CHAPTER 3

The *Imitatio Christi* and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley's Ministry with the Poor

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Introduction

About ten years ago, John Walsh asked me a question that has been pricking my mind ever since: Why was Wesley so interested in helping the poor? What was Wesley's motivation for working with the poor?

Of course, the description of Wesley's activities in this regard is rather commonplace. Any list of such activities would certainly include teaching, feeding, and clothing the poor children; furnishing gainful employment to the jobless; giving loans to struggling entrepreneurs; visiting the sick and the prisoners; providing food, clothing, money, shelter, books, medicine, and other essentials to the needy.[1] Yet, let me repeat what is obvious and has been mentioned many times: These were not the normal daily activities expected of an eighteenth-century Oxford don, especially one such as Wesley, who was raised in a relatively posh Church of England rectory by parents with a scholarly bent (even though in the hinterlands), schooled in one of the finest public schools in the country, educated at purportedly the best of the Oxford colleges, and fellow of another college at the University. Nevertheless, such was the case, though it is much easier to describe than to explain Wesley's penchant for helping the poor. We might note in passing that the description itself has often been given through modern eyes that try to present

Wesley's actions in such a manner as to support a given current perspective or program of activity.

We tend to ignore or skip over those aspects of Wesley's thought or action that seem to portray him in ways that are now thought of as outdated, insensitive, shortsighted, or perhaps just plain wrong (or, in any case, embarrassing to us). I'm not quite sure which should be more embarrassing to a present-day historian—to see Wesley twisted into a prototype of a modern perspective that he does not really fit, or to see him portrayed in ways that display his faults and quirks with all their eighteenth-century shortcomings, blemishes, flaws, and imperfections. In any case, to press the question of "Why?" is to go beyond descriptive terms and to ask for an analysis of the motivation that lies behind such an extensive program of activity. With this question in mind, I looked at several recent descriptive portraits of Wesley and the poor, keeping in mind the question, Why?

Wesley and the Poor in Recent Scholarship

Manfred Marquardt, in his *John Wesley's Social Ethics*,[2] represents an expression of the more or less traditional view of Wesley and the poor. Wesley's charitable activities are seen to be part of an ethic of love, based on the Great Commandment—to love God and love neighbor. Such charitable activities are an obedient response to the divine command, the fulfillment of an ethical obligation (p. 33). For Marquardt, again representing well the long tradition of Wesleyan historiography, there is a dynamic shift in the theological underpinning of Wesley's view around 1738. Prior to that (especially while at Oxford), Wesley helped the poor as part of an attempt to do good works in order to earn his salvation, and this effort was part of his self-affirmation before God. The author follows Vulliamy in claiming that Wesley's formal High Church attempt to earn salvation through works-righteousness at Oxford therefore disqualify that period from even being considered as authentically "Methodist," since it was supposedly so entirely foreign to Methodism's real (later) spirit (pp. 26, 145 n. 33). Marquardt (in good continental Reformation perspective) sees Wesley's good works after 1738 flowing forth as a response of faith to God's justifying love (pp. 98–101).

In the midst of his study, Marquardt does provide a basic outline of Wesley's theology, but the radical emphasis on *sola fide* fails to recognize Wesley's mature position (seen in the 1767 sermon, "The

Scripture Way of Salvation") that good works (even before justification) were "in some sense" necessary for salvation.[3] It is interesting also to note that this typical "watershed" interpretation of Wesley's life, bifurcating it into two main sections, before and after Aldersgate, seems to overlook the fact that Wesley's attitude and activities relative to the poor remain remarkably consistent, both before and after 1738. In fact, seeing Wesley's later employment of a charitable program of activities (even in a faithful response to God's love), as done simply in obedience to a command (dominical or otherwise) results in a dynamic that is very close to the sort of legalism or works-righteousness that was worrisome to the Calvinists and Lutherans (and especially to the Moravians) in Wesley's day.

In a more recent work entitled *Good News to the Poor,*[4] Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., comes at Wesley's program from a somewhat different perspective but with some similar assumptions. Jennings sees Wesley's "holiness project" as starting at Oxford with the dedication of all of his resources to the poor on the basis of the clear commands and instructions of the Gospels (especially Matthew 25:40—"just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"). This implied command represents the sort of obligation that the Christian ought to fulfill (p. 140). Again, the theological context for action is seen by Jennings to be altered in the late 1730s and early 1740s (not strictly speaking in May 1738), so that good works were then to be understood as flowing from grace and no longer entailed an outward correspondence to an external law, but rather a correspondence to the same "law" now internalized. Nevertheless, the dynamic remains much the same: the necessity of following the divine instructions (p. 141).

In a certain sense, therefore, Jennings sees more explicit continuity in the motivation for Wesley's activities with the poor. He goes on to describe Wesley's program of charitable activity primarily in terms of "spreading scriptural holiness," entailing the transformation of individuals and of the economic and political order, "the establishment of pentecostal commun(al)ism, and the abolition of war" (pp. 141–53). In all of this discussion, the theological basis of Wesley's ethic is only outlined in very general terms, and Jennings' comments that purport to present Wesley's views and intentions are often not quite recognizable and often not documented in Wesley's own writings.

Jennings does, however, go beyond the typical "obligation" point

of view in noting that Wesley encouraged his preachers to visit the sick, the poor, the prisoners, not simply in obedient fulfillment of a command or obligation, but also in order (by visiting in person) to gain an increase in lowliness (humility), patience, tenderness of spirit, and sympathy—i.e., an increase in virtue. This approach assumes the possibility of acquiring the virtues by the exercise of them. Thus, visiting the poor sick is not only a sign of virtue, but also a means of acquiring virtue (pp. 54, 57–58). Jennings, in passing, notes (though does not emphasize) an important point: that Wesley saw Jesus as both the model and as the empowerment for this activity: "Go and see the poor in their hovels [as Wesley told Miss March in June 1775], . . . Jesus went before you and will go with you."[5]

What is not evident in Jennings' claim of Wesley's "preferential option for the poor" is the fact that the poor of which Wesley spoke were not "them" but "us." The "poor of the Society," to use Wesley's common phrase,[6] were not outsiders who were the occasional object of his external social outreach—they were, by and large, the people who made up a relatively large proportion of his societies and for whom he and the Methodists had specific pastoral responsibility. The point is a major one that Jennings by and large misses—the issue has not so much to do with the nature of the church's mission to the larger society; rather, the issue has to do with the nature of the church itself.

Henry Abelove's recent biography of Wesley, entitled *The Evangelist of Desire*,[7] tries to deal with many of the same questions and themes as Marquardt and Jennings, especially Wesley's relationship to the poor (or "the plebeians," in Abelove's terminology), but his work differs starkly in many of its assumptions and conclusions. We cannot hope for much help from Abelove in matters of Wesley's theology—he excuses himself from the discussion by claiming that Wesley "taught the Methodists no particular theology" (p. 74). The short chapter on "Spirituality" does not provide any hint as to the connection between the basic Wesleyan soteriology and the ethics of one's daily actions. But the latter are seen rather consistently in terms of instructions, injunctions, demands, prohibitions, and rules, all of which represent the obligation perspective in its starkest form.[8]

The "ethic of love," however, takes on an odd new twist in this study. Abelove claims that, on the one hand, Wesley "played the gentleman and exacted deference" from his people (consisting largely of the poor), and on the other hand he "won and monopo-

lized love." This love secured the deference, together providing a "seductive and monopolistic" approach that was uniquely successful in managing the plebeians (again, read "poor") that comprised the movement (pp. xii, 6–7, 24). Abelove is at least aware (*contra* Jennings) that Wesley's "preferential option" was first for his own people (those of the household of faith, to use one of Wesley's favorite scriptural phrases), who for the most part were poor (pp. 27–28). This fact can be demonstrated specifically by Wesley's own comments about such activities as his medical clinic.[9] Only within such a context can one understand how Wesley could propose a community of goods—a common store of goods has a chance of working within a group that falls within a relatively narrow band on the economic spectrum. Any wider disparity and gaps in economic level would have allowed serious discussion only of charity and philanthropy, not communalism.

In Abelove's view, however, Wesley was so successful in his contriving to win the love of his flock, that he had to worry (a tad, at least) about whether he was competing too successfully with God as the object of the peoples' affection (p. 37). And part of Wesley's charitable scheme, according to Abelove, was the unique combination of offering salvation to the poor in addition to offering them monetary and physical assistance (p. 31; I have never before seen Wesley's soteriology categorized under "charity"). Wesley's "success" as defined by Abelove is just as implausible as Wesley's "failure" as defined by Jennings.

One thing that can be said for Abelove, however, is that he does delve into a fascinating selection of contemporary diaries and letters from the eighteenth century in trying to answer an important question—What did the Methodist people themselves think and do in the light of Wesley's teachings and actions? (pp. 58, 107–9). The point is that we should not assume that there is a necessary correlation between Wesley's ideas and actions and those of his people. As we know, the people did not always (in some cases, not often) do what Wesley suggested or think as Wesley thought. For instance, apparently only one in a hundred, at best, followed his third rule on the use of money (give all you can). It is the type of question that is difficult to trace fully or document extensively, but should always be kept in mind when we talk about Wesley and eighteenth-century Methodism.

John Walsh's brilliant discussion of "John Wesley and the Com-

munity of Goods"[10] is especially intriguing because of his references to a variety of places where Wesley talks about the Christian life in terms of precedents and models. Walsh notes that Wesley suggested, quite early on, that Christians of his day might live, as well as believe, as did the Primitive Christians (pp. 29–30). Following the lead of Clement of Alexandria, Wesley depicts the ideal Christian in his outline of "The Character of a Methodist" (1742), again providing a model for all to follow, that model being defined in terms of a person who has the distinguishing marks of the genuine Christian, one who "loves God" and "loves his neighbor." Walsh also points out that Wesley is convinced that the spirit of preaching that urged virtues upon the early Christians should elicit a similar response in his own day (p. 30–31).

In a particularly important observation, Walsh provides a clue to the answer for the question, Why did Wesley work with the poor? He points out that Wesley says charity is not a series of episodic acts but a way of life (p. 35). For Wesley, then, the Christian life is not defined primarily by *doing* certain activities but by *being* a certain kind of person. In terms of ethical theory, virtue ethics, for Wesley, is more basic than obligation ethics, though they necessarily interrelate and correlate. Virtue takes precedence over obedience; "being" has priority over "doing."

Virtue and Obligation Ethics

Professor Frederick S. Carney claims that three approaches constitute the entire range of normative elements available to anyone's ethic: obligation, virtue, and value.[11] A brief summary his description of these three approaches follows:

(1) *Obligation Theory* answers the question, What ought to be done? What actions are appropriate?
  - Decisions are framed within the options of right or wrong actions, norms, or policies.
  - This approach uses principles, rules, commands, and standards to guide the decisions.
  - Failure, in this mode, is seen in terms of the guilt of violation, transgression, or omission.
  - Such failure can be overcome by accepting forgiveness for wrong actions.

(2) *Virtue Theory* answers the question, What kind of person should I be? What sort of character is most appropriate?
- Decisions are framed in terms of good or bad qualities, dispositions, motives, and actions.
- This approach uses models, portrayals of the ideal, of what is just or good.
- Failure, in this mode, is seen in terms of shame of weakness.
- Such failure can be overcome by the experience of transformation (rebirth or new life).

(3) *Value Theory* answers the question, What objects or states of affairs are important (or more important than others)?
- Decisions are framed within a range of good or bad objects or states of affairs.
- This approach uses sets, scales, or grades of good and evil.
- Failure, in this mode, is seen in terms of remorse for accepting false or over-valued ideals, idols.
- Such failure can be overcome by a reorientation of the operative value system.

For our purposes in examining Wesley's activities, the nature of and interrelationship between the first two approaches, virtue and obligation, are especially important. Another significant element in this ethical analysis, as pointed out by Carney, is the role of truth. To make a long story short, truth is joined with love to form the basic principle of Wesley's theological ethic. Benevolence (love of neighbor) is no virtue at all unless it springs from the love of God.[12] And at the same time, Wesley is constantly admonishing his hearers to "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15). As Wesley goes on to say,

> This then is real, genuine, solid virtue. Not truth alone, nor simply conformity to truth. That is a *property* of real virtue, not the *essence* of it. Nor is it love alone, though this comes nearer the mark; for 'love' in one sense 'is the fulfilling of the law'. No: truth and love united together are the essence of virtue or holiness.[13]

Virtue in Wesley's Theological Ethics

To see how such a theological ethic of virtue works throughout the teaching and ministry of Wesley, let us first remember that his soteriology from the beginning comes to a practical focus on the doctrine of sanctification. Let us also recall his constant reiteration of the three grand themes that comprise Methodist teaching, as he said

in the 1740s and was wont to point out to the Anglican clergy in the 1750s and 1760s:

> Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion, the next, the door; the third, religion itself.[14]

As Wesley indicated, these three terms imply a variety of other terms, which he uses in a number of ways on various occasions, such as original sin, justification, sanctification. Nevertheless, holiness, or sanctification, is the crux of what he will often refer to as true religion, or religion itself. In spite of an obvious tendency toward synergism in much of his thinking, holiness, for Wesley, does not refer primarily to the results of human effort seen in a set of acts or activities, but rather to the renewal of human nature in reference to an ideal.

This perspective was as evident for Wesley in 1733 as it was in 1791. Salvation is not effected through effort or activity; Christian perfection is not a collection of perfect acts. In his sermon on "Circumcision of the Heart," he points out that holiness implies being cleansed from sin and, by consequence, "being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus, the being so 'renewed in the image of our mind' as to be 'perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect'."[15] In Athanasius' terms, we are "to become by grace what God is by nature."

One of Wesley's most constant concerns (as indicated by the prolific references to it in Wesley's earliest diary at Oxford, beginning in 1725), was inward: "purity of intention." Another of his convictions, again from the 1720s, was of the absolute necessity of God's grace in the drama of salvation. The theme of prevenient grace is evident in his diaries in the early 1730s. And the focus of the Methodist scheme of devotion during the Oxford period was, as I have pointed out before, a form of meditative piety that focused on the virtues, implanted by grace.[16]

Virtue, for Wesley, was the wellspring of the holy life. Self-examination was a means to self-knowledge, and the Oxford Methodists carried out a "particular examination" of themselves every day, using a list of questions based on the traditional list of virtues for each day of the week:

Sunday	Love of God
Monday	Love of Man [neighbor]

Tuesday	Humility
Wednesday	Mortification and self-denial
Thursday	Resignation and meekness
Friday	Mortification and self-denial
Saturday	Thankfulness

The purpose of their self-examination was to become aware of specific sins and to plant in their place the corresponding virtue. This process was not so much dependent upon rules that demanded obedience (obligation ethic); the emphasis was not on the performance of certain good works. Rather, the questions were designed to examine one's actions as a measure of the development of virtue and thus to gauge the inclination of one's heart and affections, an unfailingly inward focus, and a process that Wesley acknowledged (as we have noted) was absolutely dependent upon God's grace.[17] Many of their eighteenth-century colleagues did not understand or appreciate the inward motivation and dynamic that elicited their visible and public program of activity; some saw them as exhibiting "enthusiastic madness and superstitious scruples"[18] The same has been true of many subsequent interpreters. Nineteenth-century evangelicals saw them as (at best) well-intentioned Pharisees who had not yet seen the light (or felt its warmth). And twentieth-century commentators are often no better at careful analysis of the Oxford Methodists. But their activities were of a piece with their theology, which was by no means works-righteousness nor enthusiasm. To understand their activities and lifestyle, one must have a clear grasp of the theological impulses from which those activities sprang.

Oxford Methodist Theology and Ethics

The Oxford "Methodist" lifestyle (often typified as living by method and rule) is perhaps better characterized as meditative piety. If not fully solifidian, it was at least a theology of grace. Benjamin Ingham clearly expressed this side of their soteriological focus in his diary entry of January 31, 1734, when he resolved "God's grace assisting me, to make the salvation of my soul my chief and only concern, but never to depend upon my own strength because I can do nothing without God's assistance."[19] Wesley's sermon of that year, "The One Thing Needful" (Luke 10:42), was already stressing a theme distinctively central to Methodist theology—the necessity to

be born again, to be formed anew after the likeness of our Creator, by the agency of the Holy Spirit. This sermon was preached many times by both John and Charles Wesley (yes, the same sermon), both before and after 1738 (this text used over fifty times by John up to 1790).[20] One point that is not often recognized is that most of the early Wesleyan theology was easily woven into his mature theology.

But what about faith? It is there very early as well, in the 1734 manuscript sermon, "The One Thing Needful," where Wesley says that the restoration of the image of God is only effected when the believer has faith, a faith that works in love and draws the person closer toward unity with God, that is, having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.[21] This last phrase, a conflation of Philippians 2:5 and 1 John 2:6, becomes the central image in his lifelong attempt to define the true Christian; it becomes the most common way of expressing the nature of Christian perfection; it is the most repeated biblical phrase (over fifty references) in his published sermons.[22]

The idea of imitating Jesus, the great Exemplar who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), is not only the primary motivation of Wesley's social ethic at Oxford, it is a central and persistent theme throughout his ministry. See, for instance, his later sermon "On Visiting the Sick" (1786), where he talks to the "poor disciples of a poor Master" and encourages them (if not able to give up conveniences or necessities in order to provide for their neighbors necessities or extremities), at least to administer to them the grace of God by doing as Christ did—"whenever thou hast an opportunity, go about doing good, and healing all that are oppressed with the devil."[23] See also his sermon, "The Reward of Righteousness" (1777), where he says,

> To you who believe the Christian revelation, I may speak in a still stronger manner. You believe your blessed Master 'left you an example, that you might tread in his steps' (1 Peter 2:21). Now you know his whole life was a labour of love. You know how he 'went about doing good.'[24]

And to Miss March, whom he is continuing to press on this matter, Wesley explains how his own preferential option for the rich is superseded by the necessity to imitate Christ: given his "druthers," he would like to speak only with the genteel and elegant people; but he can discover no precedent for that in the life of Christ (or of his Apostles). Therefore, he tells her, "let you and I walk as He walked."[25]

In these and many other examples, we can see Wesley's consistent combination of *sola scriptura* and the *imitatio Christi*. And as Ted Jennings has pointed out, Wesley saw Christ not only as the model but as a source of empowerment: "Go and see the poor in their hovels . . . Jesus went before you and will go with you." Wesley's constant stress on the work of the Holy Spirit, the role of faith, and the necessity of grace, means that from the beginning he understood that the Christian's charitable acts are therefore not self-initiated but the result of God's grace. At the same time, full salvation was not viewed as a momentary event so much as a process of restoration and becoming holy. His emphasis was on sanctification, as one presses on, with the assistance of God's grace, toward perfection in love and final salvation. This part of Wesley's message does not change, though between 1737–1740 the place of faith is heightened, its nature is somewhat altered, and the role of justification is clarified.

True religion, for the Oxford Methodists, was not basically a collection of actions that were determined by obedience to various sets of rules. It was conformity to a model: Thomas à Kempis' *De imitatione Christi*, one of the first books in a crucial series of readings for Wesley in the mid-1720s, became the cornerstone of his ethical approach and established the perspective for much of his later thinking on the Christian life. As Wesley said in 1733, the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ is nothing outward, but rather inward—"an habitual disposition of the soul"—"a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him that created it."[26] In a later sermon, on "The Way to the Kingdom," he also says, true religion is not to be found in any outward thing, but in the heart, in holiness and happiness, found in love of God and neighbor.[27] In a sermon from 1789, we find him again saying, true religion is right tempers, which he then defines in terms of love of God and neighbor.[28]

It is not an act, then, or a set of acts that defines the Christian. Neither is it obedience to divine commands or conformity to sets of rules. In fact, Wesley points out that a person may feed the hungry or clothe the naked and still have no religion at all.[29] Even love itself is not the simple key, since one might do such acts out of love of praise rather than love of God or neighbor. The love of God, Wesley says, is the "essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue."[30]

Areas of Theological and Ethical Continuity

Perfection, or perfect love, for Wesley, must be understood not as a goal attained through the accumulation of good works or perfect obedience to a particular standard of conduct. Rather, to see it in the context of a virtue-oriented ethic, it is growing conformity to a model of divine-oriented virtue. The goal is not to *act* perfectly; the goal is to *be* perfect, to be open to an inward perfection of intentions and attitudes. Good works are the result of inward dispositions of the soul (virtues), not conformity to particular rules or the accumulation of credit for perfect acts. The Christian life involves a life of devotion that will cultivate these virtues (the imitation of Christ) as well as contend with the concomitant vices (the spiritual combat). The means by which this double-edged form of spirituality could be promoted in the life of the believer were the practices of prayer and meditation.

For Wesley (even at Oxford), good works were not a means to anything, but rather a manifestation of the virtues, the indication of holy tempers (by which Wesley defines "true religion"). Wesley saw this religion exemplified not only in Christ but in the lives of many other persons whom the Methodists considered to have epitomized the Christ-like life. He discovered many of their biographies and writings while he was at Oxford, but published most of them later during the revival—for instance, those of Monsieur deRenty (1741), of Gregory Lopez (1750?), of Madame Guion (1776), and a long series of witnesses to the love of God in the lives of human beings, from Ephraem Syrus and Augustine to Ambrose Bonwicke and James Bonnell.[31]

For Wesley, then, the gospel was simple, epitomized by and aimed at Christian perfection, which Wesley was prone to define (throughout his lifetime) in terms of "having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked." The Christian life is the Christ-like life; a Christian is defined by being, not doing. One cannot really love unless one is loving—one cannot imperatively command patience, or faith, or love—they must be elicited, encouraged, empowered. The life of the faithful Christian is a grace-full life, one that is transformed through the work of Christ, is empowered by the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a life that cultivates the virtues through the practice of meditation, self-examination, and prayer, and manifests its inner reorientation in a disciplined life of devotion and charitable

activities. Wesley combines devotional contemplation with acts of charity, links a theology of grace with ethical responsibility, and ties virtue to faith ("faith working through love"), in such a way as to yield a special blend of disciplined devotion and practical piety that gave continuing shape to the Methodist pattern of life and thought.

The understanding of obligation, of course, continues to perform an important role in the Wesleyan ethic, but is subservient to the more basic role of virtue. As such, the obligation aspect of ethics is infused with a different spirit than if it were standing alone as a parallel or alternative approach. And some ethical principles that bear the appearance of having an obligation approach might be reconsidered in the light of these distinctions. One of the most difficult, in this regard, is the Great Commandment itself, to love God and neighbor. The difficulty arises in trying to conceive of love as being obligatory or as being commanded. Virtues cannot be commanded, as we have noted, but must be elicited, or imitated, or implanted. Though the command to love has the form of an obligation ethic, love cannot truly be exercised by anyone who is not a loving person. In this sense, even if love could be considered in obligation terms (doing acts of love), it would need to be preceded by a consideration of virtue (being a loving person).

Another factor that needs more consideration is the matter of the agency of Holy Spirit, and the role of grace and faith. Although Wesley does admit some possibility of acquiring virtues by practice (an acquiremental perspective), his view is basically relational—one becomes good by acceptance within given relationships.[32] Faith does play a role in this process, but not necessarily the precise role that Reformed theology would seem to require. For although the Wesley of the late 1730s and early 1740s says that no good works can take place before justification, both the early Wesley and the mature Wesley allow for just such a possibility.[33] This position is what got him in trouble with Whitefield, with the Moravians, with the Calvinists, and with some of his own Methodists.

In his correspondence with John Smith in the mid 1740s, the problems of the more radical Protestant approach held by Wesley at that time are pointed out to him in very personal terms: if justification requires both a proper faith and a perceptible assurance, and is necessary before any works of devotion or mercy can be considered "good" (and in fact are otherwise works to one's damnation), then by their own testimony in the early 1740s, the Wesleys would have

gone to hell if they had died while at Oxford, and their father, Samuel, would have also faced the same predicament. Wesley's careful response began the process of distancing himself from the absolute necessity of assurance and from the denigration of good works prior to justification.[34] Within twenty years, he was, in fact, proclaiming the necessity of good works for salvation, even good works prior to justification, if given the time and opportunity.[34] Although this definitely qualifies any claim that Wesley (after 1738) saw justifying faith as necessarily prerequisite to good works, we must say that Wesley does generally tie faith and love together in talking about such matters. "Faith working through love" is one of his most repeated phrases.

Many of these theological considerations point out that various implications of Wesley's work with the poor are among the several important areas of thought and life in which the stereotypical view of "Aldersgate as watershed" does not fit well (sharp contrast before and after). In the case of Wesley's work with the poor, the activities at Oxford and their theological rationale were in many ways paradigmatic for the theological ethics and charitable activities evident during the rest of his life.[36] In considering the whole area of Wesley's work with the poor, as well as the activities of Oxford Methodism in particular, it is valuable to examine the relationship between theology and ethics, with a particular view to the nature of virtue and obligation ethics, in order to understand more fully what was motivating Wesley in this respect. The old claims about the young Wesley promoting works-righteousness will simply not hold water any more, especially when viewed from the perspective of the whole of Wesley's life and thought.

Conclusion

In summary, I believe that looking at Wesley's work with the poor from the point of view of the important interrelationship between virtue ethics and obligation ethics helps us to understand better several important elements of Wesley's life and thought:

- that a virtue ethic was central to his understanding of the nature of the Christian and the shape of the Christian life;
- that a virtue ethic was quite consistently central to his thinking throughout his life;

- that an obligation ethic was important as a means of fleshing out and measuring the manifestations of virtue in particular areas of endeavor;
- that this significant but subsidiary role of the obligation ethic (seen in rules and works) was misunderstood by Calvinist and Moravian detractors as works-righteousness;
- that the centrality of virtue theory in Wesley's thinking is closely related to his doctrine of sanctification (renewal, becoming holy); and
- that the relationship between virtue theory and obligation theory is important to a fuller understanding of how Wesley's emphasis on "having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked" correlates with the great commandment, "to love God and to love neighbor."

The simple answer, then, to the question, Why did Wesley work with the poor? is, first and foremost, because Jesus did so, but also because Jesus told him to do so and would help him to do so. Renewal in the image of God entails being drawn into God's likeness, as seen in Christ—having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked. If we accept God's truth revealed to us in Christ, we do not have to ask why Christ commanded us to feed the hungry, visit the sick, and clothe the naked, nor do we have to ask why Christ fed the hungry, visited the sick, or clothed the naked; we just need to do it, in faith and in love.

32. *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Part II, *Works (J)* 8:187.

33. "The Signs of the Times," *Works (J)* 6:308.

Notes to Chapter 2

1. John D. Levenson, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," *Midstream* (October, 1989), 30–36.

2. Renita Weems, "The Hebrew Women are Not Like the Egyptian Women: The Ideology of Race, Gender and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1," unpublished paper, 11.

3. John van Seters, "Reconstructing the Past: The Yahwist's Historiographic Method in Exodus," *Scandanavian Journal of the Old Testament* (1992).

4. In Theodore Runyon, ed., *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in Light of the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 60.

5. Ibid.

6. "The Bible: Is Interclass Reading Legitimate?" in Norman K. Gottwald, ed., *The Bible and Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 62.

7. *Tribute* (February/March, 1986), 176.

Notes to Chapter 3

1. For Wesley's own account of the Methodists' assistance in "temporal things," see "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists" in *Works* 9:272–80. Several modern commentaries will be mentioned below.

2. Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992). This is a translation by John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter of the original German edition, entitled *Praxis und Prinzipien der Sozialethik John Wesleys* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977).

3. *Works* 2:162–63.

4. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

5. Ibid., 57, quoting a letter of June 9, 1775, in *Letters* 6:153.

6. Jennings artificially supports this wrong assumption by occasionally putting words in Wesley's mouth; e.g., "the poor of the society [of London]," implying the broader society rather than the Methodist society. See ibid., 59.

7. Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

8. See the chapter on "Daily Conduct" in Abelove, 96–109.

9. See "Plain Account," *Works* 9:275.

10. John Walsh, "John Wesley and the Community of Goods," in Keith Robbins, ed., *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany, and America, c.1750–c.1950: Essays in Honor of W. Reginald Ward,* Studies in Church History 7 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 25–50.

11. To provide the context of ethical theory within which I would like to examine Wesley's thoughts and actions regarding the poor, I rely upon a presentation on theological and social ethics by Frederick S. Carney to a session of the Ethics Colloquy at Perkins School of Theology in November, 1984. The following three-fold understanding of ethical theory is summarized from Carney's unpublished paper entitled "John Wesley's Theological Ethic."

12. Carney, 8–9; see also John Wesley, "An Israelite Indeed" (1785), *Works* 3:280.

13. *Works* 3:289.

14. "The Principles of a Methodist Farther Examined" (1746), *Works* 9:227.

15. *Works* 1:403.

16. See Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 78–105, 117.

17. Ibid., 91.

18. Ibid., 98.

19. Ibid., 117.

20. Ibid., 156.

21. *Works* 4:359.

22. See *Works* 4:679.

23. *Works* 3:394

24. *Works* 3:412.

25. Letter of February 7, 1776; *Letters* 6:206–7.

26. "Circumcision of the Heart," *Works* 1:402.

27. *Works* 1:223–24.

28. "The Unity of the Divine Being," *Works* 4:66–67.

29. *Works* 1:219–20.

30. *Works* 1:407.

31. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory,* 87.

32. See Carney, 13.

33. This is stated forcefully in his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *Works* 2:153–69, and in the *Minutes* of 1770.

34. *Works* 26:259, 288–89.

35. See "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *Works* 2:163.

36. There are several other signal instances of continuity as well, which I will not get into here, such as the primacy of Scripture, original sin, prevenient grace, Christian perfection, extemporaneous preaching, field-preaching, interest in education, medicine, and prisons.