notes that it is important to understand how genuine Wesleyan Methodism relates to the capitalistic spirit at the beginning of the industrial revolution.<sup>52</sup>

Detaching of the third rule from the first two, however, marks an important dimension with respect to the way ecclesial disciplines are to be practiced and to their relationship to the wider culture. The church does not live in a vacuum. Wesley confronted again and again the injustices of his time, especially with regard to poverty. However, the ethic Wesley practices in his pursuit of scriptural holiness in the life of church's mission cannot be disconnected from the logic contained within his preaching on God's sanctifying grace in the order of salvation.

Wesley's missional ethic touches upon all areas of life. Marquardt writes that this is especially the case in relationship to the "spirit of capitalism": on the one hand, there is high praise for diligence and contentedness; persons are actively to pursue economic well-being. Waste, conspicuous consumption, and harmful vocations are deemed sinful to holy living. On the other hand, there is a widening chasm between the logic of capitalism and the logic of God's sanctifying grace -- i.e., the unrestrained striving for profit versus the warning against wealth, the accumulation of capital versus the renunciation of hoarding possessions, the exploitation of foreign laborers versus the ultimate motivation to love one's neighbor.<sup>53</sup> Wesley could look upon the world, believing God to be redeeming the creation from sin and death (Romans 8:22), but he could not escape the world as the material place where the church was called to serve. The missionary thrust of Wesley's theology focuses on how the church is called not only to proclaim the gospel but how the gospel involves embodying specific ecclesial practices to convey the full range of character in the Christian life.<sup>54</sup> This is one of the abiding challenges of Wesley's ethic for the church's missionary life as it practices the means of grace in the power of the Spirit.

Wesley, then, does not have a fully developed critique of the workings of capitalism so much as an ongoing spiritual insight into the logic of the gospel in uncovering those forces that deform life and freedom in God's image.<sup>55</sup> The church's proper location for mission is in the world but its true calling is to spread scriptural holiness. In this sense, Wesley's holiness project does not "fail," but changes over time. Theodore Weber contends that Wesley's ethic was not "one of dismantling the property system and replacing it with one more egalitarian in its concept, structure, and distributions."<sup>56</sup> Rather, "the theological context for understanding Wesley on property is stewardship....property is a gift of God to be used in service of God and for the blessing of God's people, especially for the poor. It is not a commodity reserved for one's own personal use, profit, and enjoyment."<sup>57</sup>

To be sure, Wesley looks to the book of Acts as the goal for Christian community where persons share all they have in common (Acts 2:44). The church is not a society composed of individuals with common beliefs but is a community of the Spirit gathered and scattered to offer God's grace to the world.<sup>58</sup> It is a community proclaiming the sacrifice of Christ as the atonement for sin and the power of new life. The triune God provides the basis for the church's missionary outreach.

### **Practicing Eucharist as Key to Mission & Stewardship**

To develop the full range of character in the Christian life, there are practices that can capture the distinctives of a Wesleyan framework for the church's mission. To begin, Wesley's understanding of the Eucharistic provides the logic for the missionary impulse of the gospel in the church's life. There is an intimate connection between the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as remembered in the Eucharist and the calling of Christians to sacrifice their goods on behalf of others. Ole Borgen has written that there is in Wesley's preface to the sacramental hymns the concern for the sacrifice of persons' goods.<sup>59</sup> While Brevint shares at length the implications of Christ's sacrifice for Christian discipleship, Wesley writes in succinct fashion what Christians need to do:

Therefore, as our Bodies and Souls are Sacrifices attending the sacrifice of Christ, so must all our Goods attend the Sacrifice of our Persons. In a Word, whensoever we offer ourselves, we offer by the self-same Act, all that we have, all that we can, and do therein engage for all, that it shall be dedicated to the Glory of GOD, and that it shall be surrender'd into his Hands and employed for such Uses as he shall appoint.<sup>60</sup>

The pursuit of holiness cannot be rent asunder from the practice of the means of grace in the life of the church. The self-giving love of God, as revealed in the merits of Christ's death on the cross, calls upon persons at the point of their conversion to consecrate everything they have to Christ.<sup>61</sup> All that persons own or have belong to the Lord, including their money: "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."<sup>62</sup> The Christian life is a life a self-giving love, a life of missionary service to others on behalf of the only-begotten Son in the power of God's Spirit.<sup>63</sup> This is the key to living a life of holiness: the Holy Spirit works in believers' hearts to cleanse sin and to effect change. The logic is costly, requiring nothing less than the death of the Son, and requiring nothing less than persons offering themselves as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God (Rom. 12:1).

Wesley's whole focus is on the complete and efficacious sacrifice of Christ offered for the sins of humanity.<sup>64</sup> Wesley states:

We allow farther that the use of all means whatever will never atone for one sin; that it is the blood of Christ alone whereby any sinner can be reconciled to God; there being no other propitiation for our sins, no other fountain for sin and uncleanness.<sup>65</sup>

Wesley's understanding of the Eucharist provides a logic for the missionary impulse of the gospel, a logic which prophetically critiques, pastorally comforts, and evangelistically transforms. The

missionary task of the church is to transmit this logic and to practice the means of grace in the hope of Christ's salvation to all as the Holy Spirit empowers:

O that the world might know the all-atoning Lamb! Spirit of faith, descend and show the virtue of his name; the grace which all may find, the saving power, impart, and testify to humankind, and speak in every heart.<sup>66</sup>

Wesley was certainly aware of Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions in his understanding of the Eucharist.<sup>67</sup> However, Wesley supplies a much needed ethic which remained critical of patterns of domination. In the midst of revival, Wesley did not get caught up in the endless of debates of Christ's presence in the bread and cup.<sup>68</sup> Rather, he sought, as a part of the revival, to see the Eucharist as a converting ordinance and to invite persons to receive pardon for their sins as they began the life of holiness.<sup>69</sup> This is not ministry confined to the walls of the parish or the halls of the academy but ministry propelled by the Holy Spirit to be in the world for the sake of Christ. This is messy, but it calls forth the kind of self-examination Wesley demanded as persons became more Christ-like in relationship to all.<sup>70</sup>

Thus Wesley's ethic provides a model for relationships in the life of the community and in the world. This is why the practice of taking up alms for the poor at the Lord's Supper is itself a form of both prophetic critique and personal transformation —i.e., critique, in providing the awareness that all are ultimately dependent on God for their livelihood and that the Table is open to all, and transformation, in supplying the means of receiving the Son's pardon for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>71</sup> Wesley's Eucharistic practice is an impetus for the practice of vital piety and stewardship in a new missionary context.<sup>70</sup>

Wesley's understanding of the Eucharist provides the foundation for the kind of ecclesial discipline practiced in giving to others. Moving toward Christian perfection involves how money is earned, saved,

and given. Whereas the dominant logic of a capitalist society works out of a mindset of scarcity and competition, the dominant logic of Wesley's missionary ethic works from the empowering source of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.<sup>72</sup> This is dangerous, for in an economy demanding sacrifice as a way to survive, this logic can be misused to take advantage of others. It also points to what Wesley himself realized in his sermon on "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" where he asks:

Does it not seem (and yet this cannot be) that Christianity, true scriptural Christianity, has a tendency, in the process of time, to undermine and destroy itself? 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 pride, love of the world, and every temper that is destructive of Christianity. Now, if there be no way to prevent this, Christianity is inconsistent with itself, and, of consequence, cannot stand, cannot continue long among any people; since, wherever it generally prevails, it saps its own foundation.<sup>73</sup>

Theodore Jennings contends that Wesley's rhetoric self-destructs here; it is unclear as to why people would want to practice diligence and frugality. However,<sup>74</sup> if Wesley himself caught this inconsistency in Christian practice, how can that be a sign of self-destruction? Wesley is a practical theologian who thinks on his feet. He is a missionary who is captured by the vision of spreading scriptural holiness. The "evangelical economics" he practices as an alternative to the dominant economics of emerging capitalism is one based on the logic of God's self-giving love in Christ. Perhaps Wesley is one of the first who recognizes how difficult it is to maintain ecclesial discipline amidst the forces of capitalist modernity.

This is not to say that Wesley's views do not have problems. He was a creature of a given historical time and space. He understands that with the increases in riches there can come (and often does come) a decline in holiness. He is not operating out of sophisticated critique of commercial and

industrial capitalism, though he sees how wide the gulf is between rich and poor and the abuses of slavery, for example. And the reason he can see this is because he operates out of an ethic of practicing the means of grace, especially the Eucharist, and the underlying significance of the atonement in the order of salvation. This is where for Wesley the inward spirit and the outward forms of holiness converge, and where the church lives prophetically and evangelistically in the world, proclaiming Christ and overcoming sin in love.

This is the underlying logic guiding Wesley's missionary praxis. It is geared toward aiding the poor and challenging the rich to live righteous lives amidst the emergence of capitalist modernity. It is also aware of its own internal inconsistencies. The life of holiness involves all of life, especially how money is used. But it also involves the awareness of the limits within God's own economy of love and justice. Here, Wesley's evangelical economics do not self-destruct so much as shed light on the way the life of holiness can be lived amidst the challenges of capitalist modernity.<sup>75</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

In this study I have looked to Wesley for providing theological and spiritual resources for the practice of mission in a postmodern world: Wesley's theology offers an alternative to the dominant logic of emerging capitalism in general and late capitalism in particular. The pursuit of holiness in the Christian life is vital in critiquing the overall structures and patterns of capitalist economy.

In putting forth Wesley's views, I have sought to share an important trajectory in Wesley regarding his missionary praxis: there are in Wesley missional resources for shaping a different people through the means of grace on the one hand and the ongoing taxonomy of spiritual formation in the church on the other. Wesley's theology provides spiritual insights to critique aspects of emerging capitalism while supplying the impulse of the gospel to unmask forces which distort life in God's image. In short,



Wesley's practicing and understanding of the means of grace is vital to the ongoing ministry of the church in shaping the lives of persons for the sake of God's grace-full reign. Wesley wants to make faithful disciples, and what interests Wesley is how persons are formed on a daily basis through the disciplines and practices of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit, regardless of the ebb and flow of culture. This allows Wesley to offer critiques of the culture (e.g., slavery, poverty, child labor) while moving to change it through the transformation of persons in holy societies. Thus Wesley's missionary praxis supplies theological resources that can be applied in all kinds of situations for the purpose of forming persons unto the likeness of Christ.

Several points are worth mentioning. First, the missionary thrust of the gospel within a Wesleyan framework cannot remain "quietist," whether understood pietistically or academically. The gospel cannot remain isolated in the parish or the academy. To be holy is live in the world for the sake of Christ. The missionary task is to join the Holy Spirit's work for the redemption of the world. The point is not to stand back from the world but to join God in changing it.

Second, within Wesley's view of the Eucharist there is an internal self-criticism that carries within it the power to transform persons and societies. The practicing of the means of grace is critical to the missionary outreach of the church, and yet, without the inward application of the merits of Christ's death by the Holy Spirit the church too easily falls prey to the Pelagian heresy of self-will. The Christian life becomes empty of the power of God's redeeming love. Thus the Eucharist is a constant reminder of God's initiating grace in forgiving and pardoning sin.

Third, in connection with this point, there is in Wesley's pattern of thinking the intimate and vital connection between the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the believer in sharing with others. Wesley's understanding of Jesus' atonement is not isolated from his ethic of stewardship. Conversion is not simply an emotional response to God but a movement toward practicing those

disciplines which mark Christian identity and purpose. To embody the principles of the Christian faith is to practice what the faith proclaims.

Fourth, the impulse to spread scriptural holiness in Wesley's thought provides critical insight into avoiding docetic forms of spirituality on the one hand and moving beyond seeing mission as simply humanitarian relief on the other. Holiness implies being cleansed from sin and, by consequence, "being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus." The missionary thrust of the church must remain connected to the power of the Spirit to shape faithful lives.

Fifth, there is a logic to God's sanctifying grace (i.e., to the order of salvation) that, when explored in Wesley's life and thought, uncovers the destructive forms of logic in society which de-value God's image in persons. Wesley did not develop a full-blown analysis of the workings of industrial and commercial capitalism. However, he did carry out the mission of God's saving and perfecting grace which confronted the sins of emerging capitalism head on. In doing so, he called both persons and nations to self-examination and correction.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> M. Douglas Meeks, "Being Human in the Market Society," *Quarterly Review* 21/3 (Fall 2001): pp. 254-265.

<sup>3</sup> See Henry H. Knight III, *Eight Enriching Practices of United Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), and Gregory S. Clapper, *As If the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality* (Nashville: The Upper Room Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Philip R. Meadows, "Embodying Conversion," in Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, ed., *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), pp. 223-239.

<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank William J. Abraham for bringing to my attention the practice of taking up alms for the poor during the Lord's Supper in Irish Methodism.

<sup>6</sup> See John Wesley's sermon, "The Use of Money," in Edward H. Sugden, ed., *John Wesley's Fifty Three Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), pp. 634-646.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald H. Stone's recent work on John Wesley's ethics makes the point of seeing Wesley as a contemporary of Adam Smith. Stone reminds readers that Wesley offered a more penetrating analysis of the human condition than Smith in the eighteenth century: "But Wesley, with a longing for perfection and deep awareness of sin, hoped for more transformation of people and society than Smith. He seemed also to see the need for transformation more clearly than Smith. Smith's human nature was inclined toward morality because natural human sympathy for other beings like oneself. Wesley's human nature was driven toward morality because of divine imperatives." *John Wesley's Life and Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> For a helpful connection between Wesley's stewardship ethic and his understanding of the Eucharist, see Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Definitive Study of John Wesley's Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 269.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Sampson, "The Rise of Postmodernity," in *Faith and Modernity* (Regnum Lynx, 1994), p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Rodney Clapp, *Border Crossings: Christian Trespasses on Popular Culture and Public Affairs* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000), pp. 92-93.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Rush Finn, "God and Goods: Economics As If God Mattered," *The Christian Century*, March 27-April 3, 2002, Volume 119, Number 7.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), p. 58ff.

<sup>14</sup> Jay McDaniel, *Living From the Center: Spirituality in an Age of Consumerism* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Sampson, "The Rise of Postmodernity," p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," in Edwin H. Sugden, ed., *John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), pp. 167-184.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>22</sup> Wesley states in "The Means of Grace" that "we allow, likewise, that all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all, cannot conduce, in any degree, either to the knowledge or love of God" (p. 171).

<sup>23</sup> Philip R. Meadows, "Embodying Conversion," pp. 223ff.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Outler, ed., John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 307.

<sup>25</sup> John Wesley, "The Witness of the Spirit," in Edwin H. Sugden, ed., John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons, p. 146.

<sup>26</sup> Colin W. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 151.

<sup>27</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, "Anointed to Preach: Speaking of Sin in the Midst of Grace," M. Douglas Meeks, ed., The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), pp. 105-106.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>29</sup> Philip R. Meadows, "Embodying Conversion," p. 227.

<sup>30</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, "The Imitatio Christi and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley's Ministry with the Poor," M. Douglas Meeks, ed., The Portion of the Poor (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> John Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart," in Edwin H. Sugden, ed., John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons, pp. 188-189.

<sup>32</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater notes that this phrase from scripture is an oft-repeated phrase in Wesley's sermons; see his "The Imitatio Christi and the Great Commandment," p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> John Wesley, "The Unity of the Divine Being," Works 1:407.

<sup>34</sup> John Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist" (1742-1791), Works 9:41; par. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Philip R. Meadows, "Embodying Conversion," p. 228.

<sup>36</sup> John Wesley, "Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained," Works 8:472.

<sup>37</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, "Anointed to Preach: Speaking of Sin in the Midst of Grace," p. 109.

<sup>38</sup> Gregory S. Clapper, As If the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality, especially, chapter 2.

<sup>39</sup> John Wesley, "On Perfection," Works 6:413.

<sup>40</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press,

1997), p. 187ff; and Theodore Runyan, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), p. 82.

<sup>41</sup> Theodore Runyan, *The New Creation*, p. 86.

<sup>42</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater's article on "The Imitatio Christi and the Great Commandment," p. 49ff.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> John Wesley, "Original Sin," *John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons*, p. 565.

<sup>45</sup> Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992); Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); George Lyons, "Money," Graduation Chapel Address at Nazarene Theological College in Brisbane, Australia, on November 7, 1996; Ronald H. Stone, *John Wesley's Life & Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

<sup>46</sup> John Wesley, "The Use of Money," *John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons*, pp. 632-646.

<sup>47</sup> John Wesley, "The Mystery of Iniquity," *Works* 6:265.

<sup>48</sup> Ronald H. Stone, *John Wesley's Life & Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), p. 164.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>50</sup> Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41; see also J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1830* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000 - Second Edition). Clark writes about how Methodism and Evangelicalism became powerful forces within the mainstream of Christianity in England, containing innovations that distinguished themselves as unique movements (p. 285ff).

<sup>52</sup> Manfred Marquardt, p. 41.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>54</sup> Philip R. Meadows, "Embodying Conversion," p. 237ff.

<sup>55</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, "Anointed to Preaching: Speaking of Sin in the Midst of Grace," p. 110.

<sup>56</sup> Theodore R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), p. 342.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Theodore R. Weber in *Politics in the Order of Salvation* quotes C. B. MacPherson in describing the liberal tradition of

"possessive individualism": "The basic assumption of possessive individualism are that man is free and human by virtue of his sole proprietorship of his own person, and that human society is essentially a series of market relations" [The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 270], pp. 346-247. Weber notes how early Methodism practices "mild forms of communism and mutual support" (p. 342).

<sup>59</sup> Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1972), p 269.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Ole E. Borgen from Brevint (W), sec. VIII.1, pp. 29-30, sec. VIII.3, pp. 107-108.

<sup>61</sup> See John Wesley's Extract of Brevint's treatise, in *Hymns on the Lord's Supper. With a Preface Concerning the Christian Sacrifice, Extracted from Doctor Brevint. First ed., Bristol, Printed by Felix Farley, 1745*; see sec. VIII.2, p. 30.

<sup>62</sup> John Wesley, *Works* 6: 487.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, p. 82.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *John Wesley's Fifty-Three Sermons*, p. 171.

<sup>66</sup> "Spirit of Faith, Come Down," stanza 3, in *The United Methodist Hymnal, #332*.

<sup>67</sup> Ole Borgen, p. 266ff; Theodore Runyan, pp. 128-140; Colin W. Williams, p. 160ff.

<sup>68</sup> Colin W. Williams, p. 163.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, "The Imitatio Christi and the Great Commandment," p. 60.

<sup>71</sup> Theodore Runyan writes about the trinitarian focus of Wesley's theology in *The New Creation*: "In this trinitarian action it is by virtue of the Holy Spirit that the exalted Christ is present with us, making intention of the Father toward us through the sacrifice of the Son applied to us by the Spirit" (p. 132).

<sup>72</sup> M. Douglas Meeks, "Being Human in the Market Society," p. 258. Meeks writes about the "scarcity mindset" that plagues market anthropology and discourse.

<sup>73</sup> John Wesley, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," *Works* 7: 290.

<sup>74</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor*, p. 166.

<sup>75</sup> Theodore Jennings writes that Wesley practiced a form of "pentecostal commun(al)ism" (p. 177). I am sympathetic with Jennings' passion here, and I believe Wesley and the early Methodists practiced forms of mild communism (Weber, p. 343).

However, I think Theodore Weber is correct in saying that Wesley's evangelical mission encourages more personal than societal transformation, although there is in Wesley's thought the trajectory of the political image of God (p. 349), which is the proper, and necessary, theological context for protecting his views from possessive individualism (p. 348).

**Beyond Market Logic: Ecclesial Practices for Mission**

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