Some months ago I set myself the task of discovering whether the fastidious Mr. Wesley ever left his thinking unbuttoned. Specifically I wondered if gaps sometimes showed between his theory of biblical interpretation and his practice of it. And of course I found some gaps. Wesley's interpretations of the Bible did not always conform to his hermeneutical guidelines as he had sketched them in 1746 for the Preface to the first edition of his Sermons on Several Occasions. (1)

Wesley's first guideline for interpreting Scripture called for posing the sort of question that wakes one up in the middle of the night with a fibrillating heart. Wesley awoke with the realization that he was "a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air...just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence I am no more seen." (2) Overwhelmed by the fleeting nature of his life, Wesley said he wanted "to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore." (3) So Wesley's first guideline for interpreting the Bible was that when the transitory nature of your life comes home to you, phrase your anxiety as a question and take it to the place where answers are given.

The answering place for Wesley was the Bible. There he found a reply to his question about the way to heaven. He wrote: "God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book." (4) That book, the Bible, contained, in Wes-
ley's words, "the oracles of God." (5) Therefore, Wesley's second guideline for interpreting Scripture was his belief that the Bible was not a compendium of human wisdom, but a divine road atlas in which the Great Cartographer had condescended to chart the route to heaven.

Having affirmed the Bible's divine nature, Wesley exclaimed: "O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri." (6) Let me be a man of one book. That commitment to one book sounds rhetorical on the lips of a man who was in fact a man of many books. Indeed, Wesley charged a certain George Bell with "rank enthusiasm" when he insisted the only book he needed was the Bible. If that was so, Wesley argued, "if you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul. He wanted others too." (7) Like Paul, Wesley needed books other than the Bible. Yet ever since his mother had used the Bible to teach him to read, the Bible had occupied a unique place on his reading list. Other books were valuable; the Bible was of surpassing value.

Therefore, Wesley's third guideline for interpreting the Bible was that you must not approach it gingerly, as a teetotaler takes a polite sip of champagne at a wedding reception; but you must approach the Bible with gusto, as a thirsty laborer downs a pint of beer.

Yet Wesley's thirst for the Living Water of Scripture was also a thirst for quietness. "Here then I am," he wrote, "far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his Book; for this end, to find the way to heaven." (8) Wesley's tourist question about the route to heaven was answered in the guide book called the Bible. And just
as we take our guide books literally, not expecting them to give us symbolic information about the road from Oxford to Epworth, so did Wesley accept the text of the Bible as he found it. "It is a stated rule in interpreting Scripture," he wrote, "never to depart from the plain, literal sense, unless it implies an absurdity." (9) Hence, his fourth guideline was to slip off to a quiet spot with the Bible and there to read it, sticking to the literal text.

Stick with the text as you find it, Wesley counseled, until you get stuck on the meaning of a passage. At which point he offered this advice: "Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? (10) If so, he turned to prayer, lifting up his "heart to the Father of lights." (11) Because Wesley believed the Bible was God's Word, when a passage puzzled him, he turned to God for illumination. Therefore, his fifth guideline was that when in doubt about the meaning of a passage, pray.

But for some reason, prayer did not always light the candle of comprehension. Perhaps God, like Socrates, was more eager to ask questions than to answer them. Whatever the case, when prayer did not resolve Wesley's doubts, he turned to a concordance—either the one on his shelf or the one in his memory. He wrote: "I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual'. I meditate thereon, with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable." (12) Wesley's sixth guideline was what Albert Outler terms the principle that "Scripture is Scripture's own best interpreter." (13) Thus, it is one's knowledge of the whole Bible—what Wesley called "the whole scope and tenor of Scripture" (14)—that governs one's exegesis of each part.
But since one's knowledge of the whole scope of Scripture can never be complete, Wesley added a final guideline, writing, "If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God, and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak." (15) In other words, Wesley turned to other Bible students to fill out his grasp of the tenor of the Bible. He turned to those who were alive and at hand for discussions of how the Bible as a whole shed light on the meaning of a worrisome text. Even more he turned to Christian antiquity, to tradition, to the writings of those who were separated from him by death, for additions and corrections to his grasp of how the total biblical message might resolve his doubt about the meaning of a particular passage. So Wesley's seventh guideline for interpreting the Bible was his conviction that no Bible student "is an island, entire of itself." Each is part of a community of interpretation. And the older and larger the community, the better.

Wesley adhered, as Albert Outler reminds us, to "a variation on the Anglican sense of the old Vincentian canon that the historical experience of the church, though fallible, is the better judge overall of Scripture's meanings than later interpreters are likely to be, especially on their own." (16) For that reason, when Wesley dealt with the notion that there is no sin in believers, he argued that it "is quite new in the church of Christ; that it was never heard of for seventeen hundred years, never till it was discovered by Count Zinzendorf. I do not remember to have seen the least intimation of it either in any ancient or modern writer, unless perhaps in some of the wild, ranting antinomians." (17) So only as the Bible student is guided by "what has been believed by all, everywhere and always," (18) is he or she prepared
Wesley taught what he learned from using his seven guidelines for interpreting the Bible. That at least was his theory, as expressed in the Preface of 1746. But what was his practice? To answer that question, we must watch Wesley at work, and there is no better place to look over his shoulder than in his discourses on the Sermon on the Mount. For Wesley waxed ecstatic about the Gospel of Matthew, chapters five through seven, saying: "This is the spirit of religion; the quintessence of it. These are indeed the fundamentals of Christianity." (20) He argued that at no other time or place did the Son of God "lay down at once the whole plan of his religion;" nowhere else did the Lord "give us a full prospect of Christianity." (21) Thus, it is appropriate for us to use Wesley's discourses on the Sermon on the Mount to test how closely he adhered to his own guidelines for biblical interpretation.

Wesley read in Matthew 5:1-2 that Jesus went up on the mountain, sat down, opened his mouth, and began to teach. And he commented, "Let us observe who it is that is here speaking, that we may 'take heed how we hear'." (22) In other words, he was asking, Who is the preacher? Unless we know something about him, we cannot decide what credence to give him. So Wesley offered this characterization of the preacher: "It is the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of all." (23) A few paragraphs later, when he was dealing with the authority of Jesus, he wrote: "It is something more than human; more than can agree to any created being. It speaks the Creator of all—a God, a God appears! Yea, the being of beings, Jehovah, the self-existent, the supreme, the God who is over all, blessed for ever!" (24) It is obvious that Wesley held a very high view
of Jesus—a view in which, as Albert Outler notes, he made a "direct correlation between the human Jesus and the Second Person of the Trinity." (25) That correlation cries out for analysis in terms of Wesley's hermeneutical guidelines. But before we subject Wesley's christology to such analysis, let us compare his approach to Jesus with that of Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States and, like Wesley, a citizen of the Age of Reason.

Jefferson handled the christological problem by designing a new context for the Sermon on the Mount. He did this twice—once during the winter of 1804 when he was in the White House, and again during the summer of 1820 while living in retirement at Monticello. (26) Each time he cut verses out of the four Gospels and pasted them onto the pages of a blank book. For example, in 1804 he used a selection of verses from the Gospels of John, Luke, and Matthew to create a new context for the moment when Jesus went up on the mountain, sat down, and began to preach the Sermon on the Mount.

Jefferson rejected Matthew's context for the Sermon, which is found in the closing verses of chapter four where Jesus is presented as a healer, and in the opening verses of chapter eight where he is again presented as a healer. And Jefferson composed his own context, beginning with the account in John 8:1-11 of the woman taken in adultery. To that account he attached the words from Matthew 18:15-17 about how to handle a brother who sins against you and the parable from Luke 13:6-9 concerning the man who was about to cut down an unproductive fig tree, when his servant persuaded him to give the tree a second chance. And then, having already placed Jesus
near the Mount of Olives by means of the first verse of the story of the adulteress, and having pictured Jesus—not as a healer, but as a man always ready to give others a second chance—Jefferson sent Jesus up into the mountain to preach his sermon. At the close of which the people were astonished by the authority with which Jesus taught them, and great multitudes followed him; whereupon, in Matthew's account, Jesus healed a leper. But Jefferson excised the leper and pasted in the vignette from Matthew 19:13–15 of Jesus rebuking his disciples for not suffering the little children to come unto him. (27)

Jefferson pasted together that new framework for the Sermon on the Mount because he did not want anyone to get the wrong idea about Jesus. Jesus was not a healer, not a miracle worker, not "a member of the god-head, or in direct communication with it." (28) Instead, in Jefferson's view, Jesus was the "first of human Sages," (29) who gave us "the outlines of a system of the most sublime morality which has ever fallen from the lips of man." (30) Jefferson was not prepared to trust others to read the New Testament and to draw their own conclusions about Jesus. Like Wesley, he was convinced that the creditability of the Sermon on the Mount depended upon the character of the preacher. Therefore, both Jefferson and Wesley sharply defined the character of Jesus—Jefferson, by placing the Sermon in a new framework, one from which he excised every hint that Jesus had been a divine healer; Wesley, by exclaiming, "a God, a God appears!"

That exclamation, equating the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount with "the being of beings," brings us back to Wesley's guidelines for inter-
interpreting the Bible. And we must ask, Did Wesley adhere to his own guidelines when he said that the pronoun "he" of Matthew 5:1-2 referred to "the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of all"?

Wesley's first guideline, as we have seen, was his question about how to land safe on heaven's happy shore. And it is obvious that his identification of the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount with the Second Person of the Trinity, was an answer to that question. To underscore his point Wesley wrote, "The Son of God, who came from heaven, is here (that is, in the Sermon on the Mount) showing us the way to heaven." (31) That answer accords well with Wesley's first guideline, but what about the fourth, the guideline in which he maintained the Bible must be taken literally? Where in Matthew, chapters five to seven, did Wesley find Jesus described as "the being of beings, Jehovah"? The answer, of course, is nowhere.

Therefore, remembering Wesley's fifth guideline, we must assume that a doubt arose in his mind as he pondered the pronoun "he" in Matthew 5:1-2—a doubt about the nature of Jesus. And we may assume he prayed about it. But we can make no assumptions about the christological insights that came to Wesley in prayer. All we can do is move on to his sixth guideline and attempt to follow him as he searched after and compared "parallel passages of Scripture."

Which passages did Wesley consider as he shaped his description of Jesus as "the Lord of heaven and earth"? It is harder to answer that question than it is to point to verses he ignored or forgot. But we can clearly
discern the influence of such verses as John 1:1-3—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." That passage may have been in Wesley's mind as he wrote that when Jesus opened his mouth, it was "the Lord of heaven and earth" who spoke. But did Wesley forget or close his mind to Philippians 2:5-7, where Paul said of Christ Jesus that "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." That fragment of an early Christian hymn, which is the basis for kenosis christology, does not appear to have been one of the parallels considered by Wesley when he dealt with his doubts about the pronoun "he" in Matthew 5:1-2. Rather, as Albert Outler has remarked, Wesley was in practice a monophysite. (32) He worked with a "direct correlation between the human Jesus and the Second Person of the Trinity." (33) And his only support for doing so, as far as I can see, was his seventh guideline, that of consulting "those who are experienced in the things of God." Yet he must have consulted a very select group within the ancient consensus—those who blurred the christological nuances. Wesley was not fastidious here in attending to "what has been believed by all, everywhere and always."

All of which means, I think, that when Wesley asked his first question about the Sermon on the Mount—his question about the preacher—he adhered only to his first guideline in framing his answer. Like Jefferson, he was so convinced that the creditability of the message was tied to the character of the messenger, that he refused to allow his readers to draw their
own conclusions about the authority of Jesus from what he said and how he said it. But unlike Jefferson, Wesley did not shuffle his deck of Bible verses. Instead, he read his whole christology—a monophysite-tinged christology—into the simple pronoun "he" of Matthew 5:1-2. And he did so on the basis of his quest for knowledge of how to land safe on heaven's happy shore, which was his first hermeneutical guideline. His other guidelines played at best supporting roles.

If Wesley failed to employ all his guidelines for biblical interpretation when he addressed the pronoun "he" in Matthew 5:1-2, did he proceed any more consistently when he turned to the pronoun "them" in Matthew 5:2? "We are naturally led," he wrote, "to observe whom it is that (Jesus) is here teaching." (34) And his observation was that it was "not the apostles alone," (35) in spite of the presence of the word "disciples" in Matthew 5:1. If Jesus had desired to teach only his disciples, "a room in the house of Matthew" (36) would have been adequate, Wesley reasoned. But since Jesus chose a mountain for his auditorium, he must have had a much larger auditory in mind. What auditory? Wesley asked, a doubt about the literal text now having popped up in his mind. Again we must assume he prayed for illumination, but it is impossible to assess which exegetical insights came to Wesley in prayer.

What we can assess is Wesley's use of his sixth guideline, that of searching after and comparing "parallel passages of Scripture." As he made those comparisons, he found references to "multitudes" in Matthew 4:25, 5:1, and 7:28. (37) Bringing together those references to "multitudes," Wesley
concluded that Jesus had not aimed his teachings in the Sermon on the Mount at a small inner circle of disciples. And Wesley would have rested easy with that conclusion, if he had not been aware of what other persons "experienced in the things of God" had written about the limited applicability of the Sermon's precepts. But he was aware of the tradition of the "counsels of perfection," which held that the Sermon's precepts were to be taken with utter seriousness by only a select few—those who, by taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, would commit themselves to being perfect as their "Father which is in heaven is perfect." (38)

Responding to that tradition, Wesley articulated a hermeneutical guideline that he did not mention in his Preface of 1746, one which clearly reveals him to be a man of the Age of Reason. This guideline hinges on the word restriction. Wesley asked, Does the reason of the passage under consideration require that its literal meaning be restricted? "If it does," he said, "it must be on one of these two accounts: because without such a restriction the discourse would either be apparently absurd, or would contradict some other Scripture." (39) In other words, there are two possible reasons for placing the literal import of a passage on hold. One is that when parallel passages of Scripture contradict each other, one or several of them must have their literal meaning restricted. The other is that the literal thrust of a text must be restrained if obviously it would be absurd to take it literally.

Having formulated that eighth guideline, Wesley went on to apply it to the tradition of the "counsels of perfection." Is there any reason, he asked,
for restricting the demands of the Sermon on the Mount to a small group of persons who have taken particular vows? No, Wesley replied, "there is no absurdity at all in applying all which our Lord hath here delivered to all mankind." (40) So Wesley concluded that the pronoun "them" in Matthew 5:2 referred to the "multitudes" mentioned in 4:25, 5:1, and 7:28. And he deduced from the word "multitudes" itself that Jesus was pointing what he said in the Sermon on the Mount to "all the children of men, the whole race of mankind." (41)

Here then, said Wesley, in the Sermon on the Mount, is a chart for all persons who desire to sail through life and land on heaven's happy shore. It is accurate, for the Cartographer is the "Lord of heaven and earth." Take it literally, follow it implicitly, unless a doubt arises in your mind. Then pray, and compare the map's various shipping lanes, and consult the writings of experienced travelers. And finally, if your reasoning suggests you are headed for a barrier reef, place brackets around that shipping lane on your map.

Wesley appears to have reasoned that he was obliged to pen in such brackets when he came to Matthew 5:42 - "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." As Wesley read that injunction, he must have sensed that he had boxed himself in by insisting that "all the parts" of the Sermon on the Mount "are to be applied to men in general or no part." (42) He had made that sweeping assertion, as we have seen, to counter proponents of the "counsels of perfection." But now, as Wesley pondered Jesus' command to give to those who ask of you, he must have wondered whether supporters of the "counsels of perfection" did not have a point.
How was Wesley to apply Matthew 5:42 to his Methodist people—people who only recently had formed habits of industry and thrift? Wesley simply could not tell such people to take Matthew 5:42 literally; that would be absurd. He knew the world well enough to know that it takes advantage of openhanded people. So Wesley turned to his eighth guideline, the one that called for restricting the literal meaning of a text if, "without such a restriction the discourse would...be apparently absurd." He imposed a restriction by attaching this condition to the words of Jesus: "Only give not away that which is another man's, that which is not thine own." (43)

Wesley's reasoning moved, after attaching that condition, something like this. Jesus told us to give to those who ask of us. But I, Wesley, say to you, you must not give away anything that does not belong to you. Therefore, follow these guidelines when anyone tries to make a touch. First, "Take care to owe no man anything. For what thou owest is not thy own, but another man's." (44) In other words, if the money in your pocket really belongs to someone else, you are not at liberty to drop it in the tin cup held out to you with imploring eyes. But which people have first claim on your money? Why, said Wesley, "those of thine own household. This also God hath required of thee: and what is necessary to sustain them in life and godliness is also not thine own." (45) So if you give to the beggar money that is needed to support your family, you are disbursing money that belongs to someone else. Finally, Wesley said, "give or lend all that remains from day to day, or from year to year: only first, seeing thou canst not give or lend to all, remember the household of faith." (46) That approach is vintage Wesley, carefully reasoned, pragmatic, the balanced approach of a man of the Age of Reason. But while it
is vintage Wesley, is it vintage Jesus? And how significantly does Wesley's way of restricting the meaning of a biblical passage differ from Jefferson's way of doing it?

Jefferson was troubled by Matthew 5:48 - "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." So he restricted it in 1820 by cutting it out of his Bible. Then for it he substituted Luke 6:36 - "Be ye, therefore, merciful, as your Father also is merciful." (47) Wesley, too, must have had doubts about Matthew 5:48. But instead of cutting it out of his Bible, he restricted it by making only passing references to it in his discourses on the Sermon on the Mount. (48) And when he came to it in his Notes on the New Testament, he restricted it by substituting his own translation for that which is found in the King James Version - "Therefore ye shall be perfect, as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." He made that substitution, arguing that the Greek pointed to a future indicative, not to an imperative. (49) Wesley's argument finds scant support among Greek scholars, but it is in accord with a second hermeneutical guideline that he did not mention in his Preface of 1746.

This guideline was Wesley's notion of "covered promises," by which he meant that he could look at the same words and understand them as either command or promise, law or gospel. "Yea," said Wesley, "the very same words, considered in different respects, are parts both of the law and of the gospel. If they are considered as commandments, they are parts of the law: if as promises, of the gospel. Thus, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,'
when considered as a commandment, is a branch of the law; when regarded as a promise, is an essential part of the gospel—the gospel being no other than the commands of the law proposed by way of promises." (50) Therefore, Wesley could see Matthew 5:48 as a command to love God with all one's heart and as a promise that one will love God with all one's heart. Which is quintessential Wesleyan theology; which also is a restriction imposed on the literal meaning of the text, even if it is less radical than Jefferson's approach of cutting Matthew 5:48 out of his Bible. And it brings us to the point of asking what we have seen as we have watched Wesley at work interpreting the Sermon on the Mount.

What we have seen is a man who, in theory at least, gave primacy to Scripture. In theory Wesley could never have joined Jefferson in a project of cutting out Bible verses and pasting together a personal version of the Scriptures. Yet in practice Wesley did impose restrictions on the biblical text. So we must ask ourselves whether Wesley and Jefferson differed radically; and if so, what were the grounds for their differences.

Each man took the Bible, not some other book, as the fundamental guide for his life. So both Wesley and Jefferson granted primacy to Scripture. But each of them imposed restrictions on the biblical text as he found it—restrictions that appear to have come from somewhere outside the Bible itself. So we must look for the sources from which Jefferson and Wesley drew their ways of defining the canon and shaping the message of Scripture.
Perhaps one source was each man's reflections on his personal experience. Jefferson turned to the Bible with a question raised by his experience as a politician. His political opponents said he could not be trusted because of his unorthodox beliefs about Jesus. Those criticisms were so strident and the party strife so fierce, that Jefferson began to look for a set of moral guidelines on which he and his opponents could agree. His search took him to the Bible, where he asked, Does the Bible offer a guide for living, better than any other moral guide ever offered, on which orthodox and unorthodox alike can agree? And his answer was yes, the Bible offers the Sermon on the Mount as "the central point of Union in religion, and the stamp of genuine Christianity," giving "us all the precepts of our duties to one another." (51) In that answer Jefferson granted a measure of limited primacy to Scripture—limited because his experience of controversy over his beliefs about Jesus led him, as we have seen, to cut out all references to the divinity of Jesus. So when Jefferson approached the Bible for an answer to the question posed by his experience of partisan strife, he shaped the message he received in a manner suggested by the same strife.

Wesley's way of shaping the biblical message was not dissimilar. But whereas Jefferson's political experience caused him to turn to the Bible for a guide to life on earth, Wesley's experience of a tightness about his spirit caused him to turn to the Bible for a route to a roomier place. One gets the impression that the words he addressed to "Men of Reason and Religion" reflect his own experience as a man of reason and religion. "You seek happiness;" Wesley told them, "but you find it not. You come no nearer it with all your
labours...Indeed, what is there on earth which can long satisfy a man of understanding? His soul is too large for the world he lives in. He wants more room." (52) Wesley found the world too cramped for his soul. So he turned to the Bible seeking for the route to a roomier place. And he found a promise there of heavenly spaciousness, along with guidance for how to land safe on heaven's happy shore. Like Jefferson, he made his discovery in the Sermon on the Mount. But unlike Jefferson, Wesley did not drain the preacher of that sermon of the last ounce of divinity. Rather, because he believed that only someone who had come from heaven could show the way to heaven, Wesley poured into the text the ardent spirits of monophysite christology.

Therefore, the primacy that Wesley and Jefferson yielded to Scripture was a primacy shaped by experience—each man's personal experience. That primacy also was defined by the confidence Wesley and Jefferson reposed in their reasoning powers. Jefferson's confidence was sweeping. He thought the true sayings of Jesus were "as easily distinguishable" from the additions made by "the unlettered apostles" as diamonds are distinguishable "in a dunghill." (53) No hesitancy there! Only sheer confidence in his rational ability to separate the diamonds of Jesus' true sayings from the dung in which they fell—the dung of what was added to them by "the unlettered apostles, the Apostolic fathers, and the Christians of the 1st. century." (54)

It is Jefferson's confidence in his powers of reason that begins to reveal the commitments that caused Jefferson and Wesley to differ in their
approaches to Scripture. Jefferson trusted his own mind. Wesley was not about to trust anything as new as his own mind. Whatever "is new," he argued, "must be wrong; for the old religion is the only true one; and no doctrine can be right unless it is the very same 'which was from the beginning'." (55) Wesley turned back, back to that "which was from the beginning," for his view of what constituted Scripture. He accepted the constitution of the canon as it was defined by Christian antiquity. Within that acceptance he did his work as a biblical interpreter, always trying to conform his views to what had "been believed by all, everywhere and always." Even when he deviated from the ancient consensus on what the Bible meant, he paid tribute to it by using the biblical canon that was established by tradition to correct the errors of that same tradition.

So the point at which Wesley and Jefferson differed radically was where they defined that "which was from the beginning." Jefferson trusted his own mind—and the minds of the biblical scholars he admired, such as Joseph Priestley—to take him back beyond the beginning as Wesley defined "the beginning." For Wesley would go back no farther than the time in church history when the canon was settled. That settlement settled the question of Scripture for him. God's Book was the book handed to him by Christian antiquity, by tradition. "O give me that book!" he cried. "I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me." With that knowledge Wesley might make adjustments in the ancient doctrinal consensus. But he did not make the adjustments in the canon itself that Jefferson thought himself qualified to make. Wesley did not cut up the ancient canon and paste together a modern one. As Albert
Outler reminds us, Wesley "had no 'canon within the canon'." (56) Jefferson, on the other hand, did have a canon within the canon—his own Scriptures extracted from the four Gospels. And he could establish his own Bible because he had made no commitment to the ancient Christian consensus. Indeed, he denigrated that consensus, speaking of it as "the artificial vestments" in which the teachings of Jesus "have been muffled by priests, who have travestied them into various forms." (57) Unlike Wesley, Jefferson had no hesitancy about hurrying his mind back beyond the beginning as Wesley understood "the beginning"—back beyond the canon to the time when Jesus spoke, and persons remembered his words and started to record them. "We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists," Jefferson insisted, "select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus." (58)

That phrase, "the very words only of Jesus," lays bare the radical difference between Jefferson and Wesley. Wesley said that the very words of Jesus were the words given to him in the Scriptural canon that had been defined by the ancient Christian consensus. Jefferson saw that consensus as a perversion of much that Jesus actually said and did, and he trusted his own intelligence to pick out the diamonds of the authentic words and deeds of Jesus from the traditional dung in which they had come down to him.

All of which leads me to conclude that we must not be misled by the role people say they assign to the Bible. Both Jefferson and Wesley assigned its primacy as the fundamental guide for their lives. Where they differed was in the tradition they adhered to in defining which writings were Scriptural. Jefferson, along with Priestley and others, was shaping a new tradition—
that was going back beyond the early Christian consensus on the canon, back to
	he historical Jesus. Wesley held fast to the old tradition of stopping with
the canon as it was constituted by Christian antiquity. And there he heard
"the being of beings, Jehovah, the self-existent, the supreme," telling him
how to land safe on heaven's happy shore.
NOTES

2. ibid., pp. 104f., line 31 to line 2
3. ibid., p. 105, lines 2ff.
4. ibid., p. 105, lines 4ff.
5. ibid., p. 183, line 1
6. ibid., p. 105, lines 6ff.
7. Robert Emory, History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, Lane and Sandford, 1844; pp. 49f.
8. Outler, op. cit., pp. 105f., line 8 to line 2
11. ibid., line 4
12. ibid., lines 8-11
13. ibid., p. 473, note 22
16. ibid., pp. 58f.
17. ibid., p. 324, lines 2-6
18. ibid., note 47
19. ibid., p. 106, line 13
20. ibid., p. 530, lines 20f.
21. ibid., p. 473, lines 20f.
22. ibid., p. 470, lines 1f.
23. ibid., lines 2f.
24. ibid., p. 474, lines 21-25
25. ibid., p. 470, note f


27. ibid., pp. 71-79

28. ibid., p. 333

29. ibid., p. 369

30. ibid., p. 388


32. ibid., note f

33. ibid.

34. ibid., p. 471, lines 17f.

35. ibid., line 18

36. ibid., lines 19f.

37. ibid., lines 25-32; ochloi, crowds, multitudes

38. ibid., p. 472, note 20; Matthew 5:48

39. ibid., pp. 472f., line 30 to line 3

40. ibid., p. 473, lines 4ff.

41. ibid., p. 472, lines 2f.

42. ibid., p. 473, lines 8f.

43. ibid., p. 528, lines 14f.

44. ibid., lines 16f.

45. ibid., lines 17-20

46. ibid., lines 20ff.

47. Adams, op. cit., p. 153

48. Outler, *Sermons I*, p. 530, lines 7f. and 30; p. 550, where Wesley simply fails to list Matthew 5:48, and other verses, for interpretation

49. ibid., p. 472, note 20
50. ibid., p. 554, lines 9-16
51. Adams, op. cit., p. 414
53. Adams, op. cit., p. 352
54. ibid.
55. Outler, Sermons I, p. 324, lines 8-11
56. ibid., p. 58
57. Adams, op. cit., p. 352
58. ibid.