

APPENDIX A

Introduction to John Wesley

A stranger visiting a community in England asked an old Cornishman to explain the spiritual life of the villagers. He replied, –A man named Wesley passed this way. The substantial impact of the life of John Wesley is influencing people all around the world to this very day.

Stanley Ayling, a Wesleyan biographer who wrote biographies of King George III and William Pitt, declares John Wesley as –the single most influential Protestant leader of the English-speaking world since the Reformation.

JOHN WESLEY, famous clergyman and founder of the Methodist movement, was born in Epworth, England on June 17, 1703. He died in London on March 2, 1791. His father, Samuel Wesley (1690-1739), was a scholarly clergyman of Epworth and a distant relative of Arthur Wesley, Duke of Wellington. Samuel Wesley's example and training encouraged his son's unwavering orthodoxy, love for the Church of England, stern self-discipline, unflinching courage and above all, his thirst for learning.

John Wesley's mother, Susannah, was born on January 20, 1669 and died on July 23, 1742. She was the daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley, a Nonconformist minister. She was the 25th of 25 children. She and Samuel Wesley were married on November 21, 1688 when Samuel was 26 and she was 19. They had 19 children. Nine of the children died as infants. Four of the children who died were twins. Susannah was a saint, scholar, beautiful woman and efficient homemaker. She educated the children herself. All of the children learned Latin and Greek and were well educated in classical studies. Susannah is known as the Mother of Methodism. Her two sons, John and Charles were deeply influenced by their mother, applying the example and teaching of her life in their ministry.

One cold night on February 9, 1709, the old parsonage at Epworth in Lincolnshire, England went up in flames. The Reverend Samuel Wesley and his wife, Susannah, brought their family out into the garden, only to discover that their fifteenth and youngest child, John (called Jacky) was still in the house. Hurrying inside to attempt to rescue his son, Samuel found his way blocked at the foot of the stairs by a wall of fire and dense smoke. He knelt down in the blazing hall and commended the soul of his child to God. But, then help came. A rescuer, standing on the shoulders of another, reached up to the upper floor window and pulled the little boy to safety. John Wesley was barely rescued from the flames. In later years he described himself as "a brand plucked out of the burning."

Wesley entered Charterhouse School in 1714 and in 1724 graduated from Oxford University. Wesley's reading of Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Holy Dying took him into regular periods of self-examination. He began to summarize the events of his daily life in a diary to document his spiritual journey. His extensive diary entries are an invaluable resource in documenting his personal Christian

experience as well as his ministry. In 1726 he was made a fellow at Lincoln College, Oxford and was ordained on September 22, 1728.

On October 14, 1735, John and his brother Charles, sailed to Georgia. The Atlantic crossing introduced Mr. Wesley to some emigrant Moravians, who clearly possessed the spiritual peace for which he had been seeking. The time spent with the Moravians was to have a deep impact on John Wesley. He joined the colonists in Georgia as a preacher and missionary, landing in America on February 6, 1736. Wesley's declared his chief motive in going to America was "to save his own soul." His brother Charles served as secretary to Governor Oglethorpe. John spent two abortive years with the colonists and in missionary work to the Indians. In December 1737, he returned to England after dealing with a frustrating law suit against him initiated because he refused communion to a woman whom he determined unworthy.

In London he met Moravian, Peter Bohler, who convinced Wesley that what he needed was a personal faith. At Wesley's request, Bohler produced witnesses who personally testified they had been saved by faith alone. Wesley's mind was convinced, and his heart quickly followed. On May 24, 1738, in a meeting largely attended by Moravians, but meeting under the auspices of the Church of England on Aldersgate Street in London, Wesley's intellectual conviction was transformed into personal experience while Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans was being read. Here are Wesley's own words as recorded in his Journal:

"About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

The Aldersgate experience had a profound impact on Wesley. In subsequent entries in his journal it is interesting to note some of his spiritual struggles. The night after his conversion he wrote that he was "much buffeted with temptations." On May 31, he wrote that he "grieved the Spirit of God and was troubled and in heaviness." Months later on October 14, he wrote, "I have not that joy in the Holy Ghost; no settled, lasting joy. Nor have I such a peace as excludes the possibility of fear or doubt." In these personal struggles is the evidence of his strict logic colliding with his experience. Because of Peter Bohler's influence, Wesley became interested in studying the doctrines and disciplines of the Moravians. The Moravians were a group of Protestants originating in Bohemia from the reforms of John Huss and John Wycliffe. Bohemia was a historic country of central Europe that lost its political identity in 1949 when it became a part of today's Czech Republic. In the late seventeenth century, revival among the Moravians came in the form of a renewed emphasis on pietism. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf became the leader through whom the "hidden seed" was restored. Zinzendorf founded Herrnhut, a Moravian settlement established for Protestant refugees in Germany. Herrnhut was a unique type of religious

community in which civic and church life were integrated. Christian nurture came through fellowship groups, daily worship, boarding schools, and concentration on foreign missions and evangelism. The first foreign missionaries left Herrnhut to work among the slaves in the West Indies in 1732. Within twenty years, missionaries were sent to Greenland, South Africa, Algiers and to the North American Indians. The community supported itself by various industries.

John Wesley had been impressed with the theology of the Moravians while on his journey by ship to America, as well as Peter Bohler's influence and the "Aldersgate Experience." In 1738 Mr. Wesley visited Herrnhut, Germany. While there he was deeply influenced both in his theology and the discipleship plan in practice. Count Zinzendorf and the Moravian community placed a high emphasis on personal piety, evangelism and world missions. Not only was Wesley influenced by Moravian piety and theology, but also their organizational plan designed to foster spiritual formation.

Upon his return to England, John Wesley began preaching salvation by faith wherever a pulpit was offered to him. Soon, church after church refused to let him preach. Although Wesley was ordained in the Church of England, he was frequently forbidden to preach in many of the established churches. The encouragement of his friend, evangelist George Whitefield, spurred him into his "open-air" preaching style. On Sunday, April 1, 1739, Wesley preached for Whitefield at Bristol in the open air to a crowd of 3,000 people. This launched a new approach to Wesley's preaching ministry that helped him reach the common people with the gospel. Preaching in fields and in the open air was a radical approach for a priest of the Church of England.

Here is Wesley's journal entry (Saturday, March 31, 1739) the day before his first experience at preaching in the fields:

"In the evening I reached Bristol and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church."

Wesley's friendship with Evangelist George Whitefield is a good example of Wesley's distinction between opinions and essential doctrines. Wesley and Whitefield disagreed strongly on the doctrine of election and predestination. Neither was able to convince the other to change his position. Yet, they respected one another and worked together for the cause of Christ. Wesley preached Whitefield's funeral sermon. Charles Wesley wrote a hymn, "Servant of God, Well Done," that was included in the sermon.

John Wesley was the founder of a distinct faith movement, but never formally separated from the Church of England. Even though he was forbidden to preach in many of the established churches, he saw the Methodist movement as the church within the church. On several occasions he reports preaching in a cemetery as he stood on his father's grave at Epworth. Thousands of earnest listeners who attended his

meetings were drawn by Wesley's music. Wesley always gave an earnest and able exposition of Bible truth, saying he was "a man of one book."

Important to the success of John Wesley's ministry was that of his brother, Charles Wesley, who early joined him in the work that led to the founding of the Methodist movement. Charles Wesley was born on December 18, 1707, the third surviving son and eighteenth child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. He was called the "sweet singer of Methodism." He, along with his brother, John, believed if the Methodists sang their theology it would transform their lives. He composed over 6,000 hymns in his lifetime. Many of his hymns are still sung today. When he lay dying in March, 1788, he dictated these lines to his beloved wife, Sally:

In age and feebleness extreme,
Who shall a helpless worm redeem?
Jesus, my only hope Thou art,
Strength of my failing flesh and heart,
O, could I catch a smile from Thee
And drop into eternity

The Wesley brothers had a passion to communicate the Gospel. Altogether in John Wesley's long life, he preached between 40,000 to 50,000 sermons and traveled 250,000 miles in the British Isles, almost exclusively on horseback. Wesley's journal records the fact that he often preached in open-air meetings to crowds of 10,000 to 20,000 people. It was not uncommon for him to preach up to 800 sermons per year. He made good use of his travel time on horseback, often reading or writing as he rode.

John Wesley published four books of sermons, dated 1746, 1748, 1750 and 1760. The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, as well as his Notes Upon the New Testament, contained Wesley's basic theology. Persons appointed by the conference were permitted to preach only on condition that "the said persons preach no other doctrine than is contained" in the New Testament Notes and his standard sermons. There are 53 sermons designated as his "standard sermons." Mr. Wesley's rule for preachers was this: "***You have nothing to do but to save souls, therefore, spend and be spent in this work.***"

In Wesley's Standard Sermons and Notes on the New Testament the primary doctrines are:

1. The atonement of our Lord
2. Assurance of pardon by the witness of the Spirit
3. Justification by faith
4. Entire sanctification/Christian perfection
5. The impossibility of a sincere seeker after the Truth being lost
6. Free grace as contrasted with "elected" grace

Wesley was a theological pragmatist. His theology always linked doctrine to conduct. Doctrine was to be realized in human experience and validated by that experience. It is important to realize that

the development of Wesleyan theology did not end in 1791 when John Wesley died. It is equally important to appreciate the great contribution of this practical theologian to Christianity.

The name "Methodism" was tagged on the Wesley brothers as a result of their strict and methodical "holy habits." The term Methodist was meant to be a derisive term given also to those who belonged to the Holy Club on the campus of Oxford University.

Few laborers in the Christian cause have exceeded Wesley's energy as an incessant worker. It was not uncommon for him to travel on horseback thirty to sixty miles a day, deliver two or three sermons and write and read while making his journey. His success in stirring the conscience of England to the demands of a holy God may be attributed to his unrivaled personal magnetism, powerful oratory, methodical plans and perseverance in carrying forward his work.

Wesley preached the possibility of a universal redemption by faith alone and also insisted that an added privilege of being a believer was a divine assurance that one was saved. He emphasized the witness of the Spirit within, affirming one to be a child of God. Wesley also urged the necessity of Christian living with good works as proof of faith. He constantly called his followers to what he variously called holiness, sanctification, Christian perfection and perfect love. He maintained Methodism was raised up "to spread scriptural holiness over the land." Holiness for Wesley implied not only a spiritual experience but also disciplined conduct.

The term "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" was coined by Albert C. Outler to emphasize that Wesley relied more on "standards of doctrine" rather than on theological systems or the exacting Confessions of Faith. This "quadrilateral" consisted of four primary sources of authority for Wesley. He drew on Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Experience. He saw Scripture as the "norming norm" to be the ultimate and highest authority. His emphasis on Christian experience was guarded from pure subjectivism because of his high regard for the Word of God as well as his emphasis on the witness of the Spirit, with the work of the Holy Spirit validating the Word of God in personal experience.

For Wesley, holiness was not a private, individualistic experience isolated from involvement in the world. He preached, "There is no holiness but social holiness." His 400 publications include many medical, scientific and educational books, tracts and hymns, as well as biblical and theological writings. His *Primitive Physic*, his medical self-help book, is archaic for today, but is fascinating reading.

John Wesley wrote many works on religious themes. He and his brother Charles published a number of original hymns and translated several songs from the German. Wesley preached to the "blue collar worker" of his day. He established schools. He developed an effective organizational structure for disciple making that became an amazing dynamic. His method of organizing Christians into societies, classes and bands predates the modern emphasis on small groups.

In 1751 he married Mary Vazeille, a widow with four children. The union did not prove a happy one and separation followed twenty years later in 1771. Wesley underwent persecution from his wife. She bitterly resented his pastoral oversight of hundreds of young women. Her scolding effectively removed any danger that "domesticity might impede his itinerancy." Someone has suggested any preacher would also have been a "circuit-riding preacher" if he had a wife like Mary Vazeille.

On Mr. Wesley's eighty-fifth birthday he made this entry in his Journal: "I this day enter on my eighty-fifth year. And what cause have I to praise God, as for a thousand spiritual blessings, so for bodily blessings also! How little have I suffered yet, by the truth of numerous years! It is true, I am not so agile as I was in times past: I do not run or walk so fast as I did. My sight is a little decayed. My left eye is grown dim and hardly serves me to read. I have daily some pain in the ball of my right eye, as also in my right temple and in my right shoulder and arm, which I impute partly to a sprain, and partly to the rheumatism.

... To what can I impute this, that I am as I am? First doubtless, to the power of God, fitting me for the work to which I am called, as long as he pleases to continue me therein: and next, subordinately to this, to the prayers of his children--May we not impute it as inferior means.

... Even now, though I find pain daily in my eye, temple, or arm, yet is never violent, and seldom lasts many minutes at a time. Whether or not this is sent to give me warning, that I am shortly to quit this tabernacle, I do not know: but be it one way or the other, I have only to say,

*My remnant of days
I spend to His praise,
Who died the whole world to redeem:
Be they many or few,
My days are his due,
And they all are devoted to Him!"*

On Wednesday, February 23, 1791, Wesley preached his last sermon from the text, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near." On Wednesday, March 2, 1791, at age 88, John Wesley died in London. His closing words included, "The best of all is, God is with us." The last word he was heard to articulate was "Farewell." He spent sixty-five years in the ministry, a life of exceptional zeal, diligence and usefulness in His Master's vineyard.

When John Wesley died there were in the British Isles 300 traveling preachers, 72,000 members, and about 500,000 adherents, and about two-thirds that many overseas, especially in the United States where the church was growing rapidly under the leadership of godly men like Bishop Francis Asbury.

For all the energy and the power of his voice, John Wesley was five feet, three inches tall and weighed 128 pounds. The success of his ministry was not among the rich and famous, but among simple commoners. They were the ones who often persecuted Wesley and his followers.

The rigors of Wesley's personal life indicate he practiced what he preached. His was a well-ordered personal life. Few laborers in the Christian cause have exceeded Wesley's energy in intensity, as well as longevity, as a faithful exponent of biblical Christianity.

His success in stirring the conscience of England to the demands of a holy God and His call to holy living, may be attributed to his unrivaled personal magnetism, powerful oratory, methodical plans, perseverance and absolute devotion to Jesus Christ. He was God's instrument to spread a powerful swath of holy, purifying fire to cleanse the moral decay of England.

--Prepared by Dr. Darold L. Hill. Edited by Rev. Eric 'Tupper' Ware