

## **"Take Thou Authority": Ministerial Leadership in the Wesleyan Heritage**

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On all sides, we are in a leadership crisis. In every area of human endeavor, the nature and quality of leadership is being scrutinized and the lack of true leadership is being decried. Elected and appointed leaders are criticized for a lack of vision and direction. The public strains for some glimpse of persons who might demonstrate competence, evince knowledge, and show a willingness to serve. Persons filling important positions today seem to pale in comparison with the fast-disappearing leaders of previous generations. Where are the Churchills, the Schweitzers, the Hammskjolds, the Roosevelts, the Martin Luther Kings, the Eisenhowers, the Ghandis of our day?

Within the church, in an age when shared governance, mutual ministry, lay rights, and making people feel good have taken center stage, the concept of strong leadership brings to some minds the image of oppressive, hierarchical structures with glass ceilings and procedures that implement repressive policies. The very word "authority" is tainted in some minds by the most pejorative meanings of its derivative "authoritarian." Leadership positions can be lonely positions-it is much easier to be just one of the guys or gals. Clergy are increasingly prone to abdicate leadership responsibilities in an ecclesiastical culture that emphasizes the role of the laity and highlights the concept of "general ministry,"

Granted, these are all oversimplified stereotypical generalizations that I have laid out. But those generalizations represent present-day perceptions that are part of the reality with which we have to deal. Wesley was usually able to relate to people where they were-if not on their level or from their perspective, at least aware of where they stood. Nonetheless, he was never hesitant to speak strongly, howbeit in love, against any position that he felt was wrong or inadequate. The current situation would present him with a real challenge, however. These days, no one wants to hurt anyone's feelings; everyone wants to be liked and accepted; many feel immediately victimized by any words of criticism. And the assumption is that the strong exercise of authority in positions of leadership is likely to jeopardize the comfort level in some lives, a situation that must be avoided at all costs. John and Charles Wesley would have had difficulty with such an approach to leadership.

## **Appropriating Our Wesleyan Heritage**

United Methodists rightly look to the Wesleys, especially John, as a principal source of their tradition. In some periods, as also at the present, the concern for being "faithful" to the heritage and to learn from it is especially strong. But like some "reforming" members nearly two centuries ago in the new Methodist Episcopal denomination in America, many United Methodists today also wonder how a church in a "democratic" country can, in good conscience, look to a founder who was seen as being naturally inclined to authoritarian, hierarchical structures and ideas.

Being faithful to the roots of Methodism is not an easy task, as the days of our origins recede farther into the past. Wesley's was a very different age from ours. The approach of the three-hundredth anniversary of Wesley's birth serves to highlight the growing expanse between his day and ours. And yet many of the problems that those early Methodists faced sound very familiar today. Our task is to sort through the issues and insights of the founders, the problems and programs of the incipient movement, and the personalities and policies of those early days, to see what might be appropriated as suitable guidelines and resources for understanding and developing leadership in the church in our day.<sup>1</sup> We must try to extrapolate the Wesleyan principles and practices that are not time-bound and see how they might speak to the present and serve the future.<sup>2</sup>

The problem in this case is compounded by the fact that the current situation in many ways did not arise by any consistently conscious attempt to create structures and methods that were, in fact, correlative to the heritage. Nor do we as a denomination seem to be interested in undoing the mistakes of our recent past (we simply build on them-like building a school on Love Canal land). The cry, "God is doing a new thing," can be a watchword for radical discontinuity and an excuse for doing whatever comes to mind or seems expedient at the time- not the sort of continuity that is at the heart of *traditio* as a process of faithful appropriation. At the same time, a vital heritage (tradition) is not simply transported from the past, but, being grounded in and growing out of the past, is alive and significant in and for the present and future.

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<sup>1</sup>Alternate wording: A vital heritage grows faithfully insofar as it is rooted in the vision and principles of its founders and precursors but creatively appropriated to meet the new situations/demands of a present that anticipates the future (rather than transporting the particulars of yesteryear into a present that tries to relive its past)

<sup>2</sup> See Jose Miguez Bonino's article, "Can Wesley Help Us to Discover How Best to Serve "Our Poor" Today?" In Richard P. Heitzenrater, ed., *The Poor and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), ch. 9, for a model of how this can be done. Bonino recognizes that "the poor" today are much different than in Wesley's day, but he concludes that a dialogue with Wesley on the issues involved would be helpful in four specific areas, which he outlines.

### **John Wesley on his own situation**

Ministerial leadership in the Wesleyan heritage is grounded in the concept of ministry that informed Wesley's own position as an ordained priest in the Church of England. John's rationale for his ministry is found in a letter to his brother Charles in June 1739:

I have both an ordinary call and an extraordinary. My ordinary call is my ordination by the bishop: "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God."

My extraordinary call is witnessed by the works God doeth by my ministry; which prove that He is with me of a truth in this exercise of my office.

Perhaps this might be better expressed in another way: God bears witness in an *extraordinary manner*, that my *thus exercising my ordinary call* is well-pleasing in his sight.<sup>3</sup>

These comments, of course, were made in the context of his being criticized for his activities as a Methodist preacher, especially his field preaching in various parishes, which was criticized by some among the Anglican hierarchy as trespassing parish boundaries. The significant points for our discussion, however, relate to his view of ministry as reflected in his comments. His call to ministry is related both to God and the Church; it entails both gifts and grace; and it is measured by fruits.

Wesley often speaks of being "called of God," such as in his sermon on the ministerial office, based on the text in Hebrews, "No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron" (5:4).<sup>4</sup> He begins by distinguishing between the inward call of God and the outward call of the Church. These are not equal calls in his eyes, of course. When he speaks of "He by whose authority we minister," he is not speaking of the Bishop who ordained

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<sup>3</sup> John Wesley, Letter to Charles Wesley June 23, 1739), in *Letters I*, ed. Frank Baker, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, 35 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976- ),254:660; hereinafter cited as *Works*.

<sup>4</sup>Sermon 121, Prophets and Priests, in Sermons IV, ed. Albert C. Outler, in *Works*, 4:75-84.

him. The Bishop may have said, "Take thou authority...", but the Bishop was not that source of that authority.<sup>5</sup> The Author of all was also the source of that authority.

John Wesley was ordained deacon in 1725 and priest in 1728, following a fairly normal pattern in the Church of England. And although he never considered any of his lay preachers in the Methodist movement to be clergy or priests, he never considered himself as anything other. And even his preachers, he claimed, should never be considered as even desiring separation: "they are still members of the Church-such they desire to live and to die."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, on many points, Wesley's rules for the Methodist preachers correlate very closely to Wesley's expectations for the clergy of the Church of England-surely not on matters of priestly character, but certainly on matters of what might be called more generally "ministerial character," which would be at the heart of leadership. Within his/own movement, after 1746, Wesley tested the call of all "who think they are moved by the Holy Ghost to preach" by asking a series of three questions every year-the traditional examination questions on gifts, grace, and fruits still asked today of preachers as they join an annual conference.<sup>7</sup> Wesley also used these same three categories, gifts, grace, and fruits, as the framework for his *Address to the Clergy*, which outlines his understanding of the nature and role of ordained ministry in the Church.<sup>8</sup>

### **Examination Questions (1746)**

Wesley leaves no doubt as to where one starts when dealing with the nature of leadership that he expects within Methodism. He starts with God.<sup>9</sup> The first set of questions deals with "grace" and starts by asking, "Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire and seek nothing but God? And are they holy in all manner of conversation?" The two emphases here are forgiveness and holiness, the double focus of the Wesleyan spiritual pilgrimage-justification and sanctification. The would-be leader

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<sup>5</sup> John's nonconformist grandfather, John Wesley, argued with the Bishop of Bristol over this issue in the 1660s when he was ejected from the pulpits of the Church for lack of ordination, Wesley claiming his authority directly from his being called of God.

<sup>6</sup> Sermon 121, §14, in *Works*, 4:80.

<sup>7</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences* (London: Mason, 1862), 1 :30-31; 564-65; see *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (London: 1872),8:324-25; hereinafter cited as *Works* (Jackson); see also *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (2000), , 305, for the modern version that approximates the original.

<sup>8</sup> *Works* (Jackson), 10:480-500.

<sup>9</sup> Although Lovett H. Weems, Jr., says that Wesley starts with the people (chapter 1 of *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit*), part 3 (on the Passions of Ministry) provides a good outline of Wesley's essential views on the centrality of God in the ministry of the church.

must be a "real" Christian, not just a "nominal" Christian, to use his own terms. He no doubt would have resonated well with Gilbert Tennent's publication during the American Great Awakening, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry* (1740). Leadership positions within Methodism were primarily positions of spiritual leadership. The first filter was not to determine management skills, or speaking ability, or organizational abilities. He was not looking for a potential CEO-he was looking for a real Christian,<sup>10</sup> one who had experienced the forgiving and sanctifying presence of God in their lives.

But that is not the end of the questions. The second inquiry moves to "gifts" - "have they gifts, as well as grace, for the work?" This particular set of questions has two foci-natural endowments and acquired talents. Under the first category, Wesley asks if the person has a "clear, sound understanding," and whether God has given them any degree of utterance. This comment reflects the source of these natural endowments, in case we happen to overlook it. These natural endowments come through the grace of God. In the second category, Wesley asks if the person has acquired a sound understanding and judgment in "things of God," especially "a just conception of salvation" (soteriology) and the ability to communicate that understanding 'justly, readily, [and] clearly."

The third set of questions provides a practical measure of the first two-have they "success" (later called "fruit") in their ministry? Success is not measured by membership numbers, by budget figures, or by prestige. Very simply, the question is whether the person has convinced or affected anyone, such that they have received the forgiveness of God and a "clear and lasting sense of the love of God." That is to say, is the person an instrument of God's convincing, justifying, and sanctifying grace.

To summarize the intent of the three questions, Wesley is asking whether the persons being examined are in each instance (1) spiritual, (2) talented, and (3) effective. None of these three qualities is self-generated, however. Each one is a product of God's grace working (1) in, (2) with, and (3) through the persons. If, then, persons give evidence of having experienced God's grace in all three ways-(1) saved by grace, (2) equipped for the task by grace, and (3) an

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<sup>10</sup> Although he does not use this term in his examination questions or his Address to the Clergy, he does use this term at least three dozen other places in his works.

effective instrument of that grace – then they are evidently moved to their calling as a Methodist preacher by the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

These three areas, often called "grace, gifts, fruits," are the means by which the Methodist preachers demonstrated their call. And these same three concerns furnish the framework for Wesley's view of the nature and role of the clergy.

### **Address to the Clergy (1756)**

One of the main sources for Wesley's ideas on the nature of the ordained ministry is his treatise entitled, *An Address to the Clergy*. The tract is organized under two main questions to his fellow clergy: What manner of person ought we be, in **gifts** as well as **grace**? What manner of person are we? The first section outlines his principles; the second contains his critique.<sup>12</sup>

### **Gifts**

Wesley begins his portrait of the ideal minister with a discussion of the requisite gifts "from nature" in three categories. These natural endowments focus first on mental faculties: a good understanding, clear apprehension, sound judgment, and a capacity for reasoning. These qualities are necessary in order to understand the people under their care as well as to cope with the enemies of religion. There are folk, however, with whom no one can reason. Therefore, Wesley's second necessity goes beyond the first: some liveliness and readiness of thought. As he points out, this quality is necessary "to answer a fool according to his folly." Reasoning has no effect on them: "They can be silenced only in their own way." by what we might call a quick wit (a "lively turn of thought"). The third requisite is a good memory. Acquisition of important knowledge, through reading or conversation, depends upon memory, which helps one not only to assimilate "knowledge of the truth," but also to retain and retrieve such learning, as a "teacher fitted for his work."

These natural endowments lay the groundwork for his lengthy discussion of the necessary "acquired" endowments that the clergy should develop, which he discusses under nine

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<sup>11</sup> Although the "evidence" may be *quantifiable*, we must remember that grace itself is *relational* (see last section, below).

<sup>12</sup> I have summarized and quoted extensively from the *Address* over the next ten pages, since it is often not readily available.

headings. The first seven of these acquired gifts entail the acquisition of knowledge in at least seven crucial areas.

First, Wesley asks if there is any hope that a person could discharge the ministerial office without a clear knowledge of it: "of the high trust in which he stands, the important work to which he is called." A person must know what the work of God is, in order to discharge the office faithfully.

The second necessary acquisition is a knowledge of the whole of Scripture. This knowledge is the foundation for instructing and "stopping the mouth of the gainsayers," as Wesley calls those who speak against Christianity. He goes so far as to say that no one can be a good divine who is not a good "textuary" -one who is well-informed in the Bible and biblical scholarship. He suggests that one should know the meaning of every word, verse, and chapter, in order to build the spiritual meaning. Wesley's expectations of biblical knowledge are high:

Should he not likewise be able to deduce the proper corollaries, speculative and practical, from each text; to solve the difficulties which arise, and answer the objections which are or may be raised against it; and to make a suitable application of all to the consciences of his hearers?

But he presses the matter of biblical scholarship even further in his third point. **In** order to use the Scriptures effectually, the clergy should know them in the original tongues. This knowledge is important, not only in order to understand the practical texts, but also to "rescue" the controverted texts from "learned men" who would pervert them. For without the knowledge of biblical languages, their "mouths would be stopped" by any appeal to the original tongues.

Thus far, Wesley has presented no surprises. But he proceeds to make some suggestions that do not fit the typical image of ministerial preparation. The fourth "acquired endowment" that he lists is a knowledge of "profane history," ancient customs, chronology, and geography. Although these might not be absolutely necessary to an understanding of Scripture, he sees them as highly expedient and seldom available in commentaries.

The list of expected talents continues to broaden as Wesley next suggests that some knowledge of science is "to say the least" just as expedient as the previous category. In fact, he views knowledge of logic as being nearly as important as (and in order to) a knowledge of Scripture. Logic, for him, is not a mathematical sort of exercise, as some view it. Rather, he says, it is "the art of good sense...of apprehending things clearly, judging truly, and reasoning

conclusively." It is, in fact, through the process of convincing and persuading, "the art of learning and teaching." In addition to logic, Wesley also stresses the importance of learning metaphysics, natural philosophy, and geometry. The reason for acquiring this knowledge is not only to understand Scripture better, but also to understand "many useful writers," to understand God as revealed in creation, and "to give clearness of apprehension, and an habit of thinking closely and connectedly." The well-furnished mind must also be the sharp mind.

Sixth, Wesley says that a knowledge of the early Fathers is as important as languages and science. The touchstone is again Scripture, as he calls them "the most authentic commentators on Scripture, as being both nearest the fountain, and eminently endued with that Spirit by whom all Scripture was given." His recommendation is primarily ante-Nicene, but would include several later writers, such as Chrysostom, Basil, Jerome, Augustine, and "above all, the man of a broken heart, Ephraim Syrus."

Wesley's seventh category of knowledge is "highly necessary" for a clergyman is "knowledge of the world." He describes this area more fully as "a knowledge of men, of their maxims, tempers, and manners, such as they occur in real life." Also calling it the "discernment of spirits" that is indispensable to every "guide of souls," he is pointing to what we would call psychology and its related fields, the groundwork of the modern practice of pastoral care. This knowledge of human nature allows for both a capacity to deal with all sorts of people and an ability to defend oneself against those who, "almost in every place, lie in wait to deceive."

Having spanned the areas of necessary or expedient knowledge, Wesley concludes the list of important acquired gifts with two categories. The first is prudence, or common sense – the consideration of circumstances and options, and "a facility of adapting our behaviour to the various combinations of them." The second and last is what he calls, "some degree of good breeding." What he is talking about is easiness and propriety of behavior, the exemplar of which he would see in a curious combination: "all the courtesy of a gentleman, joined with the correctness of a scholar." As part of this acquired endowment, Wesley would include "a strong, clear, musical voice, and a good delivery, both with regard to pronunciation and action." These, he says, are all much more acquirable than has been assumed. The model of this good breeding, for Wesley, is St. Paul, standing before Felix, the account of which, he says, makes one think that Paul was "one of the best bred men, one of the finest gentlemen in the world."



With regard to this list, Wesley makes two observations or qualifications—one within the list and one at the end. In talking about the acquisition of knowledge, Wesley acknowledges that at times the Fathers of the Church had accepted persons into positions of ministerial leadership who had not mastered the various branches of human knowledge that he outlined because, although they may have had the capacity for such, they had not the opportunity to attain this knowledge. But he also recognizes that his target audience has had the opportunity for education and has many times not used it. Such a person, with a University education but without knowledge in these areas, is "inexcusable before God and man."

Wesley's second observation is that, although the attainment of this knowledge takes a considerable amount of labor, persons are "assisted in all their labour by Him who teacheth man knowledge." The acquired endowments, then, just as the natural endowments, are the result of God's grace—"the powerful, though secret, influences of his Spirit, to open and enlarge our understanding, to strengthen all our faculties, to bring to our remembrance whatsoever things are needful, and to fix and sharpen our attention to them." Both the natural and acquired talents of the "complete" clergy are to some degree gifts of God that raise them "above all who depend wholly on themselves." God is the source and author of their leadership in the various areas of natural and acquired gifts.

### **Grace**

Although Wesley spends twice as many words talking about natural and acquired gifts as he does "gifts of grace," he leaves no doubt as to which are the most important:

But all these things, however great they may be in themselves, are little in comparison of those that follow. For what are all other gifts, whether natural or acquired, when compared to the grace of God? And how ought this to animate and govern the whole intention, affection, and practice of a Minister of Christ!

Wesley discusses the place of God's grace in the ministerial vocation within three categories: intentions, affections, and practices.

As to the intentions of the minister, Wesley is very clear as to the "single intention" that one should have in undertaking this office: "to glorify God, and to save souls from death." This dictum to the clergy echoes one of his rules for the Methodist preachers—"You have nothing to do but save souls; spend and be spent in this work."<sup>13</sup> In case there is still any doubt as to his

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<sup>13</sup> *Minutes*, 1:494-97.

priorities, he reiterates to the clergy, "Is not this absolutely and indispensably necessary, before taking this high office more important to the person, or even mixed in, the person's whole soul "will be full of darkness" and 'the curse of God" will abide with him. Wesley's primary focus for preacher and clergy alike was to encourage and assist people who desired "to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins."

As to the affections of the minister, Wesley reiterates another persistent theme: the persons should be "endued with an eminent measure" of love of God and neighbor. Wesley sounds very much the pietist in stressing the higher level of expectations for the minister. Although all Christians are expected to love God and neighbor, the clergy should exhibit love "the same in kind, but in degree far beyond that of ordinary Christians" in order to "answer the high character he bears, and the relation where he stands." Wesley exhibits his strong feelings in this matter by the strength of his rhetoric:

He therefore must be utterly void of understanding, must be a madman of the highest order, who, on any consideration whatever, undertakes this office, while he is a stranger to this affection- Nay, I have often wondered that any man in his senses does not rather dig or thresh for a livelihood, than continue therein, unless he feels at least. . . such an earnest concern for the glory of God and such a thirst after the salvation of souls, that he is ready to do anything, to lose anything, or to suffer anything, rather than one should perish for whom Christ died.

Just in case the reader does not catch the implications of this principle of love of God and neighbor, the basis of his whole doctrine of sanctification, Wesley goes on to show how this right affection is totally inconsistent with a love of the world, a love of money or praise, any degree of "ambition" or sensuality, and a love of diversions, pleasure, and ease.

As to the practices of the minister, Wesley extends his previous principle into the practical realm. Again what we have is a pietist view of the clergy, of whom is expected a higher moral and spiritual level than the ordinary Christian.

What is a Minister of Christ, a shepherd of souls, unless he is all devoted to God? unless he abstain, with the utmost care and diligence, from every evil word and work; from all appearance of evil; yea, from the most innocent things, whereby any might be offended or made weak? Is he not called, above others, to be an example to the flock, in his private, as well as public character? An example of all holy and heavenly tempers, filling the heart so as to shine through the life?

The list of adjectives describing the desirable traits is daunting: thankful, beneficent, humble, serious, mild, gentle, patient, abstinent.

In his concluding paragraph of this section, Wesley speaks strongly to the concept of "success" or "fruits" in ministry (the third of his examination questions) without explicitly using that terminology. After describing the intentions and affections requisite of a "true minister of Christ," he points out that such a messenger of God will, in his name, speak "the word whereby is raised a new spiritual creation."

"Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." He is continually employed in what the angels of God have not the honour to do-co-operating with the Redeemer of men in "bringing many children to glory."

His hope for the Anglican clergy is the same as for the Methodist preachers. Having been transformed by God's grace and trained with the assistance of God's grace, now as instruments of God's grace, they can help to spread scriptural holiness across the land.

### **Are we such?**

The second half of Wesley's *Address* contains the critique that the reader is lead to expect. The answer to his question, "Are we such," of course is "No." But Wesley does not hesitate to pound that answer into the ground giving illustration upon illustration to support point after point. Wesley sees himself simply as speaking "so plain and home" as the nature of the question requires, realizing that it may give some pain to his colleagues.

Some of his illustrations are worth repeating, as being especially relevant to the present. On the matter of natural endowments, for instance, he points out,

Alas, what terrible effects do we continually see of that common though senseless imagination,

"The boy, if he is fit for nothing else, will do well enough for a Parson!" Hence it is, that we see I would to God there were no such instance in all Great Britain, or Ireland!) dull, heavy, blockish Ministers; men of no life, no spirit, no readiness of thought; who are consequently the jest of every pert fool, ever lively, airy coxcomb they meet.

The tirade goes on in the same vein for the better part of a page, rehearsing how such a person lack the very qualifications he has outlined in the first part of the treatise. He is speaking for the

sake of parents, that they may open their eyes and see, a blockhead can never "do well enough for a Parson."

He may do well enough for a tradesman; so well as to gain fifty or an hundred thousand pounds. He may do well enough for a soldier; nay (if you pay well for it), for a very well-dressed and well-mounted officer. He may do well enough for a sailor, and may shine on the quarter-deck of a man-of-war. He may do so well, in the capacity of a lawyer or physician, as to ride in his gilt chariot. But O! think not of his being a Minister, unless you would bring a blot upon your family, a scandal upon our Church, and a reproach on the gospel, which he may murder, but cannot teach.

The area of acquired endowments provides Wesley with a host of examples that fall far short of his principles. The questions he again runs through provide a framework for self-examination, then and now. A sampling is enough to make any minister feel inadequate. As to Scripture,

Have I a full and clear view of the analogy of faith, which is the clue to guide me through the whole? Am I acquainted with the several parts of Scripture; with all parts of the Old Testament and the New? Upon the mention of any text, do I know the context, and the parallel places?

As to the biblical languages,

Do I understand Greek and Hebrew? . . . Do I understand the language of the Old Testament? . . . Can I read into English one of David's Psalms; or even the first chapter of Genesis? Do I understand the language of the New Testament? Am I a critical master of it? Have I enough of it even to read into English the first chapter of St. Luke? If not, how many years did I spend at school? How many at the University? And what was I doing all those years?

As to understanding the ministerial office,

Have I deeply considered before God the character which I bear? What is it to be an Ambassador of Christ, an Envoy from the King of heaven? And do I know and feel what is implied in "watching over the souls" of men "as he that must give account?"

As to understanding the sciences and logic,

Can I even reduce an indirect mood to a direct; an hypothetic to a categorical syllogism? Rather, have not my stupid indolence and laziness made me very ready to believe, what the little wits and pretty gentlemen affirm, "that logic is good for nothing?" It is good for this at least (wherever it is understood), to make people talk less; by showing them both what is, and what is not, to the point; and how extremely hard it is to prove anything.

As to understanding natural philosophy and mathematics,

Do I understand natural philosophy? If I have not gone deep therein, have I digested the general grounds of it? Have I mastered. . . Sir Isaac Newton's Principia, with his "Theory of Light and Colours?" In order thereto, have I laid in some stock of mathematical knowledge? Am I master of the mathematical ABC of Euclid's Elements? If I have not gone thus far, if I am such a novice still, what have I been about ever since I came from school?

As to knowledge of the early Fathers,

Am I acquainted with. . . those venerable men who lived in the earliest ages of the Church? Have I read over and over the golden remains of Clemens Romanus, of Ignatius and Polycarp; and have I given one reading, at least, to the works of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Cyprian?

As to knowledge of the world,

Has God given me by nature, or have I acquired, any measure of the discernment of spirits; or of its near ally, prudence, enabling me on all occasions to consider all circumstances, and to suit and vary my behaviour according to the various combinations of them? Do I labour never to be rude or ill-mannered; not to be remarkably wanting in good-breeding?

This is only a sampling of the questions that Wesley raises, fully knowing that most clergy, incompetent by his standards, would have to answer negatively to nearly all of them. But that is still of much less consequence to Wesley than the last section of the treatise, where he asks whether they meet the expectations outlined under "grace," as to intentions, affections, and practices, "a consideration in view of which all external and all intellectual endowments vanish into nothing."

The obvious foil to the matter of pure intentions (to glorify God and save souls) is the I desire for worldly gain. Wesley waxes long on this subject, but summarizes his view in one sentence: "I do not therefore blame, no, not in any degree, a Minister's taking a yearly salary; but I blame his seeking, it. The thing blamable is the having it in his view, as the motive, or any part of the motive, for entering into this sacred office." The typical argument that a minister's salary in a small parish will not maintain a large family provides him the opportunity to raise another principle, repeating his points from the sermon, "The Use of Money."

Will not the living you have now afford you and yours the plain necessities, yea, and conveniences, of life? Will it not maintain you in the frugal, Christian simplicity which becomes a Minister of Christ? It will not maintain you in pomp and grandeur, in elegant luxury, in fashionable sensuality. So much the better. If your eyes were open, whatever your income was, you would flee from these as from hell-fire.

He anticipates another argument with the comment,

A larger income does not necessarily imply a capacity of doing more spiritual good. And this is the highest kind of good. It is good to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked: But it is a far nobler good to "save souls from death," to "pluck" poor "brands out of the burning." And it is that to which you are peculiarly called, and to which you have solemnly promised to "bend all your studies and endeavours."

Wesley seldom discourages anyone from helping the poor, but in this passage, the question of social outreach is definitely placed below the priority of saving souls from death.

Wesley drives this point home time and time again, stressing that the matter of intentions is basic: "It is impossible therefore to lay too great stress upon a single eye, a pure intention; without which, all our sacrifice, our prayers, sermons, and sacraments, are an abomination to the Lord." He is driven to close with a very familiar sounding story and a firm denunciation-about the minister who moves from a parish worth 50 pounds to one paying 100.

Why does he go thither? "To get more money." A tolerable reason for driving a herd of bullocks to one market rather than the other. . . . But what a reason for leaving the immortal souls over whom the Holy Ghost had made you overseer! And yet this is the motive which not only influences in secret, but is acknowledged openly and without a blush! Nay, it is excused, justified, defended; and that not by a few, here and there, who are apparently void both of piety and shame; but by numbers of seemingly religious men, from one end of England to the other!

Wesley's questions on the affections and the practices follow in the same vein. In the following comments, he transforms a traditional view of the priestly office (stated in the first sentence) into a very evangelical view of the pastoral office, based on his foundational principle of love:

" I stand between God and man, by the authority of the great Mediator, in the nearest and most endearing relation both to my Creator and to my fellow-creatures. Have I accordingly given my heart to God, and to my brethren for his sake? Do I love God with all my soul and strength? and my neighbour, every man, as myself? Does this love swallow me up, possess me whole, constitute my supreme happiness? Does it animate all my passions and tempers, and regulate all my powers and faculties? Is it the spring which gives rise to all my thoughts, and governs all my words and actions? If it does, not unto me, but unto God be the praise! If it does not, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

He presses the matter to the fullest extent: would I do or suffer anything, contrary to my wishes or natural inclination, in order to save one soul from hell? The implicit question is, Would I suffer death for my neighbor, as Christ suffered death for me? Is love of God and neighbor the ruling temper of my soul?

Of course, that cannot be the case if love of the world interferes, examples of which he lists again, just in case you missed it the first or second time around: The love of God is not in me, if I love money, if I love pleasure, so called, or diversion. Neither is it in me, if I am a lover of honour or praise, or of dress, or of good eating and drinking. Nay, even indolence, or the love of ease, is inconsistent with the love of God.

Wesley's reaction to the issue of affections is summarized quite simply in one last observation: "What a creature then is a covetous, an ambitious, a luxurious, an indolent, a diversion-loving Clergyman! Is it any wonder that infidelity should increase, where any of these are to be found?" It sounds like he had several particular examples in mind.

On the practices, Wesley rings the changes again on the matters that form the heart of the General Rules for all Methodists, but of course, are expected in a higher degree of the preachers:

Am I intent upon this one thing, - to do in every point "not my own will, but the will of Him that sent me?" Do I carefully and resolutely abstain from every evil word and work? "from all appearance of evil?" from all indifferent things, which might lay a stumbling-block in the way of the weak? Am I zealous of good works? As I have time, do I do good to all men? and that in every kind, and in as high a degree as I am capable?

As to the pastoral character, Wesley's framework is his doctrine of Christian perfection, here spelled out with some of the familiar phrases:

Am I "a pattern" to my "flock, in word, in behaviour, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity?" . . . Do I walk as Christ also walked? Does the love of God and man not only fill my heart, but shine through my whole conversation? Is the spirit, the temper which appears in all my words and actions, such as allows me to say with humble boldness, Herein "be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ?"

The leader was also the follower, a principle that became very much engrained in Methodist polity .

In his *Address*, Wesley laid down a high road and a hard task for anyone considering ministerial leadership as a vocation. He was aware of that. Other similar references in his Works confirm his intention to see the response to God's call in the church as a high calling. An example of this view can also be seen in his *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*. To those who think that being an effective minister means preaching one or two good sermons a week and do "parish duty," he says sarcastically:

Is any trade in the nation so easy as this? Is not any man sufficient for it, without any more talents, either of nature or grace, than a small degree of common understanding? But O! what manner of shepherds are those who look no farther into the nature of their office, who sink no deeper into the importance of it, than this! . . . What gross ignorance is this! What a total mistake of the truth! What a miserable blunder touching the whole nature of his office!

When the paperwork is done and the sermons preached, the real task is yet ahead:

To "seek and save that which is lost;" to bring souls from Satan to God; to instruct the ignorant; to reclaim the wicked; to convince the gainsayer; to direct their feet into the way of peace, and then keep them therein; to follow them step by step, lest they turn out of the way, and advise them in their doubts and temptations; to lift up them that fall; to refresh them that are faint; and to comfort the weak-hearted; to administer various helps, as the variety of occasions require, according to their several necessities: These are parts of our office; all this we have undertaken at the peril of our own soul.



But who is sufficient for these tasks?

Who can do this, unless his whole heart be in the work; unless he desire nothing but to “spend and be spent for them; and count not his life dear unto himself, so he may present them blameless in the day of the Lord Jesus?”

Here again, he has focused primarily upon the intentions, affections, and practices of the person who exercises ministerial leadership

### **Rules for the Methodist Preachers**<sup>14</sup>

Wesley's *Address* was aimed at the clergy of the Church of England but was built around principles that he developed for the Methodist preachers, exhibited (as we saw earlier) in his questions for examination. One might assume, therefore, that his other rules for the preachers would also be applicable to a consideration of latter-day Methodist ministerial leadership. For instance, his comment to the clergy, just cited above, "spend and be spent" in the work, repeats his rule for the preachers, "You have nothing to do but save souls; spend and be spent in this work."<sup>15</sup> That rule, however, is followed by another, a sort of triage principle, which is especially applicable within a Methodist polity built around the appointment system: "Go always not only to those who need you, but to those who need you the most."<sup>16</sup> In Wesley's day, that did not mean going to where the people were, in large population centers. Although they certainly needed help, they were already getting some, through the churches and cathedrals, served by priests who had been successful in attaining fine, well-paying benefices. Those who needed help the most were generally in rural areas, poor-paying parishes, under the supposed “care” of absentee clergy and ill-trained curates.

The normal human reaction might be to avoid such places. Wesley realized that and developed a system that focused on the mission of Methodism rather than the comfort of the preachers. In this matter, he was perhaps closer to the "general" of a religious order than to the order of an Anglican bishop, who had little or no appointive powers. Rule twelve for his preachers speaks

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<sup>14</sup> *Minutes*, 1:494-97, see *Works* (Jackson), 8:309-10.

<sup>15</sup> *Minutes*, 1:494-97.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:494-97.

directly to the point of covenant obedience: "Act in all things not according to your own will but as a son in the Gospel;...it is needful that you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for His glory."<sup>17</sup> In the Methodist movement, the best leaders were the best followers – obedient to God, submissive to Christ, responsive to the Holy Spirit, and compliant to Wesley.

The specifics of the obedience are spelled out in a number of rules and "smaller advices" that deal primarily with the practice of ministry. The twelve rules can be seen in categories of diligence and focus (be punctual, diligent, serious, focused), fairness and honesty (be discreet, trusting, fair, honest) integrity (be humble, content), and cooperation and obedience (be collegial, obedient). The twenty-one "advices" are even more particular, but fall generally into three similar categories: diligence, propriety, and obedience.<sup>18</sup>

### **Ministerial Discipline and the Means of Grace**

Wesley does not take these "smaller" matters lightly, however. They relate directly to his understanding of the centrality of God's grace in very specific ways. In the "Large" Minutes, he spells out his understanding of the means of grace, using two categories: instituted means of grace and prudential means of grace.<sup>19</sup> Under prudential means he includes four categories: common Christians, Methodists, preachers, and assistants (superintendents).

The prudential means of grace to be exercised by preachers are evidenced in question form:

Do you meet every Society weekly? Also the leaders? and bands, if any?

Do you visit the sick! and the well? Instructing masters and parents? and in all relative duties?

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<sup>17</sup> *Minutes*, 1:496-97.

<sup>18</sup> *Minutes*, 1:527, 529, 558-61, see *Works* (Jackson), 8:317-18.

<sup>19</sup> *Minutes*, 1:548-57; see *Works* (Jackson) 8:322-24.

The list for the lead preachers, Assistants, is more detailed:

Have you thoroughly considered your office? And do you make a conscience of executing every part of it? [the list from 1763-72 includes several specifics on this point-Do you fill up and regulate the bands wherever you come? Diligently inquire into the state of the books, and do all you can to propagate them? Keep watch-nights once a month? and love feasts? With one twice a year, for all the Society? Do you visit every Society once a quarter and regulate all things therein? Do you take a regular catalogue of your Societies at least once a year? Do you write me an account of all the defects of the common Preachers, which you cannot yourself cure?]

To this point, it seems a very managerial, if not maintenance, approach to the office, especially if these actions are to be seen as specific means of grace. He does point out that these means might return no fruit. But then the list turns suddenly personal, listing some means that cannot be used without fruit: watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, exercise of the presence of God.

The list gets very specific:

Do you deny yourself every useless pleasure of sense? imagination? honour? Are you temperate in all things? Instance in food. Do you use only that kind and that degree which is best both for your body and soul? Do you see the necessity of this? . . . Do you eat no more at each meal than is necessary? Do you use only that kind and that degree of drink which is best both for your body and soul? Do you drink water? Why not? Did you ever? Why did you leave it off? If not for health, when will you begin again? Today? How often to you drink wine or ale? Every day? Do you need it?

To see the drinking *of* water as a prudential means *of* God's grace provides a clear perspective into the holistic nature *of* Wesley's understanding *of* salvation, much less ministerial leadership.

The point for Wesley, *of* course, is that these means *of* grace, as with the instituted means, bring us into the presence and power of God. They provide just another way that the minister can be constantly aware that "God's eye [is] continually fixed upon you." And the result will be positive in terms of spiritual growth-"Never can you use these means but a blessing will ensue; and the more you use them, the more will you grow in grace."

### **Ministerial Leadership in the Twentv-first Century**

Our task now is to translate these principles and practices into the present context, recognizing as we said above that United Methodism is not necessarily or entirely in logical or

theological continuity with Wesley. That is to say, many *of* the Wesleyan concepts may critique the present than fit into it. Wesley states his principles with disarming clarity. The problem is not in trying to understand what he says—the question is to ask what might be appropriate to apply to our own day. I might go one step further, however, and suggest that we might also ask why we understand some principles or practices to be not appropriate in our day. These are the . questions we face in any attempt to discern what our heritage might say to the present. My comments below will try to speak especially to the stated concerns *of* the Task Force.

**Recruitment.** One place to start might be with the matter *of* recruiting leaders for the church. Recruitment in this instance takes on a slightly different form than recruitment for business or education or social service, as Wesley points out. We are recruiting while God is calling. The recruitment must also take into consideration the call. That does not mean, however, that every call to ministry is necessarily to United Methodist ministry. As Wesley pointed out, the call of God, in these instances, must also be confirmed by the "ordinary" call of the church. As United Methodists, we still ask candidates for ministry the three "historic" Wesleyan questions on grace, gifts, and fruits. Whether we take those seriously is perhaps another matter.

Wesley's concern for gifts, grace, and fruits sets the standard high in all categories for Methodism. The list of requisite natural and acquired endowments narrows the field dramatically. The concern for having spiritual leaders who have experienced the justifying and sanctifying grace of God restricts the pool even further. And the expectation of success in the work furnishes yet another screen for the candidates. While estimating the potential of candidates may be an appropriate alternative to measuring actual condition or results in some categories (especially when considering fruits or acquired gifts or perhaps even practices), there seems to be little leeway in the matters of natural endowments, spiritual condition, intentions, and affections.

This matter of high expectations, of course, has serious consequences especially for Boards of Ordained Ministry and perhaps also seminary admissions committees. Although it may be a delicate subject, the screening of second-career candidates, as well as first-career, would benefit from Wesley's reminder that ministry is not a place for those "fit for nothing else," or those looking for a "comfortable income," or those with an eye toward "honor or praise." Wesley has raised the bar of expectations and we would be hard pressed to explain why those standards are not appropriate today.

**Training.** The United Methodist Church has tried very hard to follow Wesley's high expectations for training of ministerial leaders. The requirements for full membership and ordination expect not only a bachelor's degree, usually in liberal arts, but also a master's degree, which follows the Anglican tradition of Wesley's day. Whether or not those degrees measure up to the particulars of the Wesleyan scheme is another question, of course. He himself pointed out that many clergy "have an University education, and yet no learning at all." Many candidates for seminary programs today have little or no training in philosophy, psychology, classical literature, natural sciences, logic, geometry, or other areas that Wesley would require and that would normally fall within the purview of an undergraduate degree. And many masters graduates leave seminary without any knowledge of biblical languages or patristics (Wesleyan priorities), much less metaphysics or hermeneutics. These facts press us into a consideration not only of the importance of seminary curricula for ministerial training, but also of the significance of continuing education.

Wesley viewed training for ministry as a life long process. Many of his publications were designed for his preachers to read while on the job. His fifty-volume *Christian Library* was designed with that prospect in mind, a precursor for the Chautauqua system of distance learning. While most of his preachers were not educated, in the sense of having an Oxford or Cambridge degree, he was convinced that they should be learned.

"Learned" included, of course, knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. He more than once called himself "homo unius libri" (a person of one book). The scriptural world serves as the basic source of his vocabulary, imagery, and even illustration: it represents the matrix for his careful interweaving of material from other sources. Of course, one only has to look at the footnotes in the new four-volume edition of the *Sermons* to be reminded of the wide cast of his net beyond the Scriptures, or the fruits of his "plundering the Egyptians."

What is not often noted in all this is his later criticism of preachers who had taken his earlier dictum on "the one book" to its literal conclusion. This incident is worth revisiting, since it shows Wesley contradicting one of his own well-known and oft-repeated maxims in order to make this point. In the 1768 *Minutes*, he asks "But why are we not more knowing?" In the answer, he comes down hard on idleness, and as a cure promotes reading:

Read the most useful books, and that regularly and constantly. . . at least five hours in twenty- four. "But I read only the Bible" [you say; he goes on sarcastically:] Then you ought to teach others to read only the

Bible, and by parity of reason, to hear only the Bible. But if so, you need preach no more. Just so said George Bell. And what is the fruit? Why, now he neither reads the Bible nor anything else. This is rank enthusiasm. If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul. . . . "But I have no books." I will give each of you, as fast as you will read them, books to the value of five pounds. . . . "But I have no taste for reading" [you say]. Contract a taste for it by use, or return to your trade.<sup>20</sup>

This rather clear qualification of the "homo unius libri" principle thus became fixed in the by-laws of the Methodists, as well as in Wesley's practice, and sets a high standard for continuing education of minister leaders.

**Deployment for mission.** Part of effective leadership means being in the right place at the right time. For Methodists in the Wesleyan heritage, that does not necessarily mean where you want to be, or even where you are needed. According to Wesley, it means being where you are needed the most in order to implement the mission of the movement.

The Wesleyan connectional system was designed by Wesley with himself as the "center of union." It was his vision and understanding of Methodism's mission "to spread scriptural holiness" that determined the shape and dynamic of the movement. As one who traveled the whole connection and who had approved all the preachers, he was convinced that his overall perspective thus provided the basis for deciding who should go where and for what time. The annual conference was the occasion for many of those yearly changes of appointment.

That meeting also provided the occasion for reiterating matters of doctrine and discipline that were crucial to the mission of Methodism. Wesley did not invite everyone to annual conference. But he hardly ever omitted anyone who needed correction or improvement. And the matter of obedience to the connection, as represented by Wesley, was crucial to their discipline. *The vade mecum* or handbook of the Methodist preacher, the "Large" *Minutes*, was given to each of the new preachers, first when they came "on trial" as probationers, and again when they were set apart. The former were given a copy of the Minutes inscribed thus: "You think it your duty to call sinners to repentance. Make full proof hereof, and we shall be glad to receive you as a fellow-labourer. Observe: You are not to ramble up and down, but to go where the Assistant directs, and there only."<sup>21</sup> For the full member, their copy of the Minutes contained a note inside the front cover signed by John Wesley: "So long as you freely consent to,

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<sup>20</sup> *Minutes*, 1:68-69; see also 516-519 ("Large" *Minutes*).

<sup>21</sup> *Minutes*, 1:568-69.

and earnestly endeavour to walk by these rules, we shall rejoice to acknowledge you as a fellow-labourer ."<sup>22</sup> Obedience was not a desirable trait; it was a required stance.

Accountability. The accountability of the preachers to the Wesleys, and today to the conference, is a long tradition. Wesley's expectations of commitment were clear: "Above all, if you labour with us in our Lord's vineyard, it is needful that you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for his glory." In return, the preacher could expect training, support, and guidance.

The annual *Minutes* represent the record of accountability and support that was centered in the Conference: lists of those who had been examined, accepted, set apart; records of membership figures, special collections, standing funds for building, pensions, education, the poor; policies regarding traveling expenses, stipends for widows, allowances for children. In addition these programs, the *Minutes* also contained the doctrinal and disciplinary guidelines that the preachers were expected to follow. Although these guidelines were discussed at the annual Conference, they were usually formulated in both their preliminary and final form by John Wesley himself.

**Formation and discipline.** The Conference, as we have implied., also played a role in the formation of pastors. The covenant fellowship of preachers provided a nurturing community within which questions could be raised, issues clarified, problems pursued, persons examined, and directions given. We have probably done very well in implementing programs of preparation for probationary members and in developing various instruments to determine what the particular needs of candidates might be. We might benefit from remembering that the new preachers who were being accepted into the connection were not the only ones being examined at conference in Wesley's day—all the preachers were examined every year as to their grace, gifts, and fruit. This procedure represents in some ways a tighter discipline than any continuing education requirement or even than most re-certification programs that some professions require. The remnant of the yearly examination is still found in the clergy ("executive") session when the question is asked of the District Superintendent whether the pastors in his district are blameless in character (~605.6). But that is not quite the same thing as each pastor being measured annually against all the particulars of the "historic questions" (§§ 305, 327).

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<sup>22</sup> *Minutes*, 1:570-71.

The Wesleys, John and Charles, were constantly mentoring and examining the preachers. At times, the difference in their priorities and standards became obvious. Charles claimed that he was concerned about the Church first, then Methodism; John, he claimed, was more interested in Methodism, then the Church. With regard to examining preachers, Charles was more interested in gifts; John in grace. Charles's general opposition to the use of lay preachers, largely because of their lack of gifts (natural or acquired), led John to appoint him to lead the examination of preachers, beginning in the 1750s. Both brothers expected the preacher to have a well-furnished mind that was capable of understanding the meaning of the apostolic witness and have the ability to communicate the great truths of Scripture to the people. John urged Charles to move cautiously, however, so as not to diminish the supply of preachers too drastically: "'We must have a supply," he told Charles, "And of the two, I prefer grace before gifts."

To this instruction, Charles replied, "Are not **both** indispensably necessary? Has not the cause suffered, in Ireland especially, through the insufficiency of the preachers? Should we not first regulate, reform, and bring into discipline the preachers we have, before we look for more?" Charles was speaking from hard experience, having heard Michael Fenwick (described by John as being "upon occasion a tolerable Preacher") speak to a Society.

Went to the Room that I might hear with my own ears one of whom many strange things had been told me. I attended diligently in a little room adjoining. But such a preacher have I never hear, and hope I never shall again? It was beyond all description? I can't say he preached false doctrine, or true, or any doctrine at all, but pure unmixed nonsense. Not one sentence did he utter that could do the least good to anyone soul. Now and then a text of Scripture or a verse-quotation was dragged in by the head and shoulders. I could scarce refrain from stopping him He set my blood a-galloping, and threw me into such a sweat that I expected the fever to follow... .. Of this I am infallibly sure, that if ever he had a gift for preaching, he has not totally lost it.

Charles did not hesitate to expel preachers for such incompetence. And he was proud of his reputation as a task-master in this regard. In 1751, he described the immanent fate of one preacher as a warning to others: "[My brother,] without God's counsel, made a preacher of a tailor; I, with God's help, shall make a tailor of him again." He felt that the preacher was utterly unworthy to preach the gospel, and said without hesitation, "I have accordingly stopped him and shall tomorrow send him back to his proper business."



**Making Disciples.** The primary task of the preacher, of course, was to make disciples. In this task, Wesley did not start with the people; he started with God-- "I begin with the love of God, the fountain of all that holiness without which we cannot see the Lord." Scriptural holiness was the goal of that task; preaching was the means. As to the best method of preaching, Wesley offers a four-fold approach: "(1) To invite. (2) To convince. (3) To offer Christ. (4) To build up; and to do this in some measure in every sermon."<sup>23</sup> In effect, his preaching method builds upon and supports the very structure of his soteriology: (1) prevenient grace that draws, (2) convincing grace that convicts, (3) justifying grace that forgives, and (4) sanctifying grace that nurtures.

Wesley was apparently more interested in serious discipleship than in large numbers of members. Many are the times that Societies were purged of large numbers of members as a result of the quarterly examinations in the classes. In a population of nine or ten million, Methodism during Wesley's lifetime never came close to having a membership equivalent to one per cent of that population. Especially in the earlier years, Wesley often preached to as many as twenty or thirty thousand people during a week, or even just on a weekend. And yet, the Methodist societies in Great Britain only grew at an average rate of about 1,500 per year (about 30 per week).

The clear picture we get from this is that the effects of mass evangelism in Wesley's ministry were certainly tempered by the expectations of strict discipline (discipleship). Not everyone was called to be a disciple; fewer were called to be preachers; and even fewer to be clergy. Methodism in Wesley's day seldom had as many as a half dozen clergy associated with the movement. It was much easier to remain within the boundaries of a comfortable parish.

### **Ministerial Leadership and a Theology of Grace**

In summary, Wesley's view of ministry is consistent with his theology, which is basically a theology of grace. Nearly every aspect of our discussion has touched on the necessity of God's grace in the call to ministry, the gifts for ministry, the fruits of ministry, the character of the minister, and the mission of the connection. The ministerial leader in the Wesleyan heritage is essentially a spiritual leader **in whom** the grace of God has been active in forgiveness and

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<sup>23</sup> *Minutes*, 1:558-59, 525, 527.

holiness, a talented person **with whom** the grace of God has been shaping gifts, and an effective person **through whom** the grace of God has been active in transforming the world.

To call this view "Wesleyan," however, is to do an injustice to Wesley. He was not so much interested in perpetuating a Wesleyan scheme as in implementing Christianity. He did not try to develop clones of himself, but rather, imitators of Christ. In "The Character of a Methodist, when answering the question, what are the marks of a Methodist, he answered as though the question was, who is a real, genuine Christian- "these are the marks of a true Methodist, i.e., a true Christian." The marks which distinguish them from others are quite simply stated: "A Methodist is one who has 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him' . . . [and] accordingly loves his neighbour as himself." When Wesley anticipates the critic pointing out that these are only the basic principles of Christianity, he answers, "Thou has said; so I mean." For Wesley, the difference between nominal Christianity and real Christianity (including Methodism), however, is that the real Christian "~ what I preach," and therefore is a "Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life." In other words, Methodists, for Wesley, are a small band of disciplined Christian who really love God and neighbor. And the Methodist preachers are those who are not only leading others into this life of love and service, but are the very exemplars of it.

Most of the descriptions I have outlined above are taken directly from Wesley's prescriptions. And as he himself admits, they present a very high standard. He asks the question, "Who is able to describe such a messenger of God!" The task would be impossible were it not for the grace of God, which Wesley keeps introducing into the picture. For Wesley, grace is relational, active, and powerful: plain and simply, it is God's active presence and power in human existence (Emmanuel). We describe that presence and power using terms that relate to the context or effect of that divine presence and power: prevenient (coming before), justifying (bringing forgiveness), sanctifying (bringing holiness). We also speak of God's grace as convicting, liberating, assuring, empowering, sustaining, blessing. By viewing many of the functions of ministry as prudential means of grace, Wesley opens up a new window into the ways that God's active power and presence can be manifest through effective ministerial leadership.

But Wesley's essentially synergistic framework does not allow anyone to shirk the responsibility of working with that grace. The section of his *Address* on acquired endowments

makes that very clear-the acquisition of these gifts may be assisted by God's gracious presence, but it takes considerable labor on our part. The synergism that is at times explicit in his theology is really the story of God's presence enlightening a person to the need for God's presence and drawing the person into that presence and power, which then liberates the person from sin and empowers further loving responses to God's presence. Every human response of "faith working through love," exhibiting works of mercy and piety (which themselves are a means of grace), is made possible by God's empowering presence.

Beyond his concerns for ministry, Wesley's writings are full of references to "the presence and power of God." His journal frequently records that "the power of God was present with us," and his conclusions often state, "God was with us of a truth." He is speaking of the reality of God's grace, the active presence and power of God manifest in human lives. Toward the end of his own ministry, this somewhat complex theological idea resolved into a simple rhetorical phrase. Wesley recognized this powerful divine presence as a central reality in his own life and ministry when on his deathbed he said, "The best of all is, God is with us."