

## Wesleyan Communities and the World Beyond Christianity

“... the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men ...”

Works of John Wesley Vol 1, p. 537:6-8

What is the common ground for Wesley's meeting with people beyond the boundaries of Christian faith? Where do we find the common values, references and conditions for conversations with people of no faith? Do we in our Wesleyan heritage find reasons why and how we could interact and cooperate with people outside the boundaries of Christian faith? Where do we find the common grounds for meeting and cooperation?

### The world is my parish

The beginning of the fields-preaching in 1739 caused critique against Wesley. Preaching outside the consecrated churches and in unusual and insufficient places was seen as a violation of the ecclesiastical structure of the Anglican Church.<sup>1</sup> The ordained pastors of the church had their authority as pastor within the parish, they were appointed to. Each pastor represented the whole church in his pastoral functions within his parish, which was defined as a geographical area, a *terra missio*. Pastors had to exercise their pastoral functions within the parish and to respect the boundaries of other pastor's authority in the parishes, they were appointed to.<sup>2</sup> The religious societies, which were organized since 1670es after inspiration of the pietistic *collegia pietatis*, were organized after specific legislation, which opened for ecclesiastical structures across the boundaries of parishes.<sup>3</sup>

Wesley himself was not ordained to be a pastor of a parish. The colleges of the two university cities Oxford and Cambridge had an extraordinary status to let fellows be ordained to exercise a pastoral function within the college life. The university had students from the whole country, and during the time of education the ordained college fellows could be pastors for them. Wesley held a fellowship at Lincoln College, and he was not ordained and appointed to a position limited by the parish system. When Wesley is criticized for his fields-preaching, he argues against his opponents with two arguments. In the first argument Wesley refer to his status as an ordained presbyter of the Anglican Church not limited by the parish structure or with responsibility to focus on the local church in a parish. In the other argument Wesley refers to his ordination, to 'Take thou authority to preach the Word of God.' Wesley understands this as a duty, a yoke of obedience, given directly from God. When opponents claim that Wesley shall stop his fields-preaching, he sees it as "contrary to the command of God," given him in his ordination.<sup>4</sup> The two arguments you can say is Wesley's rejection and refuting of the critique against him. The positive argument, Wesley introduces to give understanding for his field-preaching, is what he calls "my principles in this matter." And he states his principles as: "I look upon all the world as my parish."<sup>5</sup>

His parish, an ecclesiastical term, is not within the structure of the organized church, but outside the boundaries, where people are not included or organized in the ecclesiastical structures. "All the world" is where the church is out of control or has lost its influence. Wesley's first field-preaching took place in such a place, in Kingswood, a mining settlement in far distance to the nearest local church in Bristol and its services and preaching. "All the world" is places, where the church is not present or have no influence. The world is used in a dialectic tension to the church. In the perspective of the parish system, Wesley's field-preaching was seen as invasion into another pastor's office. In Wesley's perspective of "all the world" as his

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<sup>1</sup> Works Vol 25, 615:11-616:3

<sup>2</sup> Hooker 1595, *Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*

<sup>3</sup> Heitzenrater 1995, 17-25

<sup>4</sup> Works Vol 25, 660:8-15

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 616:4-5

parish, the field-preaching is the needed mission-preaching, he fulfill on the authority given him in ordination.<sup>6</sup>

One strong motive in Wesley's thinking is to reach people with the Christian gospel. We could call it the dominant motive of mission. When Wesley focuses the church and its functions he sees the purpose to reach out to people as the most important task behind all ecclesiastical issues. The church is not a goal in it selves, it is a mean of something bigger. We see it in Wesley's mission statement that Methodism is raised to transform the Nation, first of all the church. The main purpose is the nation, the people of the country, and their community life together, and as a tool for reaching people, a reformed and vital church is needed. Church structures and policy have to be adjusted to needs of the mission. The argument of mission we find in several of Wesley's initiatives inclusive his organizing of religious societies and his acts of ordination. Wesley's tendency to see beyond the boundaries and limits, to all kind of people behind, is included in the perspective of "all the world as my parish."

Wesley opens up for connections with people outside the boundaries of Christian faith. How could Wesley so strongly focus on reaching out to all kind of people of faith, of formal religion or of no religion at all? One motive for connections is to find possibilities for mission and ways to make the Christian gospel understandable to people with no Christian background. Another motive is to give reasons to how Christian people can find their place in the society and among people of another faith or no Christian values. A third motive is to find common ground for Christians to cooperate with people who have different or no religion and values. A number of themes in Wesley's thinking are preparing his attitude to people beyond the boundaries of Christian faith and his "all the world" perspective. Some of these preparing themes are:

### **1. Prevenient grace as enlightenment of every person**

In his teaching on prevenient grace, Wesley often quotes John 1:9 about "the true Light, who lighteth every man that cometh into the world."<sup>7</sup> Wesley uses the quotation with the understanding that God comes to all people and gives them some kind of enlightenment. In addition to the direct quotations, we find Wesley's allusions and references with different formulations of the text, so it is absolutely an important text in his understanding of what God is doing universally to all people.<sup>8</sup> God's coming to each and every person, and not leaving anyone alone in his or her own weaknesses and limitations, Wesley identify to a function of the conscience. The enlightenment of the person is open for everyone to test by examine the function of his or her conscience. We find that Wesley explain the process of enlightenment of every man in his note to John 1:9.<sup>9</sup>

The meaning of lightening and enlightenment we shall see in the context of Wesley's understanding of the human-God relation as a question of seeing, hoping and believing. With reference to Hebrew 11:1 Wesley talks about hope in the situation, where it is not possible to see. The original or natural situation for the human-God relation is where man can see God, and in that situation hope or faith are not the conditions for the relationship. Where you can see, you know and can live in the relation with love. But something happened that changed the situation into not seeing, and in that new situation new ways of relationship were given. It is what Hebrew 11:1 is about, the relation built on hope in the situation, where you can't see. Hope leads to faith, and faith will last as long as you can't see. But when faith in God is turned into seeing God, the seeing of God has absorbed the relation based on faith. Seeing God face to face begin the period

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 615:16-21. 616:17-30

<sup>7</sup> The John 1:9 is preaching text for Wesley 16 times. See the register of preaching texts.

<sup>8</sup> Works Vol 4, 668, Index of Scriptural References under John 1:9

<sup>9</sup> Wesley Notes Upon NT, 1754/1966, 303

where seeing, loving and knowing are the keywords for the human-God relation, as it was in the first beginning before separation and the conditions of no seeing started.<sup>10</sup>

Wesley's pointing to the "the true Light, who lighteth every man that cometh into the world," reestablish a little bit of the original conditions for human life, the conditions for all humans to see something of the divinity without first getting more insight based on hope or developed by faith. The understanding, that every human being is objects for the enlightening power of God, will change your attitude to that human being. It is not just a person different from yourself or your religious orientation. It is no longer a stranger or an enemy. It is a person in whom the same God that works in you is working. Something in the person you face is of the same character as in you. The understanding of prevenient grace as God's enlightening of all persons will connect the people, who have this understanding, to other people beyond any boundaries of different faith, culture and orientation.

Wesley's use of the light metaphor to explain God's prevenient grace in all people, he develops in relation to faith. In the Sermon *On Faith* (106) he draws the picture that all people have faith. The heathen people have a small faith because "a small degree of light is given."<sup>11</sup> The Jews and especially John the Baptist "a still clearer light was given," and that is why the degree of faith is on a higher level among people of the Jewish culture. But nevertheless, "he that is least in the kingdom of God, is greater than" John the Baptist. Most light is given under what Wesley call "the Christian dispensation," and that is why we among Christians find the faith of a child of God, not the servant's faith, but the child's. Very low faith Wesley finds among the deists, and only the materialist have the lowest degree of faith. The understanding is that all people have at least some level of faith and this is because God has enlightened all people to some degree.<sup>12</sup>

## **2. Prevenient grace as partaking, participation and dwelling in God**

Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace was also inspired by other ideas than the idea of everybody's enlightenment. Focusing the human-God relation Wesley learned from Macarius Homilies that human beings are partakers of the divine life.<sup>13</sup> The human life understood as a life depending on the life of the divinity, places all people in the closest relation with God. The concept of partaking we know from the 2. Peter 1:4, which was a key text in Wesley's understanding of the human-God relation as "to dwell in God and God in you."<sup>14</sup> The "Love divine," "to earth come down," is followed by the wish to God that he will "Fix in us thy humble dwelling."<sup>15</sup>

Using the word participation Wesley draws on Irenaeus, when he describes God as the spring of human life, "the life of God in the [human] is a participation in the divine nature."<sup>16</sup> The relation as partaking, participation and dwelling also echoes the Eastern Fathers explanations to the relations of the persons in the triune God.<sup>17</sup> Some analogue understanding develops between how humans take part of the life coming from God, on the one hand, and how the three persons of the divinity are part of the same being,

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<sup>10</sup> Works Vol 2, 39:23-34

<sup>11</sup> Works Vol 3, 492:14

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 494-498

<sup>13</sup> *Wesley Christian Library Vol 1, Homilies of Macarius 7:2-3: "Whosoever therefore you are, that have been made partakers of the Spirit of Christ, look upon yourselves ... that you may be never excluded from the life which you have been made to partake of."*

<sup>14</sup> *Wesley Notes Upon NT, 1754/1966, 1. Pet 1:4, 800 n4*

<sup>15</sup> Works Vol 7, 545:1,3

<sup>16</sup> Works Vol 19, 97:8-9. Vol 1, 150:1-2

<sup>17</sup> Allchin 1988, 32

on the other hand.<sup>18</sup> The relationship between the different persons in the trinity, as united and partaking in one another without absorption or deletion of each person's character, is mirroring the relation between the human being and God.

The understanding of prevenient grace as human's partaking, participation and dwelling in God and God in him or her will connect the people, who have this understanding, to other people beyond any boundaries of different faith, culture and orientation. The relation you have to God and the receiving of life from the life-giving God will influence your attitude to your fellow human being regardless all differences between you, because your fellow human is related to God and the radiating life and energy coming from him in the same way as you are. Your understanding of the human-God relation connect you to other people, where you see a similar relation to the same divinity, as you see is the conditions for your life, in spite of what understanding these people might have.

### **3. The heathen himself will bear witness**

In his sermon *On the Omnipresence of God* (118)<sup>19</sup> Wesley develops his understanding of how you can find God everywhere. Referring to Psalm 139 Wesley goes through all the places where God possible could be present. First places mentioned are those closely related to the actual person. Then other places in distance of the places, where God is first recognized. Finally places, where it is not obvious that God could be found. But the answer is the same, God is to be found everywhere, in heaven, and on earth. Even in hell and among the most evil, God will be present.<sup>20</sup> There is "no point of space ... where God is not."<sup>21</sup> The understanding of the omnipresence of God, Wesley sometime combines with Paul's discovery at the Areopagus.<sup>22</sup> Paul did not only discover the presence of God in a place, where no persons apparently were Christian, but he also identified signs of the only one God in a non-Christian culture. The statement that "in him we live, and move, and have our being," is an understanding developed in a culture different from Christianity and built on other values, but it is in harmony with Christian thinking. In fact Paul's discovery of God's presence and influences in non-Christian cultures was not a discovery he suddenly did, when he saw the alter of the unknown god at the Areopagus. Wesley remarks that Paul very well knew the Greek philosopher Aratus and uses his quotation to give an interpretation to the phenomenon of the unknown god, and this non-Christian text became Paul's preaching text.<sup>23</sup> The omnipresence of God is recognized in every place. But also in cultures and ideologies where he is unknown or known in other ways and names, you can find signs of his influences and truth. "The heathen himself will bear witness" of God and how people in that specific culture understand and experience God.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ware 2001, 35

<sup>19</sup> Works Vol 4, 40-47

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 41:20. 43:21

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 42:1-2

<sup>22</sup> *Wesley Collection of Psalms and Hymns* 1784, 88: "Him, in whom they move, and live, Let every creature sing, Glory to their Maker give."

<sup>23</sup> *Wesley Notes Upon NT*, 1754/1966, Acts 17:22-34, 466 n28

<sup>24</sup> Works Vol 4, 44:4

Wesley's understanding of the heathen world is that everywhere people show, they are related to the one God. They show it in the thinking, the understanding of the world, the culture and in the developed moral codex.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley sees the so called royal law as a concentrate of Christian ethics. He finds, in heathen cultures with no contact to Christianity, that they follow the royal law and lift it up as the highest ideal.

This is that royal law, that golden rule of mercy as well as justice, which even the heathen emperor<sup>26</sup> caused to be written over the gate of his palace: a rule which many believe to be naturally engraved on the mind of everyone that comes into the world. And thus much is certain, that it commends itself, as soon insomuch that no man can knowingly offend against it without carrying his condemnation in his own breast.<sup>27</sup>

This sign of God's law in heathen culture is what Paul touches in Roman 2:14, "the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law." Wesley does not accept that humans by nature should be in a good position to God. It is because of the obliging God that humans all over are in a good position. Wesley notes says, "strictly speaking, it is by preventing grace," that the Gentiles are able "to do the things contained in the law."<sup>28</sup> But anyhow nature or preventing grace, Wesley agree with Paul, that in heathen culture you find signs of God's law, and in heathen culture you can see that people are inspired by the one God, even though they do not celebrate God in according to Christian understanding.

The understanding, that people, with no contact to the Christian gospel, have elements of or analogue thoughts in their culture, will change the attitude to those people.

#### 4. Reason as common ground

In 1743 Wesley publishes his *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*. In this writing Wesley addresses people watching the beginning of the Methodist movement, and in defense of it, he gives his presentation of true Christian faith. In 1745 the next three and more expanded parts of this apologetic

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<sup>25</sup> Works Vol 3, 199:5-200:8: "Some great truths, as the being and attributes of God, and the difference between moral good and evil, were known in some measure to the heathen world; the traces of them are to be found in all nations; so that in some sense it may be said to every child of man: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; even to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.' With this truth he has in some measure 'enlightened everyone that cometh into the world'. And hereby they that 'have not the law', that have no written law, 'are a law unto themselves'. They show 'the work of the law', the substance of it, though not the letter, 'written in their hearts', by the same hand which wrote the commandments on the tables of stone; their conscience also bearing them witness', whether they act suitably thereto or not.."

<sup>26</sup> Footnote on Works Vol 1, 660: Cf. Echard, Eccles. Hist., III.iv. ('222 A.D. '), p. 389: 'Though Alexander [Severus-222-35] did not believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, yet he reverend him as a Law-giver, whose institutions excelled all those of the Gentile Philosophers. That command, on which all the Law and the Prophets depend. DO NOT THAT TO ANOTHER, WHICH YOU WOULD NOT HAVE ANOTHER DO TO YOU, he was so fond of, that when he punished any man for acts of injustice, the Crier was commanded publicly to announce it in the Court; and that it might be more regarded, he ordered it to be inscribed upon his palace, his courts of judicature, and his public works and buildings.'

<sup>27</sup> Works Vol 1, 660:32-661:6

<sup>28</sup> Wesley Notes Upon NT 1754/1966, Rom 2:14, 525

writings come with the title *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion I-II-III*.<sup>29</sup> In his *Appeals* Wesley addresses the intellectuals and especially “men of no religion at all or men of lifeless, formal religion,” the last mentioned is the same as the supporters of the deistic theology.<sup>30</sup> Wesley is in harmony with the understanding of his time that new knowledge and recognition is a function of the human reasonable thinking.<sup>31</sup> The enlightenment’s opening of natural sciences, as an expanding of the human senses, is very interesting for Wesley, and he studies quite a lot of the writings of scientists of his time.<sup>32</sup> Wesley sees no contrast between natural sciences and Christianity. When disharmony and contrast nevertheless appears, it is in fields where human knowledge not yet has been able to understand the problems.<sup>33</sup>

Reason is for all people the common ground for evaluation of other things and phenomena. The Christian faith cannot be deduced from or by reason, “no man is able to work it in himself.” Christian faith is always a gift of God. But faith is neither irrational or has an unreasonable content. It is quite the opposite. With the good use of reason humans can evaluate faith, and so far people distance them self from reason, they distance from Christianity.<sup>34</sup> From Wesley’s perspective Christianity is a “reasonable religion,” and from that perspective he mentions all the good effect Christianity has on society and culture.<sup>35</sup>

We do not find that Wesley’s defense of Christian faith and attach on deism is a question of the status of reason. Reason is the common ground for discussion with other Christians, with the deistic theologians and all other thinking people. There is no special reason that only Christians or spiritual people have access to. And there is no spiritual or Christian reason only for Christians or Christians of a specific character. People can have different experiences and knowledge, but that is another matter. The reason in itself is a common ground for human understanding of the world, and that is why Wesley frankly appeals to men of reason and expect them to understand his reasonable arguments in the same way as he understands them.<sup>36</sup>

What are not mentioned here, are the themes of Wesley’s view on prevenient grace as enlightenment of every person, and human life as a partaking, participation and dwelling in God. Included the understanding of reason, Wesley sees the prevenient grace in all people, and by this God’s presence in and working through people, human reason will to some degree mirror something of the truth coming from the one God.

## **5. Wesley’s understanding of experiences, tradition and history**

Experiences are another major theme for Wesley as a common ground for meeting with people beyond the boundaries of Christian faith and communities. The times of enlightenment moves the focus to the empiric world. The natural sciences expand the uses of natural senses, and exact ways of putting nature into terms

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<sup>29</sup> Works Vol 11, 43-325

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 45:10-11

<sup>31</sup> Allchin 1988, 31, 36-37

<sup>32</sup> Outler in Works Vol 2, 380 note 16: List of Wesley’s scientific readings

<sup>33</sup> Meistad 1999, 14

<sup>34</sup> Works Vol 11, 48:1. Ibid., 53:2-3: “So far as he departs from true genuine reason, so far he departs from Christianity.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 52-53

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 55

of measure and weight write the new map of the world. Wesley is very interested in the empiric or natural philosophy and the new scientific interpretation of the human world.<sup>37</sup> From natural sciences Wesley learns that you can do experiences of a phenomenon but that is not the same as understanding the same. One thing is to observe that a subject will fall to the ground if you lift it up and let it go. Another thing is to give reasons for the observation and understand the phenomenon of falling items. Wesley discusses the theory of gravity, proposed by Isaac Newton and used by him to explain the moving of the planets. The critical theory was that the planets and all objects moving in direction of another object is determined of the ether they are moving in.<sup>38</sup> From the discussion of phenomena in nature Wesley draw the analogue picture to the religious phenomena. Also here you find peoples experiences. Experiences of fear and safety, confusion and happiness, sorrow and confidence, reasonable faith and absurd faith. Wesley describes religious experiences in a psycho-sociological terminology. In the argumentation for the trinity Wesley uses the discussion on gravity to make a parallel argumentation that you can experience the phenomena of what comes from the Father and creator, what comes from and are observed of the incarnated and saving Word, and what is observed as the life coming from the Spirit. Another thing is to interpret and understand these experiences in the way of the Christian profession of the triune God in the apostolic creed.<sup>39</sup>

There are no special experiences only Christian people can do or spiritual experiences only religious people can have. Experiences are a common human way to observe the world. Wesley uses this understanding of experiences to conclude that experiences, many people had at a meeting, where people were moved by their experiences of God, also mean, for the deists who were there, that they had the same experiences.<sup>40</sup>

Behind the understanding that human beings are able to experience God and what God is doing, we find the interaction between God and humans, which Paul refer to in Romans 8:16, that "The Spirit beareth witness with our spirit ...", one of Wesley's very often quoted phrases.<sup>41</sup> It is a parallel understanding, that in the same way as the prevenient grace is enlightening all people in the world, and Wesley see the enlightening in the conscience of humans, the spirit of God interacts with the spirit of humans to get an experience, the person can recognize.<sup>42</sup>

In Wesley's thinking we find that experiences give interpretation to experiences. The individual experiences are seen in the light on other people's experiences, which again are tested on the experiences mentioned in history, especial the history of specific normative importance. The personal experience has of course a great value and importance for the individual. But Wesley turns never into individualism in his perspective.

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<sup>37</sup> Wesley's reading of natural scientific is listed in Works Vol 2, 380, note 16: Wesley had also read Sir Isaac Newton's *Opticks* (1704), and the *Principia Mathematica* (1687), Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of the Worlds* (1686), Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, John Keill's *An Examination of Dr. Burnet's Theory* (1698), William Whitston's *A New Theory of the Earth*, John Woodward's *Natural History of the Earth* (1695), John Hutchinson's *Moses's Principia* (1724), John Roger's *Dissertation on the Knowledge of the Antients in Astronomy* (1755).

<sup>38</sup> Works Vol 2, 379-381

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 384:8-18

<sup>40</sup> Works Vol 21, 429:14-17: "I believe an eminent deist who was present will not easily forget that hour. He was (then at least) deeply affected and felt he stood in need of 'an advocate with the Father'. Footnote: E. Perronet MS: 'Old Mr. Ford the surgeon'. James Ford of Bristol, doctor, father of Gilbert Ford who matriculated from Christ Church in 1767."

<sup>41</sup> *Wesley Notes upon NT*, 1754/1966, notes to Rom 8:14-16

<sup>42</sup> Works Vol 1, 111-123 & 123-134

The personal experience has to be compared to other people's similar experiences, and these experiences again tested on the multiple of experiences written in history. The personal experience is seen in the perspective of the common experiences of history. Wesley's Aldersgate experience is an example of this. In the time after Aldersgate, Wesley describes his experience in many details and with explanations. No doubt that the experience is very important for him and his personal development. But later in his life and writings the Aldersgate experience almost disappears. Wesley continued to preach, what he learned through the Aldersgate experience, but his references changed from his individualistic perspective to the brought and common perspective of many contemporary and historical persons. The point is that experiences are personal, but what experiences leads to is common, collective and rooted in the strong foundation of history. History is the strong authority, new discoveries can be tested on.

Contemporary experiences connect people to history, because history is nothing but told and written experiences. History is not photographic pictures of a specific time or a simple list of facts from past ages, but a told history from a specific perspective and includes an interpretation of what people have experienced and understood. Wesley's *Christian Library* is such a history. The first volumes have Wesley's huge introductions where he draws the lines from the pre historic and antique Hebrew time, to the Greek Christian antiquity and further on to the spreading of the Christian culture in direction of where Wesley is today, in Britannia. Wesley is aware of the very early connection between the cultures in the Mideast, the Phoenicians and Syrians and the British Isles. Because of this early connection the first Christian culture, the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Christian Culture on the British Isles before the Latin Christianity took over dominion of the British Isles, Wesley saw this Christian culture as part of the Christian Antiquity. Beda is one of the sources Wesley uses to lift up the Anglo-Saxon culture as exemplary.<sup>43</sup> It is the history of the people, Wesley tells. The elected Gods people, the Christian people of the road, the different European people to the English people and the people called Methodists. Wesley's introductions to the history, developed in his historical writings,<sup>44</sup> are the framework for his presentations of the many witnesses that fills the 50 volumes of the *Christian Library*. The collection of witnesses who in life, thinking and writing give testimonies to their experiences Wesley calls *practical divinity*<sup>45</sup> and *experimental Christianity*.<sup>46</sup> Even when Wesley gives his presentation of Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon, where most of the material is theology and philosophical thinking, is still in Wesley's perspective practical divinity and experimental Christianity, because it is historical persons experiences and understanding of the human life, include the dimension of God's self-revealing and its influence on life. History is a collection of human experiences organized after the perspective that gives interpretation and understanding to what is experienced. As long as history is understood as collected experiences, history too is common ground for meeting with people beyond the boundaries of Christian faith.

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<sup>43</sup> Wesley *Christian Library* Vol 3, 6-11. Beda *A History of the English Church and People* 731

<sup>44</sup> Wesley *A Concise History of England*, Vol 1-4, 1775. Wesley *Ecclesiastical History*, Vol 1-4, 1781

<sup>45</sup> Wesley *Christian Library* Vol 1, i

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol 2, 209-210



## 6. God has mingled you together with other

In his sermon *Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount IV (24)*,<sup>47</sup> Wesley concentrates on Christianity as a social religion. The sermon has a double perspective, first on the inward holiness, and second on the outward holiness. The perspective on inward holiness is where the Christian person is part of the Christian fellowship in the congregation and the love of God. Wesley points out that inward holiness is not limited to only the fellowship with God and the Christians. To be a Christian is not to withdraw from other people and cultures. The perspective on outward holiness is where Christians are active in connection with "ungodly and unholy men," because connection with non-Christians "is absolutely needful."<sup>48</sup>

The salt metaphor Wesley has taken from the text of Matt. 5:13-16, and he uses it to describe how it is a Christian duty to influence people and neighboring societies. Like salt automatically influences what is next to it and the whole area, so Christians are spread among other people to be influential on the environment they find themselves in. The light metaphor also taken from the text of Matt. 5:13-16 Wesley uses in the same way as the salt image, but also expanded with the understanding of the light that enlightens all persons in the world. Christians spread among non-Christian "ungodly and unholy" people have the function of salt, but also the function of the outgoing light, coming from God and passed on by Christians to non-Christian people, who receives it as the God given enlightening. The Christian people's functions to be "salt of the earth" and light to all men are "the great reason why the providence of God has so mingled you together with other men."<sup>49</sup> Outward holiness shall be seen in the context of the mingling with other people. In the same way as inward holiness is understood in connection with the fellowship with God and the Christian congregation, outward holiness is seen in connection with the mingling with "ungodly and unholy" people.

Wesley's understanding of Christian people's relations, inward and outward, makes the Christian dependent on the relations he or she builds up or pull down. The social dimension of religion is inward, but also outward.

## 7. Last public action beyond the boundary

Wesley preached his last sermon on February 23, 1791. The next day he dictated his last and famous letter to William Wilberforce. Wesley's last public action was not to address the inner church situation in one way or another. It was to give public support into the political process of the abolishing of slavery. Did this dictation of the Wilberforce letter indicate that Wesley never lost the focus of his ministry outside the borders of the church and in the midst of society? If it is so the action is very much in harmony with his motto for the Methodist, to transform the nation, first of all the established church. Again the focus is on the other side of the boarder, and the church is a tool for something beyond its own limits.

### The world

Finally after going through themes that prepare the understanding how the outside part beyond the boundaries of the Christian fellowship and the ecclesiastical organization can be a parish, we are back to "the world." So many aspects of Wesley's thinking draw the attention to what is outside the boundaries of

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<sup>47</sup> Works Vol 1, 531-549

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 536:16-18

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 537:6-8

Christian community. And Wesley's understanding of the anthropology and what God is doing in the world gives Wesley a readiness to identify the presence and signs of God in any hostile place and in any stranger person.

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