

2. A. Skevington Wood, for example, in *The Burning Heart: John Wesley, Evangelist* (Devon: Paternoster Press, 1967), attempts to make a strong case that John Wesley was actually converted at Aldersgate Street. See especially pp. 66-69.

3. "The scriptures are the touchstone whereby Christians examine all real or supposed revelation. . . . For though the Spirit is our principal leader, yet He is not our rule at all; the scriptures are the rule whereby He leads us into all 'truth'" (*Letters* 2:17), quoted in Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 35.

4. Rupert E. Davies, *Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1976). A good discussion on the intellectual, spiritual, and social setting is found on pp. 21-37.

5. *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1979), 6:512.

6. Wesley, *Works* 7:187. Cf. Wesley's sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *John Wesley*, ed. Outler, pp. 271-82. "If Wesleyan theology had to be judged by a single essay, this one would do as well as any and better than most" (ed.'s introduction, p. 271).

7. *Works*, 7:188.

8. *Works*, 7:373-74.

9. Williams, *Wesley's Theology*, p. 46.

10. *Works*, 7:188. Cf. 6:206.

11. Mortimer Arias, "That the World May Believe," in *Mission Trends No. 3: Third World Theologies*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas J. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), p. 91.

12. Arias, p. 92.

13. Cf. Wesley's sermon, "Christian Perfection," in *John Wesley*, ed. Outler, pp. 252-71.

14. Williams, *Wesley's Theology*, pp. 196ff.

15. *Works*, 6:295-96, 430-31.

## *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Traditions*

### *Working Group Paper*

"The Gospel is the Good News of the Kingdom of God. It is God's offer of life through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as risen Savior and Lord, participation in His Body the Church, and His call to become partners in the work of His Kingdom of love, peace, and justice in the world."

"Evangelism is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. It means presenting the love of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit so that persons repent, place their trust in the resurrected Christ, worship Him as Lord in the fellowship of His Body, and invest their lives in the work of His Kingdom."

With these definitions, the evangelism group of the Institute summed up days of research and discussion. The major areas of investigation and the main conclusions reached are as follows.

#### *1. Wesleyan Evangelism*

The message of the evangelism of John and Charles Wesley was the historic faith of the Christian church. The Wesleys were orthodox believers, remaining always in the mainstream of Christian truth and tradition.

In "offering Christ" John Wesley developed a clear understanding of the way the Holy Spirit works in "the Order of Salvation." Beginning with prevenient grace, the Spirit leads people through convincing, converting, and sanctifying grace. At the heart of this process are conversion and assurance, brought about through justification by faith. After conversion comes the call to seek holiness, including social holiness.

## 2. *Wesleyan Evangelism Today*

Is Wesleyan evangelism valid in the vastly different modern world? Yes, for underneath the changes and the complexity of life today are vital constant factors. Human nature is the same: shameful, splendid, sinful, saintly, needing salvation. The Christian gospel, rooted in the historic birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, abides. The gospel needs to be reinterpreted, but Jesus is the name for today.

## 3. *The Context of Evangelism*

The Evangelism Group, representative of the six continents, examined the context for evangelism today. Reports were discussed from churches in the First, Second, and Third Worlds. A time of opportunity has opened for the proclamation of the Christian faith, as young people grope after the transcendent, and adults are discovering that the secret of life is not in the means but in the ends of living. Many are seeking afresh a faith to live by.

## 4. *The Message of Evangelism*

The message of the gospel in every age and in each place and culture is a first concern of evangelism. What is the message now?

Conversion Christianity is the message of the church and the need of the world. The message must be contextualized in each society and undertaken in concrete historical situations, taking note of religious and cultural diversity. The message must be at once personal and social; especially it must represent good news for the poor. In a nuclear age it is essential to present Christ as the Prince of Peace.

## 5. *The Methods of Evangelism*

The maintenance church is called again to be a missionary church, reaching, as did John Wesley, for those beyond its boundaries, inviting them to a living faith. The effective church is the indigenous, contextualized church. Under the challenge of Latin American members of the group, it was recognized that ways must be found to undertake evangelism

among the poor with sensitivity. Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor, who understand and relate to the gospel in a unique way.

With surprising frequency, the house group, or the "little church," emerged in worldwide reports. As Methodism seeks to use this method of evangelizing, John Wesley has much to say through his system of bands and class meetings. The gospel is to be expressed today in deed as well as word, in acts of mercy to the victims of suffering and oppression and in social action in relation to the power structures of society and the corporate sins of humanity. The little church facilitates this.

Finally, as the spiritual sons and daughters of John Wesley, we cannot overlook preaching and preaching for conversion. Evangelical preaching inside and outside churches is one great need of today.

## 6. *A World Vision*

World Methodism, established in ninety countries, is powerfully placed to see afresh the world vision of John Wesley and can reach the world through its world evangelism program. By the intellectual and scholarly search for the meaning of evangelism and by the doing of it, we may yet experience this in our time.

### *Some Areas of Concern*

1. How are social, political, and economic realities related to the kingdom of God? What does personal evangelism mean in this context? What help can we get from Wesley on this question?
2. What is the relationship between the gospel and the experiences of the poor? What does it mean to speak of the gospel of the poor and for the poor? How do we avoid platitudes in this regard?
3. What does evangelism mean in situations where people live, as in Africa, in socially integrated communities with common bonds and loyalties? What is the nature of the gospel to be preached in such situations?
4. In societies where traditional churches are declining in numbers, which forms of church community and outreach

can help to foster new growth? Is the Wesleyan model of bands, classes, and societies relevant in this context?

5. How can we ensure that evangelism is an act of sharing in love? Since women form the majority of the membership of the church, can their experience tell us anything about male-dominated concepts in evangelism—e.g., the common use of military language, such as “campaign” or “crusade”?

### Some Issues for Further Reflection, Study, and Dialogue

1. What can we learn about the meaning and practice of evangelism from churches which really are churches of the poor?
2. How do the themes of poverty and oppression and the actual life of the poor relate to the *content* of the gospel?
3. How do militarism, the arms race, and in particular the growing awareness of the worldwide nuclear threat, impact our evangelistic message and practice? What does the gospel promise of universal *shalom* have to say to humankind’s hunger for peace today?
4. How are the social, economic, and political dimensions of God’s kingdom to be correlated with our evangelistic witness? Can we learn anything from Wesley in this regard?
5. Can we come to a fuller understanding of the psychological and sociological meaning of awakening, conversion, and sanctification by attending to secular interest in and study of spiritual experience?
6. What can we learn from Africa and other communal cultures about the nature of evangelism and the meaning of the gospel as a call to and an offer of socially integrated community?
7. The concept of prevenient grace and its implications for evangelism and social witness need further investigation.
8. Given the historical dimensions and concrete historical expressions of sin, how is the historical meaning of love, justice, peace, and salvation to be understood in context?
9. What is the theological significance of evangelism as part of the *praxis* out of which theological reflection arises? Is

theological reflection not inherently deficient and incomplete if it is not grounded in the practice of evangelism?

10. The need for evangelism *within* the church needs further attention. How can we proclaim the gospel to professed Christians so that the radical demands of the kingdom of God may be heard and heeded?
11. The relationship of dialogue and evangelism, and the place of dialogue as part of evangelism need further clarification. Are dialogue and evangelism complementary or contradictory? In particular, as Wesleyans, what is our stance towards other living traditions of the Christian faith in the practice of evangelism?
12. What does it mean to speak of the eucharist as a “converting ordinance”? What is the place of liturgy and worship in evangelism?
13. Organizational structures of the church as vehicles for (or obstacles to) evangelism need careful study. What structural forms or changes tend best to further the church’s evangelistic witness?
14. The relevance of Wesleyan *ecclesiolae* has been affirmed by our group. Such structures seem particularly suited to ministry among the poor. Why do they seem to die out, however, as churches become more affluent? Is this an inherent social dynamic, or is it due to other factors?
15. The significance of the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Spirit for evangelism need further emphasis. Have we adequately appreciated the evangelistic significance of the priesthood and our gifted laity in general, and women and the poor in particular?
16. Our group affirms the urgency of the evangelistic task and the need to offer life in Christ to all. To this end we commend and call for such research and study as may help to further this work. Given the theme of this Institute, we therefore express concern about the inadequacy or unavailability of theological publications—especially in Africa—and the need for a Spanish edition of Wesley’s works. (Drafted by Alan Walker.)