

**John Wesley:
Christian Revolutionary**

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Christian Revolutionary

by

MILDRED BANGS WYNKOOP



BEACON HILL PRESS OF KANSAS CITY
Kansas City, Missouri

First Printing, 1970

Printed in the United States of America

Quotations from *The New English Bible*. © The delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge of the Cambridge University Press, 1961.

Preface

Revolution was the mood of the sixties and promises to become the mode of the seventies. The average churchman draws back from it, deploras and abhors it, longs for the day when "law and order" may prevail again. "Down with revolution!" he pleads and prays—perhaps in vain.

It may seem strange, then, to relate John Wesley to revolution, but that is precisely what it is necessary to do if we are to talk about Wesleyan theology. And this is what we are attempting to do.

We will not engage in the fascinating, formal, intricate, and abstract aspects of theology in this little book. Rather it is the fountain out of which flows the need for theology, namely, life, which we wish to explore. Christian doctrines, at least the central ones, were life experiences before they became statements of faith. They were life involvements and profound commitments before they were neat propositions packed into theology books. It is possible to enter theology through the gates of life, but life cannot be recaptured by mere theology.

It is the life, the personal participation in grace, the spiritual dynamic of the Christian's interrelatedness with God, that captures our attention. Only in this dimension of the total theological enterprise known as Wesleyan theology can we find the key to its significance.

We are reminded that of early Christians it was said that they "turned the world upside down." It must be granted, grudgingly, that Wesleyan theology as such is not disturbing society to any appreciable degree, nor, for that matter, is any other theology doing so. But it will have to be granted also that Wesley, the man, and

the common ordinary Christian, lay or clergy, of whatever theological persuasion, who has found "the warm heart," did (in Wesley's case) and does (among mortals today) stir up ancient, entrenched human evils to do pitched battle against them with some measure of success. And is not that what revolution is?

These three chapters were first college chapel talks, ambitiously called lectures, designed to present in a "popular" form the heart of what Wesleyan theology is to a student body as diverse in background as any several hundred persons can be. For this book, the term lecture has been changed to "chapter," a bit of literary *legerdemain* which does not hide the informality and "breeziness" of the presentation. It can only be hoped that the reader will not be too greatly offended ("turned off," shall we say?) by this manner of approach. Behind it is the author's lifelong, passionate interest in the subject of Wesleyan theology, not specifically as a theology associated with someone's name, or because it usually defines holiness doctrine, but hopefully, as a truly biblical theology. It points the way toward an understanding of man and God and grace, in all the rich complexity of each in their interrelatedness. Only such a view is adequate to meet the deepest and most urgent demands of mankind caught in the maelstrom of real life.

No three chapters, short or long—or three books, for that matter—could do justice to this subject. It is impossible because this theology overarches the whole of life itself, entering into every nook and cranny of the human psyche and society, and must suffer when it is oversimplified. The most that can be expected is that the heart of it can be exposed herewith—at least one step toward a better understanding.

—M. B. W.

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I

PERSPECTIVE

To attempt to reduce the vast scope of Wesleyan theology into three brief segments is almost presumptive. Indeed there is a great responsibility involved, for there is the hazard in so doing of distorting its enormous vitality and beauty. But attempt it we will under its three major facets: its roots and general characteristics, its doctrine of Christian perfection, and its emphasis upon spiritual outcomes in everyday life—using three one-word titles, perspective, perfection, and performance.

I shall not give you formal theology, nor use much traditional language. When the Apostle Paul was throwing together a few ideas on the subject, he did not use much theological language either. He, as did Jesus, used language vibrant with meaning pulled out of the common life with which their listeners were all familiar. Since then, men have tended to formalize these vivid words and we often miss the fresh, meaningful beauty of them when we read the Bible today.

No subject could be more in need of living, dynamic language than Wesleyan theology, because this subject is itself so charged with life that the best of words can scarcely do it justice.

THE APPROACH

I have selected that feature of Wesleyan theology which I believe to be the most central and significant, namely, the emphasis in word and life on the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is himself Life; radiant, radiating Life. But it is not our intention merely to look at the Holy Spirit, but to be concerned with the Holy Spirit's interrelation with men. We will have to understand what man is, what God intended him to be, and then try to understand what it means for man to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Here is dynamic; here is power, vitality, bursting-out life. From this confluence of man and Holy Spirit radiates spiritual energy which may affect every area of human experience and give meaning to all the theological terms which try to describe it.

We stand in a rich and noble heritage. This heritage did not begin with any one modern denomination—not even with the revered John Wesley—though these later “church fathers” contributed greatly to our progressively enriched heritage. But the real beginning, in a special way, was on the Day of Pentecost. The story of the in-

tervening years inspires and challenges, for it is one of divine providence coupled with heroic faith.

But our purpose here is not primarily to turn our faces to the rear and glory in our heritage and congratulate ourselves on past achievements. Rather we wish to examine the implication of our own place today in this heritage. We are not outside looking in, but deeply involved inside it.

THE PARADOX OF HERITAGE

We will discover that we stand in a paradox. If we are true to our heritage, we will be marching forward with only an occasional check on our past via a rear-view mirror. Christians are locked in a chain of heritage, yet that heritage demands by its very nature that a Christian be in a real way free from bondage to the past. This is the paradox.

We will neither worship nor neglect our heritage. Our fathers found a dynamic that shattered the lethargy and ineffectualness of mediocre Christianity. That dynamic propelled them into orbit, an orbit into which we were born. We will respect our fathers for discovering that dynamic and harnessing themselves to it. But then we are born into a responsibility for perpetuating that dynamic.

It was the Holy Spirit to whom our fathers related themselves. He is the Dynamic. He will not be harnessed. He will not submit to our wills. He is creative and bursts out, like a raging fire, from the strictures we may try to build about Him. Our heritage does not tie us to the past, but harnesses us to a dynamic that propels us into the demands of the future faster than we are often prepared to go. If we "follow Jesus," who is "the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever," we will have to put on seven-league boots, and use them. Jesus is not behind us; He is a long way ahead of us. To go

“back to Christ and the Bible” is in no sense a retreat. It is a “forward charge.”

He, the Holy Spirit, does not and cannot work in an organization as such, but must of deepest necessity work through persons—organism. An organization made up of Spirit-filled organisms will *groan* and *strain*, and *creak*, and *move*, and *live*, and *sparkle*, and *relate* under the wholesome tension between our human conservatism and He who is the Source of Life. That is, Christian fellowship, or “the temple of God,” or “the body of Christ,” will always have growing pains.

REVOLUTION VERSUS REBELLION

*Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven.*

In these lines William Wordsworth characterized the feelings of youth in 1789, in the early part of the French Revolution. The dream of an overnight solution to the oppressions of centuries was a heady elixir, but a dream that turned into a drunken nightmare before the morning came. Many a youth learned the bitterness of disillusionment. But one of the most precious, albeit dangerous, things about youth is its *spirit of revolution*. Mere *negativism*, *inconoclastm*, *rebellion* are the bitter dregs of the spirit of change.

But true revolution is not rebellion and destruction. True revolution is the desperate personal dedication to *constructive*, *idealistic*, *remedial*, *creative* reforms and life. True revolution is the profound grasp of truth that refuses to live comfortably and uncritically with the blessings of heritage and demands that the source of life be discovered to him, so that he too may drink from that fountain of Living Water. For this reason, we cannot separate revolution from the work and working of the Holy Spirit. Rather, revolution without the Spirit becomes destructive rebellion.

WESLEYANISM

Everything that the Bible tells us about the Holy Spirit and the meaning of Christ and our relationship to Him fortifies our deepening understanding of the genius of Wesleyanism—that *in the best sense* it was, and is or ought to be, *a revolution*. Christianity is revolution, not peace in the ordinary understanding of that word. “You must not think,” said Jesus, “that I have come to bring peace to the earth . . . but a sword” (Matt. 10:34, NEB). Christ meets the secular and formal religious world and shatters it.

Christianity always raises persecution for itself because it is life in the presence of rigidity and death. It is the new wine which requires new skins to contain it. Christianity is a call to total dedication to Christ against dedication to every other idol that raises its proud head in defiance of God. All idols, even modern secular idols, try to erect their ziggurats (Towers of Babel) as eternal, unchangeable bulwarks against change and God. The hard core of sin is the attempt to grasp and hold as security that which can only be temporary in the ongoing of history. It is ironic that secularism should deplore in religion the spirit of absolutism which is its own god.

The Apostle Peter prepared us for Christian revolution in his inspired Old Testament hermeneutics on the Day of Pentecost. Listen to the rumble and thunder and bursting energy in his text:

I will pour out upon everyone a portion of my spirit; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your young men shall see visions [a sense of personal responsibility for needs in the world and vistas of service], and your old men shall dream dreams [make plans for the future of God's work]. Yes, I will endue even my slaves, both men and women, with a portion of my spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the sky above, and signs on the earth below—blood and fire and drifting smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before that great, resplendent day, the day of the Lord,

shall come. And then [now], everyone who invokes the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The Jesus we speak of . . . received the Holy Spirit from the Father, as was promised, and all that you now see and hear flows from him (Acts 2:17-21, 32-33, NEB).

Christian young people stand today in a sacred heritage which by its very nature calls them up out of a narrow, dull, lackluster religious provincialism into a life of Christian revolution. They are propelled into an unlimited and totally challenging future by the very dynamic of the Holy Spirit within them which is the true hallmark of Wesleyan theology.

SANCTIFIED REVOLUTIONARIES

There ought not be a destructive tension between Christian heritage (the past) and Christian revolution (the future) either in the Wesleyan context or, more specifically, in the heritage handed to us in recent years by our holiness leaders. Some of us recall that the very thing which our forefathers had, essentially, was the spirit of revolution. They were not quiet, comfortable, placid, undisturbed people. They seethed with energy. They saw visions which sent them crashing through barriers of impossibilities. They dreamed dreams and brought forth solid realities. But they did not do everything that needs to be done. They took up a world-shattering task and we betray them when we accept what they did, as a status quo, to be preserved as a museum piece, not rolled out to do new battles. And, if we had eyes to see, we would recognize some true sons of our fathers hewing away at this great task today. The heroes of the Cross are not all dead.

We dare not betray the genius of our heritage by too great a preoccupation with our past. We are not reactionaries or obscurantists. We ought to live "on the boundary"—dangerously. We need to take our position on the growing edge of a noble tradition.

Essential Wesleyanism is *sanctified revolution*. This

is a young person's religion. There is life in it. It is revolution but not *rebellion*. It is the gospel for individuals and for society but not a social gospel. It is human nature set on fire by the indwelling Holy Spirit bringing Christ to bear on personal, church, social, national, and world life.

THE PROBLEM

It is now necessary to give a little background as to the general meaning and character of Wesleyan theology and to the reason for the existence of it.

"Wesleyan theology" is another label for what we know as "Holiness theology," though these may not mean exactly the same thing. Holiness theology is not really something separate from all other doctrines. If it is biblical, as it should be, it will encompass the entire scope of life and doctrine. It will reach out, interpenetrate, and tie together every single teaching within Christian theology, from the first stirring of conscience in a child right through to the great Judgment Day and beyond.

Just as truth is one, so holiness theology should be one with all truth. In fact holiness in its broad meaning is the underlying structure of all reality. The Bible reveals the moral and spiritual aspects of existence, and from this men derive a theology, just as nature reveals its secrets of truth to a scientist and from it is derived a theory of science; or just as the human body discloses truths about itself to the physician and the nerves and mind to the psychologist, and we have the medical sciences. Actually holiness theology is not unrelated to any area of truth, be it medicine, philosophy, psychology, science, economics, politics, or any other aspect of human experience.

In the popular mind, holiness theology has often stood for *only* one or two isolated moments within total truth. These "moments" are (1) "the second crisis" in

religious experience and (2) an acute concern for high ethical standards. Now these are cardinal elements in the total scheme, but these two emphases apart from the whole cannot be truly called Wesleyanism or holiness theology. When holiness theology is narrowly defined this way, the result is that these two vital factors, crisis and ethics, central though they are, stand in danger of becoming caricatures of holiness rather than characteristics of it. To isolate these two moments from the total truth gives rise to what we call provincialism or making a partial thing the whole, and judging the vast true whole by the inch stick of the partial truth.

It is truer to sound scholarship and religion to catch as large a concept of the whole as possible and then measure our segment of it by that large yardstick. A proper sense of proportion will then give proper meaning to the second crisis and to ethics. We must see ourselves in the light of whole truth if we would not disqualify ourselves for active duty in this world of urgent need. God does not intend for us to fiddle around fussingly in an obscure corner of the battlefield where the fight is already over and only the duds remain. Crisis and ethics are too important to the whole to squander them in trivialities and meaninglessness, unrelatedness and blind fanaticisms.

I conversed at some length one time with the professor who sits in the chair of theology in Leiden University, Holland, where Arminius taught. He is the Arminius professor and teaches in the room where Arminius taught 350 years ago. He said that neither he nor the continental theologians were interested in Wesleyanism, not because Wesley's insights were spurned, but because Wesleyanism had not produced a profound theology and was only wallowing around in moralism. I was deeply stung. I wanted to say, "It isn't so!" But if Wesleyanism anywhere is only a moralism without total theology, it needs to be rescued from its provincialism.

In this study, then, the basic task is to relate our interest in such matters as crisis and ethics to the more inclusive and whole thing that holiness theology actually is.

WESLEY'S PERSPECTIVE

In order to understand why it was necessary for there to be a theology distinct from others such as Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinistic, we must look briefly at history. What we know as Wesleyanism began as a doctrinal affirmation protesting and correcting the prevailing idea that all the responsibility for man's religious life and destiny was on God. This theology, which Wesley believed was not biblical, said that man is not under any obligation at all in effecting his salvation. It said that salvation is by grace alone and not by any merit on man's part. Of course Wesley believed this too, and very strongly. But merit was interpreted by the Calvinists of his day to mean any obedience, or faithfulness, even the act of believing, which was held to be a special gift of God not really attached to man. Saving faith was in no sense the voluntary response of a free choice. This would be interpreted as "works." So extreme were some expressions of this unbiblical theology that it was even said that man glorified God only in the committing of sin, because only as God expresses His love in forgiveness is He showing His glory! Therefore sin is most desirable. In fact, the man who says he does not sin is not only a liar (hence, a sinner) but a dishonor to God.

The obvious result of such teaching was to excuse a Christian from all attempts to eliminate sin from his heart and life. If God was freely and wholly responsible for man's salvation and God was glorified in forgiving his sin, then holiness would be a barrier to God's glory—an enemy to divine grace.

On this basis how could one distinguish a Christian from a sinner? The only possible answer would be that

only God knows who is a Christian. And since man had no part in his own salvation, it stands to reason that God must have chosen him apart from his own will, or even his knowledge. This is called personal predestination. God chooses whom He will, saves him in principle without changing his heart, is glorified in the man's sin, and discourages him in any attempt at a holy life. Besides all this, He saves the man eternally, no matter how much sin he commits—in fact, the more the better. The more sin, the more forgiveness and grace. The more sin abounds, the more grace can abound, seemed to be the way many people around Wesley understood Paul in Romans 5.

Wesley's study of the Bible convinced him that any theological system which could result in such a radical conclusion violated everything Christ died for. Wesley was usually the cool-headed, rational thinker, poised and proper—a true intellectual—until he started thinking about this interpretation of the Calvinism of his day. He lost his "cool" when he saw that the theory of predestination stood opposed absolutely to the real holiness which God requires of men in order that they may see Him. Any theology, he said, that could put a man in heaven without any holiness coming between the new birth and heaven was not biblical and not safe.

It was when the Wesleys expressed themselves in poetry that they waxed most "uncool" about the matter. Listen to intellectual, gentle Wesley (Charles or John) sing with none too gentle sarcasm about a salvation which could ignore the sin problem of mankind and lull a sinner into false security and death:

UNCONDITIONAL ETERNAL SECURITY

*Surely I once believed,
And felt my sins forgiven.
But soon the subtle fiend
Beguiled my simple mind.*

*Darkness with light he knew to blend.
Falsehood and truth he joined.
And preached to my unsettled heart
His bold, presumptuous lie,
"You are secure of heaven"
(The tempter softly says).
"You are elect, and once forgiven
Can never fall from grace.
You never can receive
The grace of God in vain;
The gift, be sure, He did not give
To take it back again.
God is unchangeable and so are you.
You cannot wholly fail.
Out of His book He cannot blot
Your everlasting name.
Cast all your fears away;
My son, be of good cheer,
Nor mind what Paul and Peter say,
For you must persevere.
And did they fright the child
And tell it it might fall?
Ah, poor misguided soul!
And did they make it weep?
Come, let me to my bosom lull
Thy sorrow all asleep.
Only believe yourself elect
And the work is done."*

Holiness theology, then, stands as a positive, biblical corrective to that kind of thinking about God's and man's part in salvation which was based on a theory of personal predestination. Most of us would not be troubled about predestination. We cannot understand how anyone could sincerely believe in it. But any difficulty one might have in understanding holiness doctrine usually arises from the same basic way of thinking

which makes predestination doctrine intellectually necessary.

Wesleyan theology must reach back and rebuild a concept of *man* from Scripture before we can understand what biblical salvation is in general and what holiness is in particular.

THE PERSONAL EMPHASIS OF WESLEYAN OR HOLINESS THEOLOGY

In the Wesleyan emphasis on the Holy Spirit there is an implicit emphasis on man. The dynamic of the Holy Spirit is not an abstract thing, just something to talk about and believe in, intellectually. It is something to *experience personally*. The heart of Wesleyan theology is precisely the personal relationship of the Holy Spirit to men in actual human experience. If we may be understood properly, we should like to make man central—not in the sense of making man the center of life, but of looking at him as the object of God's grace realized in Christian experience. He is the one to whom the Bible was given as communication between God and himself, the creature whom God made to be the shrine of the Holy Spirit, and in whom, and through whom, the Holy Spirit seeks to perpetuate Christian revolution in personal and corporate life.

The Holy Spirit cannot be simply an abstract doctrine. *He is the Revelation of truth*. He is the Personal Presence of Christ in men. He cannot operate externally to man. He does not come to church as a power, unrelated to man. Only as man provides Him an avenue of expression can He do His work. Man needs to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit to fulfill his own personal spiritual life; but more profoundly, the Holy Spirit needs a man *by whom and in whom and through whom* His power can be released into the Church and world. In this sense, man does His work.

The importance of the total man, totally and actually committed to God, fully and profoundly indwelt by the Holy Spirit, cannot be overstressed. This concept stands diametrically opposed to any theology which (1) understands man as being saved in principle but not in real experience, or which (2) understands the work of the Holy Spirit to be a power apart from the most free participation of the human person in the event and in the life.

When contemporary psychology understands man as a dynamic, active self, it comes close to the biblical concept of man. The personality is not a static thing. It grows and leaps forward, reaching outward toward self-fulfillment to include more and more within itself in the persons of others. It discards and relegates, discriminates, and commits itself. It searches for truth and relates itself—rightly or wrongly—to truth. It is a glowing fire of living restlessness. And it is precisely this kind of being that was made for the Holy Spirit and to whom the Holy Spirit seeks to relate himself. The Holy Spirit cannot unite himself to a stick, a stone, a church pew, an organization, or a building—He must have a man, in some ways like unto himself, in whom not only the power of fellowship can be experienced but from which fellowship can flow love.

A LIVING SACRIFICE

In the next chapter we will examine some scriptures which will sharpen our understanding of holiness life and doctrine and our concept of man. But this section should not close without reference to Rom. 12:1—13:10, where there is found more spiritual and intellectual wealth than we will be able to exhaust in this small volume, or even, I suppose, in any human library. It is an outcropping of an ore of truth that simply tells us where to *start* digging. The vein leads deep into the

entire Book of Romans and beyond into the entire Word. It is inexhaustible.

From this passage of scripture we will quote but two verses: "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable [well-pleasing] to God, which is *your intelligent service*. Do not fashion yourselves [conform] to this age, but be transformed [metamorphosed] by the renewing [bursting out from within] of your mind in order to prove, *by you* [notice the emphasis] what the good and acceptable [pleasing] and perfect will of God is" (free translation). This passage is simply the beginning of Paul's thought and must include and not end before 13:10—"Love is the fulfilling of the law."

Everything is here which Wesleyanism stands for in its most vital and central emphasis.

II

PERFECTION

In the first chapter, Wesleyan theology was put into its larger context. Its most significant characteristic was said to be the infusion of the meaning of the Holy Spirit into theology as a way of *thinking* and into human experience as a way of *living*. It is the dynamic interrelationship of the human person with the Holy Spirit that is significant. Wesleyanism has called this "perfection," a perfection of love, following Jesus' characterization of this relationship, "Love God with your whole heart, soul, strength, and mind [the whole self], and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27, free translation).

HOW PERFECTION?

But it is the human participation in this kind of perfection that raises questions. How can anything be perfect when imperfect man has any part in it? We do not and cannot perfectly demonstrate love. Our human nature is basically motivated by self-interest. How can this be brought into any harmony with the idea of perfect love? In other words, the introduction of the Holy Spirit into the real areas of human life raises problems in the realm of theology as well as in personal religion.

There have been several attitudes toward the idea of "perfection" in man:

1. The most common reaction is to say that perfection is an *absurdity* in the essentially imperfect, fallible, human experience of mankind. We ought not to speak about it seriously, at theology's best, and we become hypocritical bigots at its worst, when perfection is claimed for oneself.

2. Many attempts have been made in history to achieve perfection. Those who tried to *run away from the evils of everyday life*, personal and social, and who gathered together in monasteries, or hid away as hermits in isolation attempting to escape the sins of the human flesh, were seriously trying to find Christian perfection. Adolf Harnach said that the monastic movement was the greatest search for perfection in history. But the perfection which this rejection of the human body tried to achieve eluded these ascetics.

3. The search for perfection through *reformation of society* has never produced satisfactory results. Not only did the so-called "social gospel" fail miserably, but subsequent rigid social and moral controls of modern-day dictatorships and Communism fail to reform or remake human nature according to the naturalistic dream of progress. This failure is evidenced today by the unrest in all the world, especially in those nations which seem

most concerned about constructing a "Brave New World."

4. The search for perfection can and does manifest itself in the evangelical churches in unfortunate ways. One such attempt to find it is to hide all our "sinfulnesses" and imperfections under the cover of Christ's white robe of righteousness and claim His righteousness as ours on the basis of the "finished salvation in Christ." The problem with this is that character cannot be transferred from one person to another. Another kind of "perfectionism" is to claim that in sanctification everything we do is free from sin, so that there is no need ever again to plead for forgiveness from God or man. The first glories in his sin, the other in his sinlessness; one in his humility, the other in his perfection. But neither one comes even close to biblical perfection.

Briefly, the problem lies in our understanding of what man is and what holiness is. When we think of perfection or holiness as *something* which men possess in themselves which must be guarded from the shocks of ordinary life, something fragile and delicate, something that must be preserved by shielding it from contact with a world of evil, we have seriously missed the point of Jesus' teaching.

Most of us know that we may lose perfection and grace, but we do not always understand that the kind of perfection we are talking about can be lost more quickly by under-exercising it than by overexposing it. In our sincere attempt to preserve our grace we terminate our expansion program—intellectually and socially and in almost every other way. We settle down to a life of *safety*. We do not want to venture out into a new ideal or a new program of activity, lest we lose our sanctification. To live on the defensive is not consistent with the promise of spiritual energy given us by Jesus, nor to the divine challenge to an unprotected life of exposure to the demonic forces of anti-Christ.

When we think about perfection as a philosophically finished and totally unchangeable thing, or of sanctification as a *quantity* of fragile goodness which God deposits in us, we are looking in the wrong direction. Looking inward, into ourselves, we cannot see what perfection and sanctification might and could be. Looking inward we will see only the vastly imperfect self. Perfection, or sanctification, is not something inside of us, a commodity which we possess and which we may weigh or measure.

Perfection in the Bible does not have to do with a static self but with the way a self operates. Perfection in the physical realm is visualized as a healthy organism, living at a furious clip, expanding itself into adulthood. No matter how perfect a child may seem to be, he is not perfect unless he is growing away from one stage of life toward the ever advancing goal of maturity. Arrested development is not perfection, either physically or intellectually, and certainly not spiritually. A perfect mind is not one that knows everything. It may even be very ignorant. Most of us are born ignorant. It seems that, to be born, one must submit to the condition of being terribly ignorant! But a perfect mind is one reaching out after new ideas. Just so, a perfect Christian is not one who has "arrived" but one who, unencumbered with enmity against God, is pressing relentlessly out after the new horizons of truth and life in all the realms of God's world—physical, intellectual, and spiritual.

PERFECTION VERSUS PERFECTIONISM

There is a real and meaningful difference between perfection and perfectionism. *Perfectionism* is the end of movement or striving. It is static, death-producing, moral lethargy. *Perfection* is an *outward* drive, a dynamic, life-producing energy. We do not need to protect this kind of perfection. We have no need to spend precious energy in simply preserving our sanctification. We do

not preserve our physical hearts by lying in bed and feeding ourselves up on an overabundance of delicious calories. The heart is preserved by getting out of bed, and running, and climbing, and pumping blood through the arteries until one is aglow with health. The spiritual heart is preserved by living life self-forgetfully in energetic service. Jesus put it in a nutshell when He said: He that preserves his life shall lose it, but he that throws his life away shall find it. Such simple spiritual truths are the key to truth in the whole of life.

We will die in our "goodness" and be preserved (if we are preserved) as useless wax figures in a museum, if we do not put to God-required use the energy given to us by the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Holy Spirit will not and cannot enshrine himself in an organism that refuses to submit its powers to His will. And it is precisely this outflow that defines perfection.

PERFECTION IN TODAY'S LIFE

Wesleyan theology, or holiness theology, is practical. It does not simply describe a religion of the mind, though it is rational, too. It is not merely a religion for the next life, though that is included. It does not simply tell us what God has done for us. It does not leave us with no place to go. It has to do with man in his total life. Holiness must, of course, include whatever remedial steps are necessary to deal with man's totality in both crisis and process. But it must also include the full scope of life's meaning and fulfillment to the farthest reaches of his earthly experience. In this sense, Wesleyanism is not provincial, that is, limited to a narrow segment of truth. We do have a specific *emphasis*, but not to the neglect of the full scope of Christian truth. Wesleyans emphasize the crisis experiences, not to isolate these from the full scope of theology, but to point out the rather obvious fact that in order to get into the house

one must go through the entrance. But Wesleyanism in its best expression does not stop at the door. Forgiveness and entire sanctification do not exhaust the biblical message. These essential moments are the remedial steps which *begin* a life of fulfillment. All the business of living, all the purpose of our existence, all the unspeakable excitement of a life of achievement here, and hereafter, lies on the far side of these moments. But we cannot get to the "far side" until we go through the gates in specific moments of crucial decision which run down to the deepest levels of rational life.

Failure to see this limits our vision to the going-in experience only. After going up through two levels we hit our heads on the ceiling of our expectation. Where do we go now? In order to recapture or perpetuate the exuberance of entry we go back down and come up again, and again, and again, until our heads are sore and our minds distressed. This is not true Wesleyan theology. *There is no ceiling to a life of holiness.*

The solution to the problem of perfection is found in the passage previously referred to (Rom. 12:1—13:10). This is undoubtedly an interpretation of Jesus' law of perfect love—"Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . soul . . . mind, and . . . strength . . . and . . . thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:30-31).

Rom. 12:1-2 tells us precisely how one begins to love God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength—or with the whole *self* without distinction between the mental, spiritual, or physical. The self is *one* thing and that whole self is to be centered in God. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice." Paul then shows precisely how one is to apply in everyday life Jesus' second word—love to self and neighbor.

In this exciting passage we see not only our *personal* interests discussed (how to personally relate to God) but our social obligations laid out clearly and inexorably. We see not only how to treat others but we see how we

ought to regard ourselves. Self-regard is basic to a dedication to "other-regard." Our obligations to others cannot proceed apart from a proper and virile self-love. Self-fulfillment is the result of the proper outward flow of energy. Self-fulfillment is never achieved without this outwardness of the flow of spiritual energy.

May I be allowed a personal estimate of this passage? Rom. 12:1-2 has long been a favorite of mine and has become a foundation for my own philosophy of holiness. From it have come some of the most soul-searching insights of my life. It is to me the emancipation proclamation which freed me from a narrow, limited, disappointing theory of holiness which I had somehow developed out of what I had heard in a fragmentary way from various sources. No one else is to blame but my own stupid self. But from my faulty interpretation of holiness I had rebelled vigorously. But Romans 12 became a point of departure for my pilgrimage from darkness into light. For what value it would have to others, I would like to point out some observations which structure my present interpretations. May I add that new and rich truths have leaped out at me even as I have worked on this passage for this particular study.

Observation I. If there had been any abstraction or theological language in the first 11 chapters of Romans (which there is) or in Jesus' law of love (which there isn't), certainly this passage is singularly free from such. The Roman Christians knew what Paul meant and they knew precisely what to do when Paul spoke in this exhortation. It is perhaps as strong a holiness text as any to be found in the New Testament. There are none of the usual theological words in it—not "holiness," or "sanctification," or "cleansing," or "baptism with the Holy Spirit," or "second work of grace." And yet all these are in it, and much, much more. The amazing thing about this whole passage is that nothing has become theologically stereotyped in it. In some way God was able

to preserve for us the real-life vitality of this passage. The language is vivid. The figures are universally understandable and the exhortation is clear. It hits us squarely between the eyes and forces us into a most real encounter with truth.

When we pray in generalities we soon lose the personal issues and we never know whether we have "it" or not. Paul never confused moral concerns by permitting his readers the luxury of retreat into vague generalities. It flashes its sword sharply against our self-protection and retreatism.

Observation II. Present your "bodies" to God. I used to wish Paul had been more elegant and delicate. Present your soul, spirit, heart, mind, would sound nicer and agree better with my theology. But Paul is the inspired psychologist here. If one commits his body to something, the rest of what man is tags along pretty faithfully. It is a little hard to locate one's heart, soul, and spirit, but we usually know where our bodies are. We can't hide them from ourselves. They intrude disturbingly into our consciousness. The body is the locus of "me"—and you. It is all too easy to "give one's heart" to God and leave the gift in mere sentimentality or policy.

I worked one Christmas vacation in a post office. My task was to open dead letters to find any possible identification. I was amazed by the number of Christmas cards—some with sizable amounts of money in them—saying, "Sorry I haven't written you since last Christmas," and signed, "With all my love." *All my love!* Yet, "all my love" equaled one card per year with no news, only an occasional money gift. I was scornful until I remembered that I was saying when I was in church, "I love the Lord with all my heart," and then running my own life by myself all week. The little money gift to God on Sunday was a poor substitute for honest and actual dedication.

The body represents the total self. Paul is a Hebrew in his concept of personality, not Greek. To the Hebrew the person is a unity. When Scripture spoke of the heart, or soul, or arm, or feet, or bowels, or any one of a number of designations of the person, it was not the particular member or entity that was meant but the whole person as characterized, or acting, under the figure used. Feet were "quick to shed blood," and the feet of the bearer of good news were beautiful. In no better way was Paul able to indicate Jesus' meaning, Love God with your whole "strength," than to say, "Present your bodies." The body is the man.

Observation III. The body moreover is to be a "living sacrifice" and nothing could be a deeper rebuke to a static concept of personality or formal concept of holiness than this phrase. "A living body" involves more than a practical self-giving—it embodies the challenging element of risk. This analogy says the body is:

a. *Not like cement.* A living sacrifice is not fixed, set, changeless, proper, cold, lifeless. Peter's illustration of Christian dedication under the symbol of *stones* adds the adjective "living"—living stones—and thereby invests the picture with both stability and vitality. (See I Pet. 2: 4-5.)

b. *Not like rubber.* This substance is easily pressed but difficult to change—like men who respond to emotion and circumstances but are incapable of receiving a lasting impression. We have all known people who were easily convinced of various ways of thinking and acting, but while the new "light" was still shining and the new affirmation was still on their lips, the old habits were putting them through the same motions as before. Convinced but not converted!

c. *Not like a corpse.* A dead body is unresponsive; it has perfect poise; it is never hurt; it is completely predictable. Dead people do not feel pins poked into them (as I had been told by some well-meaning Christians

who took "death to self" quite literally). Whatever "dead" may mean to a Christian, it does not mean that he will not feel the hurt of injustice. "Dying to self" is vastly different from "death of self" and makes a very great difference in what the Christian life is intended to be and what we make of it.

d. A virile, vibrant organism. The figure reminds us of a four-year-old getting into everything, climbing, jumping, bothering everyone, asking questions, challenging parental authority sometimes, but *alive*. A living sacrifice is a vital, living person, bursting with life, impulsive, creative, individualistic, eager—with all this put at God's disposal. I would rather have a student who pesters me with questions until I'm glad when the bell rings than to try to arouse from his lethargy one who doesn't know that there are problems and would be afraid to admit their existence if he met one.

But this business is risky. We don't all have good sense—at least all the time. Fortunately God is willing to take the risk. In fact, He is not only inviting the risk but pressuring us to invest our resources with Him. He surrounds us with all the aids, guides, guards, mercy, and chastisement needed to direct this energy into spiritual maturity.

A "living sacrifice" may think some new thoughts—plan some new plans. A Luther is apt to burst out of the bondage of mediocrity and shatter precedent. A Wesley is apt to find his heart warmed again and go crashing into a too-comfortable church and stir it up. He may go running out into the fields—or into the ghettos—where a sin-saturated culture needs the well-harnessed dynamic of a Christian who cares about people. God needs people who don't quit thinking and challenging life when they become Christians. Heaven isn't here yet.

Observation IV. "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed." I shall never forget the theo-

logical shock I received the day I discovered in my reading of the Greek New Testament that "transformation" is a *process* and does not occur in a crisis moment at an altar. It spoiled some of my best sermons. I held a sad funeral for them and wept bitter tears. It almost seemed that holiness was going to be buried with my sermons. But a resurrection occurred which liberated the truth of holiness from the bondage of my prejudices.

Be not *conformed* but be *transformed*. There are only these two alternatives open to a Christian. These figures of speech come, as usual, from the natural and familiar things. Transformation is *metamorphosis*, a geological word.

We are told that when vegetable matter such as trees, grass, etc., is covered with great layers of rock, the tremendous pressure and heat over great lengths of time eventually turn it into coal, and in some cases into diamonds. The structure of the soft vegetable matter is changed. Extremely hard, beautiful gems of great value are the result. This is *transformation*. It takes *time* and *patience* and *pressure*, and *heat* to bring it about. This idea of change was in Paul's mind as he thought of the transformation needed in human personalities.

Conformation is external shaping without a basic structural change taking place. I have seen blobs of clay shaped into two identical forms. Both were decorated the same. One was "fired" under intense heat and controlled conditions and emerged a beautiful, strong, useful object. The other was merely dried, decorated and polished. It looked much like the first one. But it crumbled under ordinary usage. It had tried to achieve value the cheap way. It had not gone through the fire.

Paul is contrasting the possible responses of Christians to the normal pressures of life. The "world" here does not mean evil. Paul used the Greek word *aion*, a period of time (age). He seems to be saying that the

concerns of this life, pressures which all of us experience, need not "squeeze you into its own mold," as J. B. Phillips translates it, but can be the occasion of transformation from within. None of us can escape the pressures but we can choose which result these pressures will produce on or in us.

Conformation is the taking on of the shape of our surroundings. We let others think for us, entertain us, give us all the answers, with no effort on our part to earn or evaluate them. It is possible to put on a religious uniform so that we look like paragons of virtue, assuming that the external appearance will pay all the bills for character. In the end we find we are bankrupt and empty.

This danger of mere conformity is perhaps the central danger of the holiness movement. If we die, it will not be because our doctrine is wrong, or our apologetic weak. We will not fail because the people are bad or because we become educated and socially respectable. Our danger lies in permitting ourselves to conform to, or pattern after, even good things as a substitute for the precious process of a deep and radical transformation of the center of the self.

In our own religious circles there is a danger that we will standardize religious expressions, standardize the vocabulary of our testimonies, standardize our activities, and thus become colorless, dull, weak, patterned persons. No wonder we achieve so little in personal life, and the Church has so little impact on our world!

Transformation takes place by a "renewing" of the "mind." The Greek word for renewal suggests "keeping alive at the center." The thought is strong that change can take place at the very center of the personality. This does not come about by some mystical operation during an emotional anesthetic, but by a most conscious and continuous facing up to God in which we are forced

away from dependence on patterns and platitudes and compelled to come to grips with the person in us God wants to develop and use.

The whole scheme of salvation is morally and spiritually and psychologically wholesome.

Observation V. Present your body to God. There are a few things about this word "present" which will help to put our thinking on the right track.

a. Presenting is not surrender. "Present" is active and "whole-personal." We do not inhibit ourselves in "presenting." We go along with the gift. In fact it is the whole self, not gifts of time, money, and talents, that are involved.

b. Presenting is not an emotional act. Emotion may be needed to "spark" our decision, and be the result of what has happened, but it is not an essential factor to the event.

c. Presenting is a crisis event. It is deliberate, voluntary, specific. It is an about-face. Growth is an improper concept regarding it. It is possible only in a growing personality, but growth does not account for it.

d. Presenting has the deepest moral implications. The beginning of transformation is in a relationship to God which is absolutely opposed to the concept of conformation. We are *conformed* by outward forces. We are *transformed* by the very elimination of outward pressures. We are forced past all the presence of others, down into the most personal and lonely, intimate encounter with the Holy Spirit that it is possible to conceive. We often look for a sort of subconscious act of God in cleansing us, where God does something for us which we may enjoy without knowing the nature and cost of it. But this experience which inducts us into a life of holiness is a personally conducted tour into the deepest parts of our personalities where no other person can go with us. We step out alone with God to make

dedications that will be for life, untouchable by others and uncorrupted by any other loyalty.

True moral life cannot operate or develop in conformity. We are individuals and must come to God singly—not to submit to a pattern of experience set by others, but to find for ourselves God's will for us as individuals.

To avoid conformity one must put a high price on his moral and intellectual integrity. The cost is not ultimately to cut oneself off from life, but to keep intellectually and morally and spiritually alive—to become a person of integrity. The New Testament never patterns Christian experience, but drives the person into a unique, moral relationship to God that not only preserves the precious commodity of fresh individuality, but sparks that uniqueness with all the fire of heaven.

The human self, seeking for fulfillment, *finds itself* as the Holy Spirit "cuts it off from the herd," so that there is "nothing between." The most creative thing we will ever do is to let the Holy Spirit drive us into this place of confrontation where the superficialities of our social life and self-interest can be stripped away and we emerge true and whole and integrated selves—the living shrine of the Holy Spirit. This is the only, lonely, star-studded path into the center of the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

"God's will" is, by its very nature, unapproachable and hidden from us, though God is crowding us with it, exposing it to us. He reveals its beauty until we come to Him with "our eyes wide open" (to use the J. B. Phillips phrase), our guard down, and our hearts open, willing from the depths of our beings to will His will. God's will is so utterly acceptable! It is, after all, exactly what we are made to want. But only in this lonely way can it be found. And always this will plunge us into the heart of humanity.

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice" is Paul's way of telling us *how* to do what Jesus told us to do. It is

the practical definition of love to God. Love is not abstract. Love is not basically emotional. Love is not sentimentality. Love is a deliberate, voluntary, profound, practical, earthy dedication of the whole self to the Lord Jesus Christ.

THREE-DIMENSIONAL LOVE

But Paul is saying something else. He did not end his letter at the second verse. That is not a proper stopping place for any discussion of holiness theology. Nor did Jesus leave us with a one-dimensional religious life. To love oneself and one's neighbor complements one's love to God.

Love, to Paul, was not a three-ring circus that we have to keep going all at one time, trying to divide our limited energies into conflicting enterprises. "Love God." "Love others." "Love me." Its hard to keep the whole show going. It's exhausting. Isn't loving God with all the heart contradictory to loving others and particularly loving one self? Isn't it too great a burden for imperfect, fallible, finite humanity to try to keep all this love thing going?

A woman with 12 children asked a preacher how she could keep better victory through her terribly busy and frustrating days. "Get sanctified," she was told. "Oh, no," she said, "I've got enough problems without adding that to my load." Perhaps this woman's misconception exposes much misunderstanding about the grace of God as taught by Wesleyan theology. Love, in the biblical sense, is not something added to our already complicated situation but a change in the direction of life's deepest commitment—to God—so that a profound unification of the self begins. Love unifies, takes the enervating tensions away; strengthens, purifies, and directs all of life's energies.

What Paul is saying, not in so many words, but by

the way he presents his material, is that a total involvement of the self in the love of God as we become a living sacrifice takes care of the other directions of love. In loving God truly, we love what He loves and this builds up our own love factory so that it produces enough surplus to take care of all our needs. Christian love does not divide personality, but fuses the whole man into a unity—a dynamo of love and outgoingness.

But does not such love tend to foster pride in one's spiritual attainments? Hardly, if it is real love. Love is the very thing that delivers us from pious and enervating preoccupation with our own "state of grace." Love does not center in the self. Love is not static. Love is not a "state" at all. It is a life, lived out to the fingertips.

III

PERFORMANCE

Before proceeding further, let us recap our progress thus far. To begin with, we sought to locate the jugular vein of this theology and to follow the main arteries into the heart, then out to the fingertips of usefulness. In Chapter I, "Perspective," we located the genius of Wesleyanism in the interpenetration of the human spirit by the Holy Spirit. The dynamic is not in the human spirit alone nor in the Holy Spirit alone, but in the confluence of these two.

This led to an examination of the nature of that confluence under the title "Perfection." Man is not a static,

passive "thing." Man is human, fallible, finite—a being who cannot be philosophically perfect. The perfection of man in his relationship to the Holy Spirit means a dynamic, growing, expanding, creative self, unencumbered with the strangling "enmity against God" which leads to death. We also discussed the kind of response required from man which is necessary to realize the full life of the Holy Spirit in him—namely, transformation from the very center of the personality, in contrast to any kind of external conformation as a substitute for genuine character.

The implications of all of this must now be examined. It is concerned with *performance*. That is, Christian holiness is good for something, not merely to talk about, to preserve in a glass case and charge admission to see. In the first chapter we called it "revolution," and perhaps the use of this radical term should be explained. For there is a creative kind of revolution and there is a destructive, indiscriminating type. The difference is vital and certainly apropos to the subject of the Christian life.

Since it is Wesleyan theology we are discussing, we must stay at least within calling distance of John Wesley. Some in Wesleyan circles remember him for his contribution to our understanding of personal religious experience, but the world outside remembers him for other reasons which we tend to forget, but which we forget to our impoverishment.

The Wesleys lived in an age of turmoil and transition and social trouble, much as we experience today. Both France and Britain were torn internally by economic and moral dissolution. Worst of all, the churches were adding to the tragedy by their own vicious, selfish motives. France looked vainly to the Catholic church and found nothing but a corrupt clergy moonlighting and debauching itself in a manner seldom equalled since.

But two men cared. Two men raised their pens and

voices and hands to hold back the tide of unspeakable evil perpetrated upon the helpless and suffering middle- and lower-class people—Wesley in England and Voltaire in France. It may seem strange to link these two men together; but they shared important qualities of manhood.

Both men saw the social need. Both hearts were torn by it. Both dedicated their lives to a correction of the evil. Both saw that the decadent Church stood in the way of reform. Both set about to correct the problem by an attack on the Church, though each in a very different way.

Both Wesley and Voltaire were men of high intellectual caliber and achievement. Both were champions of religious toleration. Both had been victims of intolerance and had an innate sense of justice which is not inconsistent with the highest Christian grace.

Both Wesley and Voltaire protested vigorously against the evils of the organized Church. Neither turned against what the Church actually stood for. Even Voltaire, while attempting to crush the "infamous" church (that is, the Catholic church as an organization), actually praised the ethical consistency of the Dutch Anabaptists, and pointed all men to the teachings of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. He was, for all his renowned atheism, not basically antagonistic to the Christian God—but denounced the church that had destroyed the possibility of faith in God.

But it was John Wesley who saw most clearly that revolution must be sanctified if it is to build and not merely tear down. Voltaire's radical revolution weakened the Church. Wesley's revolution strengthened the Church, built faith in Christianity, and achieved reforms without destroying institutions.

John Wesley, the revolutionary, is hard to reconcile with the earlier Wesley who evasively refused to

accept the Epworth pastorate from his father. He said then that he could be holier in Oxford than anywhere else. His chief motive for going to America as a missionary was to save his own soul, for he said, "I cannot hope to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there." There is no revolution in this quietism and retreat.

Only a Wesley in vital contact with the Holy Spirit could later see that saving one's own soul is only a step toward a much more noble task, namely, helping others to save their souls and find a place of usefulness in their communities.

The eighteenth century was a dissolute age. Society was shot through with sodden coarseness. Every area of life was touched with the blight. The literature "emitted an odor of scented sickliness" that would never have been tolerated in a healthy age. Taste for the pornographic was avid. In a so-called "Age of Enlightenment," education was at a low ebb and public education was a farce. It is difficult to imagine a more sorry day in which to hope for a religious awakening.

In attacking the problems of his day, Wesley engaged and applied every power of his personality and every advantage of his training. He anticipated modern psychology by exploring very deeply into the inner world of human consciousness and relating religion to it. Nor can we assume the title "Wesleyan" without likewise applying all the available furnishings of our own minds to the scope and depth of Wesley's interests and personal explorations. It is said he knew as much about medicine as the physicians of his day and he operated a free clinic in his house every Friday he was in London. He treated with remarkable success the scores of people who came. Wesley's doctrine, moreover, would not permit him to rest content in biblical theology as such, or religious experience as such—two stopping places for some contemporary Wesleyanisms. Instead it pushed

him into the social and economic and educational problems in the world outside his church.

Wesleyan theology, in its essential meaning, includes a thorough and radical biblical study—the Bible is its Authority for faith and practice. But it must also be structured and tested by reason. And it dare not neglect the practical application of grace to human nature with all its vicissitudes and complexities. It cannot draw back from a thrust of the whole self into the world of human need around us—not only to preach salvation, but to sensitize our personal and corporate conscience regarding our responsibility to the “secular city.” A professed salvation that did not include all of this was no salvation as far as Wesley was concerned.

If we can call this biblical, rational, psychological, social theology “Wesleyanism,” then this is where we can find our bearings. We may apply to ourselves Wesley’s urgent counsel to his preachers when he said, in part, to them in an essay entitled “An Address to the Clergy”:

If I am lacking even in these lowest endowments, shall I not frequently regret the want? How often shall I move heavily, and be far less useful than I might have been! How much more shall I suffer in my usefulness, if I have wasted the opportunities I once had of acquainting myself with the great lights of antiquity, the Ante-Nicene Fathers; or if I have denounced or droned away those precious hours wherein I might have made myself master of the sciences! How poorly must I many times drag on, for want of the helps which I have vilely cast away! But is not my case still worse, if I have loitered away the time wherein I should have perfected myself in Greek and Hebrew? I might before this have been critically acquainted with these treasuries of sacred knowledge. But they are now hid from my eyes; they are close locked up, and I have no key to open them. However, have I used all possible diligence to supply that grievous defect (so far as it can be supplied now) by the most accurate knowledge of the English Scriptures? Do I meditate therein day

and night? Do I think (and consequently speak) thereof, "when I sit in the house, and when I walk by the way; when I lie down, and when I rise up"? By this means have I at length attained a thorough knowledge, as of the sacred text, so of its literal and spiritual meaning? Otherwise, how can I attempt to instruct others therein? Without this, I am a blind guide indeed! I am absolutely incapable of teaching my flock what I have never learned myself; no more fit to lead souls to God, than I am to govern the world.

One of the first results of a true spiritual awakening is the thirst for knowledge. Wesley was one of the first advocates of popular education. He saw that his converts must be cared for, and he built schools wherever enough converts warranted it.

Wesley had an intimate interest in the bread-and-butter problems of life. He knew the value of wealth if properly used, but the curse of it when it was controlled by selfish hands. He practiced what he preached by giving away (we are told) 98 percent of his income.

Labor problems and child labor came to his attention. He worked for fair wages, fair prices, honest, healthy employment. He cared about the whole man, not just his soul.

He applied Christian ethics to a corrupt society. His voice against the liquor traffic, "England's master curse," was potent. He was a powerful antislavery spokesman. Wesley's social reforms leaped the Atlantic Ocean and influenced American social morality more than is recognized.

Our heritage, as channeled to us through the magnificent and God-indwelt Wesley, makes us aware of the fact that God needs big men to do His work. And everything holiness is, is geared to making big men. Only big men can handle big visions. Only big men, who have known the depth of doubt and have found truth, can handle truth. To handle big truths it is necessary to have a flexible, growing, enlargable self. If we have

terminated our expandibility and have limited our vision, our love, our understanding, our empathy, and our dedication to personal growth alone, we are living on a lower level than the divine call and will never serve this present age, our calling to fulfill.

Only big men—or men in the process of stretching out their cramped, pinched little souls—can be Christian revolutionaries. Only big men are able to see past the small, petty, childish irritations close to them, out into the real problems that tear at the heart of the world.

Small men attack each other, tear each other to pieces, and think they are doing God's service. Exhausting our fighting spirit in destroying those among us who differ with us gives a false sense of achievement and fosters a bitter, divisive spirit. Wesley was particularly distressed about this among his people. He wrote to Rev. Downing:

I think it a great pity that the few clergymen in England who preach the three grand Scriptural doctrines—Original Sin, Justification by Faith, and Holiness consequent thereon—should have any jealousies or misunderstandings between them. What advantage must this give to the common enemy! What an hindrance is it to the great work wherein they are all engaged! How desirable is it that there should be the most open, avowed intercourse between them! For many years I have been labouring after this—labouring to unite, not scatter, the messengers of God.

In a sermon, "Caution Against Bigotry," Wesley urged his audience to be very sure that all bigotry remained with their opponents. In another sermon he said:

But although a difference of opinions or modes of worship may prevent our union of affection, though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, not withstanding these smaller differences.

We do not need withdrawal from the world of man so much as we need big men. To link hands, *healingly, forgivingly*, with infinite tolerance for each other, to move outward to do what the Church, the body of Christ, is called on to do—*this is our need*.

The world is in convulsions. It will not settle down again just to give us peace of mind or in answer to our prayers for peace. Killing off the wicked, ambitious leaders would not solve the problems of the world. The ancient gods are dead and the people of the world are seeking for more stable and humane values to serve. American democracy was once thought to be the new world savior, but it also has feet of clay. Our own country is in the throes, a maelstrom, of troubled change. Our youth are restless, searching, disturbing to our peace, but we believe it is not so much defiant as defensive, not so much rebellious as confused. Where are the great Christian heroes so essential to any generation?

All of this frightens us, drives us together into introverted, self-protective cells. We build walls of negativism about us until we are so ignorant of how the other side lives that we are an anachronism in our own society and helpless to lend a hand in this day of unparalleled opportunity.

If we can isolate one major weakness in the Wesleyan holiness movement, it is a reluctance to harness our dynamic to the wheels that need to be turned in this world. It seems we have been afraid to be contaminated with the world, and in our increasing opulence and secular strength we have drawn back from dedicating what we have gained by way of intellectual strength and material wealth along with our "hearts," which we give so quickly but so imperfectly.

Contamination with the world cannot occur so long as the power of the Holy Spirit flows outwardly via our love. Only a loss of dedication and poured-out love can permit the reverse flow of the world back into us. And

ironically, to cut off our contact with the world to preserve our purity is to corrupt our own purity, for purity does not consist in what we preserve but in the outflow of the love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

We cannot withhold either our possessions (which is the easiest to give, in principle at least) or ourselves (including our mental development) if we are to earn our place of leadership and privilege.

There have been a number of crucial moments of insight in my life. Almost all of them have come as a climax to a period of painful, even torturing questioning. Perhaps I felt as a snake must feel as he gets too big for his skin and must discard his familiar and comfortable protection to expose his tender under-skin to the rough earth as he struggles out of the old.

One of those times came when the church seemed to be failing me. The pastor's sermons were boring, the music was mediocre (even awful), the people weren't blessed as they once had been, the prayer meetings were dull, the attendance at all the services was dropping. The church had in the past been a haven of peace to my often troubled spirit, a place of excitement and joy when I was depressed, food when I was hungry, encouragement when I was sad. The people restored my self-confidence after a week of being buffeted by my associates, and the church wiped away my petulant tears when the world had been unjust. Now the church was making demands upon me. It was withdrawing its sympathy. The people were ignoring my long face and shutting their ears from my tale of woe. They ceased praying for me with enthusiasm when I made my frequent, dramatic trips to the mourners' bench. They gathered instead around newer converts. Some even had the impudence to ask me to pray with others instead of for myself.

"I don't like this church," I said. "It is backsliding. I can't keep a good experience here. The people do not

create a red-hot atmosphere of shouting blessing anymore. I'm going somewhere else."

In my tears and sorrow and disillusionment there came a voice from somewhere, I knew not where, which said to me so clearly, so shockingly, "You are no longer a child. You are too big to be picked up and carried anymore. The time has come for you to pick up and give aid and love to the many new spiritual babes who need your care." This was a crisis in spiritual maturation.

That was lesson number one. Some years later came lesson number two—or was it 200 or 2,000? I've needed so many lessons!

My proud aunt, not a Christian as I identified a Christian, visited us in our small, poor, bedraggled church and parsonage. I was ashamed of it. I said to her, "I am anxious to get into a bigger, better place, where my talents and intellectual achievements can be nurtured in a more congenial atmosphere." She answered, "But wouldn't it be better to bring this excellence to this small place? They need it." I am not often speechless but I had nothing to say that day and nothing but long, long thoughts for days to come.

Let us conclude with a few pointed suggestions as to what we believe to be the spirit of the Christian revolutionary—the true Wesleyan.

INVOLVEMENT VERSUS ISOLATIONISM

If there is a contemporary word which expresses the heart of Wesleyanism or, more specifically, holiness, it is *involvement*. How we draw back from involvement! Involvement is holiness expressing itself in love. And there isn't any other kind of holiness. The call is to involvement. We cannot be detached from life. We will not bring Christ to bear on the lives of men by standing on a cloud to preach and witness *down* to men. If we

would be privileged to bear the proud name, "Christian Revolutionary," we have a price to pay.

A friend of mine expressed my own convictions when he wrote: "A Christian revolutionist must be a committed, maturing, growing child of God. He must have the particularities of his allegiance sorted out." He must have a life hid with Christ in God. He must have positive convictions, sound and true, grounded in the Word of God. He must have gone beyond spiritual infancy. He must bear about in his body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifest in his very body (II Cor. 4:10).

KNOWING THE PROBLEMS OF SOCIETY

The Christian revolutionist must know the world today. Again I let my friend, Lee Nash, speak:

A Christian revolutionist of the sort needed will be intimately familiar with the world in which he lives. He will follow the news of the day and know something about domestic and international problems. He will learn to sense the direction of cultural and intellectual trends. He will make it his business to understand the moral concerns, the motivations, the values, of non-Christians. He will learn all he can about the behavior of groups and individuals. He will become a student of Christian psychology and try to sound the depths of the human heart. He will force himself to take an analytical look at sin in the heart and in society—at its ugly effects as well as its "respectable" attractions. He will be close enough to sinners to see them as persons, to be reminded of his own tendencies and temptations, to empathize with them and to love them.

We find at once our greatest justification for this world-involvement, and our Pattern for it in Jesus' high-priestly prayer, where He said: "As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). A Christian can do few things as helpful as to study the example Jesus set in all his relationships with the world, and then to try to follow that

example. There is much in the Gospels concerning His attitudes and actions toward sinners, the government, social customs, recreation, and the practical, workaday world. For far too long we have preached an anemic, delicate gospel that needs to be sheltered to be preserved. The holiness gospel is strong. It can withstand any abuse, any opposition. It is the *power of God* unto salvation. Let us come away from the monastery—out into the thick of the battle, where men for whom Christ died are battling to find what we can offer.

CHRISTIAN UNDERTAKERS

The revolutionist must know and respect his organization. The effective Christian reformer must not only be truly Christian and be one who understands the world; he must, in the third place, have a close and sympathetic acquaintancē with the organization he wishes to reform, and also with its leaders. Lee Nash has put it this way: "If he wishes only to properly operate the guillotine, he is not a reformer at all. He is merely a rebel. Christian revolutionists are not called to be executioners or undertakers." Christian revolution is a healing ministry. It is infinitely more difficult to bind up wounds than to cut off heads.

We cannot improve on the Master Revolutionist—our hand frees the hand of Christ himself. He said: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). And again: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Matt. 18:15).

"That the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them" (John 17:23). Here is sound proof

of holiness. It is unmistakably clear that whether I am at fault or whether my Christian brother is at fault, whenever I know fellowship to be broken I am to take the initiative to go to him, humbly and brokenheartedly and in the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. Reconciliation is a two-way grid—humbling to the one who offers reconciliation, but ennobling too. "It is well for the budding Christian revolutionist," said a wise counsellor, "early to learn this formula for interpersonal relations . . . [that] the best weapon after love . . . is candid, open honesty, and personal exposure."

Were it not for Jesus' distinctive teaching, we could have been captured by a new legalism after having been delivered from the old bondage of law. We would have been tempted to justify ourselves by external conformities, and it is precisely to this error that Jesus addressed His interpretation of love. The uniqueness of His teaching is that it takes obedience out of the merely legalistic and moralistic realms and puts it into the realm of love—it is spiritualized. External standards are not obliterated, but love, driven inward, safeguards the vast areas of decision which cannot be covered by laws. The responsibility then rests upon the individual, as he must nurture and strengthen his love and his understanding of God's will and men's needs.

It is reasonable to compare Mark 12:28-31 (Jesus' epitome of the law) with the Sermon on the Mount (Jesus' commentary on the law). In neither case is the law abrogated, but spiritualized. It is impossible to perfectly obey the law with the "mind of Christ" and do it on the basis of mere external conformity. Obedience is not legalism, but the whole of life spiritualized. Obedience, according to Jesus, becomes the living expression of the spiritual life. Legalism is negative, a refraining from evil, and the measure of its sanctity is the power of restraint, renunciation, conformity. Jesus' spiritual interpretation includes also the positive—a new life lived out to the

fingertips and springing from the deepest resources of a life in Christ.

The existential interpretation of the doctrine of holiness then includes two main emphases: *first*, attention to the *verbal expression* of doctrine as biblically presented, by means of which a strict account may be kept of our stewardship; *second*, attention to an adequate *life expression* of that doctrine in terms of a personal moral transformation demonstrated in life situations. Sanctification is an act and a life. It is a crisis and a process. It is a doctrine but it is doctrine in shoe leather, as well as on the books. Its beauty is not mainly in words, for words apart from vital living condemn it. Its loveliness and power are in a life lived out by the grace of God.

Holiness can never be accepted, intellectually, merely as a philosophy of life. It turns gangrenous apart from the constant flow of living blood out of the deepest heart. Sanctification does not provide character in a nice, neat bundle at an altar, but it clears the ground for character building and remains as a vital relationship to God so long as the recipient continues to work the ground.

Holiness means something. It means everything. It means a beginning but it also means a continuing. Even more than that, it means a constantly augmented enlargement of love commensurate with the daily growth of human personality. It may begin in a small soul, but no soul can remain small and retain it. It may begin in promises, but it dies apart from the fulfillment of the promises that involve the stewardship of personality development.

To be confronted by the doctrine of holiness is the same as being confronted by Christ, for His whole work was to restore us to the love and will of God. To be confronted by Christ is to face personal judgment. In Him the law is personified. In Him all the demands of God

crowd themselves upon us for immediate personal decision.

The Bible does not leave us with a historical Christ, only. It confronts us with our living Lord, who cannot be heard by the intellect alone, nor be judged by the intellect alone. He is heard by the whole man and will be accepted or rejected by the whole man in radical, moral decision. To reject Him thus, however much one may retain an intellectual belief in Him, clouds the heart and darkens the light which illumines the pages of the Bible. To accept Him involves the whole man in a moral revolution which transforms the very spring of life itself and thrusts His beauty into every area of a man's nature and service. Sanctification, then, grows up with life, is co-extensive with life, is as dynamic as life, for it is the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus.