

PURITAN POOR AND WESLEYAN POOR

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In an early discussion with Dick Heitzenrater about the topic of the Institute this year, I was led to ask a series of questions: "How did the Puritans treat the poor? What did they do about the situation of the poor among themselves? How does their treatment compare with Wesley's concern for and treatment of the poor?" The next question was, of course, "Where does one go to discover answers to such questions?" Answering this last question led me beyond the confines of theological investigation into studies of British economic and social history. There I was overwhelmed by the remarkable wealth of secondary materials on English seventeenth and eighteenth social history. Topics in these fields have been researched thoroughly and continuously for decades. Information was obviously not going to be a problem!

However, time to prepare the paper and resources for travel to collections allowed for very little primary research. Secondary sources were far too numerous for anything but a very limited search into what had now become for me an absorbing inquiry. So the paper which follows is offered to you simply as my preliminary discoveries--a beginning inquiry into a broad and fascinating topic. As in most such research, questions are easy to raise but answers often lead to more questions and frequently answers are partial at best so the study has proved to be an significant but open-ended learning experience for me.

PATTERNS OF PURITANISM

The positive and negative labels we humans create to categorize our neighbors often tell us as much about ourselves as they tell others about those to whom we attach the labels. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the use of the nickname "Puritan" among Englishmen could easily be as complimentary as derogatory. Who used the word and how it was used often revealed as much about the speaker or writer as it did about the one labeled with the tag. It might suggest *purifying* of church polity and governance, *purity* of religious and theological opinions, *modifying* the character of the state, or *pure* moral teachings and practice.¹ Whether one agreed with or resisted such positions determined a Puritan's positive or negative character. The label referred to persons of a great variety of opinions, concerns, and motivations drawn from all factions and classes of the society. In the course of the centuries the word became so widely used and for so many purposes that definitive definition isn't really possible.

For the purposes of our study, however, we need to identify two major groups to whom the title was attached. First, the economically rising merchant, gentry and artisan class who, attracted by Calvinistic theological instruction, sought to continue the earlier Reformers purification of the English church and ultimately the nation. Many among these merchants experienced a significant rise in economic independence along side their reformist theological interests. Acquisition of economic power meant participation in the political process and a new

social status which helped mold their understanding of themselves and others within the society.

The second group of Puritans important for our inquiry arose among the poor, often victims of the changing and expanding economy which aggrandized the merchant and artisan class. Although without social and economic position, many in this group found in the Reformation patterns of the gospel hope and assurance not present in their normal lives. Here were many who, freed by the reforms of the previous century to read the scriptures, found in Jesus' teachings invigorating concepts of human dignity, worth and freedom. Concepts which when employed to question economic and political traditions threatened to "turn the world upside down."²

As we shall see, each of these Puritan groups suggested radically different solutions to poverty and its attendant problems. Yet, the contrasting religious, economic and political programs of each should not blind us to their central agreement: the problems of the English society of their day demanded nothing less than major cultural change when faced with teachings of the gospel.

A FLUCTUATING BUT PERMANENT UNDERCLASS

England from feudal times experienced an inequitable distribution of wealth resulting in the consistent presence of a "poor," or poverty stricken, class of people who enjoyed few if any economic or political rights and possibilities. The situation of this group changed from century to century as the economic and political fortunes of the country shifted. From the sixteenth century until the modern day the political, religious, and social leaders of the nation have sought to relieve the consequences of poverty. Causes have been analyzed, responsibility assigned and programs of relief instituted. Nevertheless, poverty continued to be a major social difficulty as it has in most western nations. The causes of poverty, programs of relief, and the motivations for alleviating it vary greatly from period to period.

On the eve of the seventeenth century (1597) causes of poverty were listed by a contemporary as:

- (i) excessive luxury expenditure, leading to the racking of rents and sale of lands; (ii) and (ix) excessive consumption of food by the rich, leading to scarcity and high prices; (iii) oppressive landlords; (iv) usury; (v) cornering of corn and holding out for high prices; (vi) wasting of substance at law; (vii) gambling; (viii) breaking up of households, unnecessary dismissals of servants and apprentices; (x) failure to execute the poor law.³

Among these reasons several point to major cultural changes arising from sixteenth century reforms. Henry VIII's closure of the monasteries and sale of their lands created new patterns of land proprietorship. One consequence of redistribution was the loss of property rights and privileges for many who worked the land.⁴ At a later stage of this development the expense of maintaining great manor households led many of landowners to "break up" estates, again forcing peasants and servants off the land. In addition to these problems, a traditional source of poor relief, alms distributed to the poor through the monasteries, was lost with the closing of the abbeys and monasteries. Responding to this loss Henry forbade alms-giving except through church collections which were then distributed through the parish church. This pattern was

systematized and expanded by the end of the century into a Poor Law requiring all parishes to care for their poor through the resources raised by a poor tax. Enforcement of these laws, as the quote above indicates, was never consistent through the counties.

Changing patterns of cultivating the land also contributed to the disenfranchisement of villagers. An expanding cloth trade demanded a steady supply of sheep. Farming lands traditionally held by villagers in common were fenced or enclosed in the later years of the sixteenth century. The practice was extended to facilitate new and more productive methods of crop production through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries even though often criticized and occasionally officially resisted. An ever rising need for land also brought deforestation and draining of marshes further contributing to the difficulties of large sections of the population.⁵ For the poor the results were the same--the lose of ability to sustain oneself and one's family.

These cultural changes plus the self-centeredness of the rich noted in the causes listed above make it easy to empathize with the plight of the poor during the Puritan period. It will be shown, however, that the situation of the poor could also be interpreted quite differently by Puritan leaders.

Turning to the eighteenth century and inquiring about causes of poverty in this period, we are not surprised to find many of the same trends now enlarged by the continuing economic expansion of England both at home and in international markets. The growth of enclosure only worsened the difficulty of many. The mercantilism which called forth the industrial revolution at the end of the century lead to a widely fluctuating wage labor dependency. Employment when it was obtained was often not stable. Effective labor laws were still in the future so low wages, long hours, employment of women and children all contributed to the difficulties of the poor.

In 1773 when supplies of foodstuffs ran low John Wesley ventured to offer his insights into the reasons for the difficulties and his suggested solutions for the problem in a tract entitled "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions." Wesley begins by suggesting the central problem was unemployment because there is no "vent for their[the usual employers] goods" since food was so expensive.⁶ Bread-corn was expensive because "immense quantities of corn are continually consumed by distilling."⁷ The breeding of horses in place of beef and mutton not only raised the price of meat but also the price of oats and other grains.⁸ "The land which was some years ago divided between ten and twenty little farmers, and enabled them comfortably to provide for their families, is now generally engrossed by one great farmer."⁹ Such monopoly of farms meant that pork, poultry and eggs normally raised by individual farmers were no longer produced resulting in high prices for what was available. In the "kitchens of the great, the nobility and gentry" one might also observe great waste of food.¹⁰ Luxury and art accounted for high prices. Because prices had risen gentlemen raised rents so farmers were forced to raise prices.¹¹ Finally, prices were high because of taxes: "I have heard that the national expense, seventy years ago, was, in time of peace, three millions a year. And now the bare interest of the public debt amounts yearly to above four millions! to raise which, with the other expenses of government, those taxes are absolutely necessary."¹² Wesley can then sum up the problems as "distilling, taxes, and luxury."

The tract, not surprisingly, reiterates many of the causes of poverty listed in the 1597 document quoted above. Luxury, rising rents, monopoly, excessive consumption by the rich, and changing agricultural patterns were common causes of poverty in either century. The usury of the

earlier time was replaced by taxes in Wesley's period. The plight of the poor remained the same and was often caused by the same or very similar economic and social forces.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POOR AMONG MERCHANT AND GENTLEMEN PURITANS

Puritan leaders drawn from the gentry, merchants and artisan groups were often educated, newly wealthy, politically and ecclesiastically well connected representatives of the established social order. While their theology and politics led them to seek major change in contemporary political and ecclesiastical systems they carried with them traditional social perceptions. Their understandings of the place, position, and value of various segments of the society, particularly the poor, were slow to be modified by their Puritan ideas.

Englishmen, including the Puritans, expected the general citizenry through their largess and charitable nature to provide for the poor who could not care for their own needs. Before the reforms of the sixteenth century monasteries, parish churches, and private individuals carried this responsibility without government involvement. Pressures on this voluntary system became intense after the reforms for several reasons. The secularization of monastery and other ecclesiastical properties resulted in a general rise in prices. The removal of the monasteries from the charities system and strain on private giving brought on by higher prices ultimately led to a break down in patterns of giving for a growing number of poor. The Poor Rate tax designed to relieve the situation created new circumstances for the poor. In this new arrangement attitudes toward charity and toward the poor themselves began to shift. The poor found themselves dependent upon the government in what was at best a faulty system dependent upon the whims and prejudices of local government and parish leaders. Since taxes to sustain the poor were imposed generally and funds, however inadequate, were through this source guaranteed, many who might normally give for the poor no longer saw the necessity for alms. Charitable giving was sustained, particularly among Puritans, but now took on rather different purposes.

Protestantism from its beginning put great emphasis upon the responsibility of the individual and at the same time insisted that Christians care for those who were unable to care for themselves. Beggars, vagabonds, and the purely lazy were classed as irresponsible and therefore reprehensible. Luther along with other reformers classified beggars with monks and friars--idle and unproductive.¹³ English Puritans, following this tradition, emphasized God's call of all persons into a vocation, usually this meant a vocation where one would be gainfully productive. Puritan participation in the developing capitalism of the time only collaborated this need for productivity. Persons unwilling to work or lazy were obviously rejecting the teachings of Christ. William Perkins states the case succinctly:

It is a foul disorder in any commonwealth that there should be suffered rogues, beggars, vagabonds; for such kind of persons commonly are of no civil society or corporation, nor of any particular church. . . .To wander up and down from year to year to this end, to seek and procure bodily maintenance, is no calling, but the life of a beast; and consequently a condition or state of life flat against the rule, that every one must have a particular calling. And therefore the Statute made the last Parliament[1597] for the restraining of beggars

and rogues is an excellent statute, and being in substance the very law of God, is never to be repealed.¹⁴

Perkins expresses here the general attitude toward the beggar among the merchant and gentry Puritans. To give indiscriminately to these or to support them through the poor tax was often equated with sin.

On the other hand, Puritans were intensely conscious of the plight of the poor who were left unemployed by the economic and agricultural changes of the time and those whose infirmities would not allow them to sustain themselves. Charity for these was a real concern. We see that concern collaborated when we note that the counties which supported the Parliament in the civil war provided a more careful administration of the poor law than many other counties.¹⁵

Nevertheless, these two understandings of the sources of poverty meant merchant and gentry Puritans generally divided the poor into two distinct classes one of which they were willing to help and one which they were likely to condemn.

To alleviate the difficulties of the impotent poor, Puritans, along with many others, generously gave vast sums. In the closing days of the sixteenth century and the beginning decades of the seventeenth the country experienced unprecedented economic expansion and accumulation of wealth. Wealthy merchants began to establish endowments with a variety of missions. Many of them had as their purpose the amelioration of the situation of the poor. W.K. Jordan's detailed studies of the charities of England states that in London alone some forty percent of charitable gifts during the period from 1600-1640 established endowments for the direct household relief of the poor.¹⁶ Many of these took the form of endowments administered through city parish churches. Almshouses where the poor could find shelter and be taken off the streets had been founded from an early period but received generous endowment by Puritan merchants.¹⁷

Establishment of trusts for the assistance of prisoners, particularly those imprisoned for debt, brought needed relief. Hospitals for the care of the poor were established early during the Reformation period and gained substantial support in the post-Reformation period through charitable endowments.¹⁸

While direct support to the poor by Puritans was substantial they were particularly interested in schemes "designed to afford opportunities for the social rehabilitation of poor and ignorant men."¹⁹ Among these were endowments for the support of apprenticeships; loan funds including direct loans for emergencies as well as loans to be put out at interest or to be worked off, the latter sometimes only available to young men wishing to become tradesmen or merchants.²⁰ Strategies aimed at providing jobs for the poor were popular. Richard Stock clearly states the widely held Puritan sentiment concerning the necessity of work, "This is the best charity so to relieve the poor as we keep them in labor. It benefits the giver to have them labor, it benefits the commonweal to suffer no drones, nor to nourish any in idleness; it benefits the poor themselves."²¹

Puritan appreciation for education led them to be particularly interested in schooling as a means of overcoming poverty. Examples of this concern are many. William Jones, a prominent London merchant, in 1616 left a large endowment for the establishment of a grammar school capable of handling 100 students.²² Robert Lever, another London merchant, provided for such a school at Bolton-le-Moor, Lancashire.²³ Recent study by Valerie Pearl has provided an instructive

account of an interesting Interregnum experiment to provide work and instruction for poor children in London. Under a Corporation of the Poor created in 1649, two workhouses were established to educate the children and train them for productive trades. Although disbanded at the Restoration they were successful while they existed.²⁴ The Dissenting academies of the post-Revolutionary period, founded in greatly different circumstances and for somewhat different reasons, were anticipated in these early Puritan school foundations.

Puritan admiration of discipline sometimes enticed them to stipulate in their charities means of imposing their ideas and patterns upon the poor. Sir James Lancaster, Puritan merchant and explorer, provided “thirty pounds for the relief of the poor of Basingstoke who should attend the distinctly Puritan lectures he had founded there.”²⁵ Some Puritan church wardens also withheld relief from those who failed to attend services.²⁶ One must wonder how the destitute and hungry poor must have felt about these measures.

The well intentioned charity of merchant Puritans no doubt helped many of the poor. The design of much Puritan strategy to improve or eliminate poverty was also helpful to many, nonetheless these attempts only partially succeeded. The endowments, generous as they might be, were not sufficient to deal with the increasing numbers of poor. In the midst of these laudable efforts attitudes continued which depreciated the lot of the poor and openly condemned those who did not appropriate the Puritan work ethic. Such attitudes could hardly have ingratiated merchant Puritans among the poor themselves.

ATTITUDES TOWARD POVERTY AMONG THE PURITAN POOR

The disciplines of a watchful, charitable Puritan magistracy seeking to establish a holy commonwealth are seen by Michael Walzer as an attempt to return order, consistency and security to a world of anxiety, dissolution and disorder.²⁷ Revolutionaries themselves against a traditional order which no longer gave security, Puritans saw cultural and political discipline based on religious commitment as a means of restoring order to life, presently and eternally. Combined with their theological understanding of a vocation or call for each person in the society such discipline required that all be subservient to “masters.” Those who were willing to throw off their own political masters were quick to insist upon the necessity of mastery over the lower classes to ensure social stability. Vagabonds and such, the “masterless men” of the day, were a significant threat to discipline and vocation which provided security and, at least in some sense, illustrated salvation. “‘Masterless men’ are always the first products of the breakdown of tradition and the saints hardly thought such men were less dangerous than did their former masters. Without the experience of masterlessness, the Puritans are unimaginable.”²⁸

Christopher Hill describes the large group of “masterless men[and women]” among the population preceding and during the interregnum:

A masterless man was nobody’s servant: this could mean freedom for those who prized independence more than security. . . . Beneath the surface stability of rural England, the vast placid open fields which catch the eye was the seething mobility of the forest squatters, itinerant craftsmen and building labourers, unemployed and quack doctors, vagabonds, tramps: congregated especially in

London and the big cities, but also with footholds wherever newly-squatted areas escaped from the machinery of the parish or in old-squatted areas where labour was in demand. It was from this underworld that armies and ship's crew were recruited, that a portion at least of the settlers of Ireland and the New World were found, men willing to run desperate risks.²⁹

The disciplines of the Puritan merchants and gentry were at best only partially effective and often missed this large group of masterless persons.

Not all among the poor were masterless for many were found among the more traditional employments of servants and laborers. From this normally poor group and the masterless folk another form of Puritanism emerged. Representing a broad section of the culture with a variety of training, background, and interests there was little cohesion among this underside of society. It is in these subcultures of the society, however, that the religious ideas of freedom, equality, and direct spirituality flourished for in the gospel they could hope for more open possibilities.

Among these groups of poor people religious (and political) configurations fractured and multiplied into innumerable patterns, sometimes frightening patterns. They produced the "mechanick preacher," the roving evangelist, and the "prophet" so often seen by merchant and gentry Puritans as threatening to social and religious order.³⁰ It was here that personal reading of the scriptures led to new ideas of freedom and equality. It was here that the insistence upon personal contact with God could open one to significantly differing understandings of the "leading of the spirit." It was here that the radical movements of the period, both religious and political, found ready acceptance and therein created a very different pattern of Puritanism.

Among the variety of ideas and suggestions which arose among these groups several themes were unmistakable: 1) The "religion of the heart," tempered by congregational testing of its validity was valid in ways that "academic divinity" could never achieve.³¹ 2) Anyone, led by God, could preach; therefore limitations imposed by education, position, or training were often understood to be irrelevant. Lay mechanic preachers and writers, such as Bunyan, were clearly acceptable. 3) The gospel taught an equality of humanity that extended to all classes and people so choice of ministers and other leaders should be determined through "democratic" means. 4) Religious freedom, assumed by the concept of individual spiritual guidance, demanded toleration in doctrine and church governance. William Dell, New Model Army chaplain, stated the position clearly: "unity is Christian, uniformity antichristian" therefore "the variety of forms in the world is the beauty of the world."³² Another consequence of such freedom was an assumption that voluntary membership within a local congregation required support from the congregation not the state. Tithes for a state church were an unnecessary imposition. While some aspects of these concepts were shared by merchant and gentry Puritans of an Independent persuasion they often took a much more radical trajectory among the Puritan poor. The Leveller movement of the 1640's consisted largely of yeomen and craftsmen who asserted that the poor had a right to vote, to decide about the governance under which they would live. They were, therefore, critical of both King and Parliament, wanting to open enclosures, elect justices of the peace and sheriffs, eliminate the House of Lords, and generally open up the society for all. They would extend the democratization process, even though they did not support a universal franchise.³³ Quaker stress

upon the leadership of the “Inner Light” eliminated human distinctions and gave the poor personal confidence and equality among all humanity. Quaker insistence on equality arose from George Fox’s understanding of the direct spiritual experience of God’s spirit. Leveller attempts to equalize property rights were often justified as the teaching of the Gospels discovered through scripture reading. Even when they appeared to Puritan gentry as radical understandings of spirit and scripture, their arguments sounded very similar to justifications offered by the gentry when they sought different changes in the society.

Ranters constituted an unorganized radical fringe whose dependence upon the spirit sometimes led to heretical extremes approaching pantheism and spiritualism. Declaring that love made teaching of the law extraneous their patterns of behavior were often antinomian.³⁴

In 1649 a group of “Diggers” began to dig up commonland and wastelands claiming the right of all to the productivity of the land. Digger leader, Gerrard Winstanley, rejecting the concepts of property rights, declared: “He that works for another, either for wages or to pay him rent, works unrighteously; . . .but they that are resolved to work and eat together, making the earth a common treasury, doth join hands with Christ to lift up the creation from bondage, and restores all things from the curse.”³⁵ Winstanley and the Digger movement generally saw communal living as the only logical consequence of the gospel.

These few examples of more widely known Puritan fringe groups popular among the poor suggest that their solutions to the injustices of the religious establishment and the society were many and varied. Central to each was the incorporation of the poor in the governance of their religious and political lives and genuine improvement of their position economically and socially. Obviously, solutions offered differed substantially from those proposed and attempted by the merchant and gentry Puritans who dominated the revolution.

Oliver Cromwell worked in league with Leveller soldiers and others from the fringe groups in the early successes of the New Model Army. However, when it became clear during the army revolts of 1648-49 that Leveller ideas might threaten the men of property who had begun the revolution, Cromwell and his generals broke the power and influence of the Levellers in the army. This defeat and the use of the army against the Diggers in 1649 sealed the political fate of such movements. The Puritan poor lost their short lived freedom to experiment with new and radical concepts of the gospel and their own social situation. The ruling Puritan gentry suppressed the radical groups and slowly restored more traditional patterns of mastery and property.³⁶

Among the Puritans communities which survived the Restoration, Quakers and Baptists retained some of the religious patterns attractive to the Puritan poor. However, non-conformists who came from the gentry and merchant groups continued their traditional understanding and treatment of the poor into the eighteenth century. They successfully ministered to the poor only when they began to modify concepts which marginalized or depreciated the poor.

JOHN WESLEY AND THE POOR

John Wesley’s suggestions as to the causes of eighteenth century poverty noted above remind us that the reality of poverty and its consequent disabilities change little from century to century. By Wesley’s time many of the issues of the revolutionary sixteenth century had been settled: religious freedom was an accepted fact, the average Englishman enjoyed greater freedom

of employment and movement, a limited monarchy required more cooperative forms of government, and the innovative intellectual and scientific climate provided unanticipated opportunities and possibilities.

Nonetheless, relationships between the ruling, monied, successful merchant gentry; the craftsmen and shopkeepers; and the working poor remained much the same. The broad base of laboring poor who provided the underpinning of the society still suffered under numerous barriers to full participation in the community. Disenfranchised because they seldom owned property, their employment was often sporadic and brutally demanding. Living conditions in the industrializing towns were squalid making disease a constant treat. Among the gentry, attitudes toward the poor was little changed from earlier days. Although sometimes sympathetic to the plight of the legitimately unemployed, the poor were often seen as base, lazy, brutal people who cared too little to improve their situation. Apathy and lethargy were often found among the poor since prospects of changing their condition were dismal.

When we compare Wesley's attitudes and activities on behalf of the eighteenth century poor with what we have learned of Puritan treatment of the sixteenth and seventeenth century poor we find interesting similarities and significant differences. Perhaps a central and striking distinction was Wesley's personal perspective toward poverty and the poor. A gentleman by education and vocation, John Wesley's attitude toward poverty was exceptional among his peers. From at least the time of the Oxford Holy Club, Wesley and his colleagues endeavored to serve the poor not simply by sharing the gospel but seeking to understand and relieve their situation. This active participation in the life of the poor and their plight became a hallmark of Wesley's Christian faith and of the Methodism which developed from his witness. Early Methodism appealed to the poor because they found there a message of gospel grace *and* a non-condemnatory accepting spirit.

Manfred Marquardt suggests that Wesley's own attitude toward the poor and his work among them led to new attitudes "both among the affected poor and the higher strata of English society."³⁷ This perhaps is an overstatement of Wesley's influence, especially among the gentry, but Marquardt's comment correctly denotes the central place of Wesley's attitude toward the poor. Ted Jennings recent work, along with earlier studies, has convincingly shown us Wesley's identification with the poor.³⁸ Wesley's insistence on religion as a lived experience and his programmatic approach to any aspect of life guided him into intimate contact with the poor from an early stage in his ministry. Once such contact was made he was never to abandon the poor or to see them as others saw them. Clearly Wesley's and Methodism's identification with the poor was unusual and often unique during the eighteenth century. This identification also distinguishes him from the normal attitudes found among the merchant and gentry Puritans of the earlier centuries. Does such an attitude identify him with the patterns of the Puritan poor? Certainly not with some of their more radical political and social ideas, but his appreciation of the poor and their situation came from his ability to see their condition from their perspective, and because of this, to reject the attitudes of the gentry. His continual critiques of the rich sound much like similar criticism raised among the Puritan poor.³⁹

Wesley's active efforts to relieve or modify the situation of the poor are well known. In many cases they parallel programs and patterns established by merchant and gentry Puritans in earlier times. In others they are distinctively different.

In the transitions which surrounded charity in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritan gentry came to be particularly wary of indiscriminate giving to the poor. Joseph Hall, a bishop of Puritan sympathies, comments: "Thou art very poor: who made thee so? If thine own negligence, laziness, improvidence, unthriftiness, rash engagements, thou hast reason to bear that burden upon thine own shoulders."⁴⁰ Numerous barriers and tests were imposed to be sure that alms were deserved. Endowments for relief of the poor often imposed such restrictions.

Wesley, on the other hand, erected few barriers in his giving although he occasionally notes giving to the "diligent."⁴¹ Instructions to the societies, however, clearly point to giving where there is need without distinction, "whether they are good or bad, whether they fear God or not. . . never be ashamed to beg for the poor; yea, in this case, be an importunate beggar."⁴² Throughout his life Wesley raised alms for the poor and distributed these with few restrictions. The Oxford Methodists collected for the poor and a *Journal* entry of 1785 (when Wesley was eighty two years old!) illustrates the pattern:

At this season we usually distribute coals and bread among the poor of the society. But I now considered, they wanted clothes, as well as food. So on this, and the four following days, I walked through the town, and begged two hundred pounds, in order to clothe them that needed it most. But it was hard work, as most of the streets were filled with melting snow, which often lay ankle deep; so that my feet were steeped in snow-water nearly from morning to evening.⁴³

Wesley's active leadership set a lofty example among his followers. Henry Rack suggests that by his later years he was giving away some 1000 pounds per year of his own publication profits.⁴⁴

Wesley obviously did not share the wide spread Puritan suspicion of indiscriminate charity. His attitude toward and identification with poor hardly allowed for restrictions on giving nor would his theology have supported such.

In the poorer Methodist societies Wesley also instituted patterns of giving which amounted to the poor helping each other. By the simple expedient of asking every one to contribute a penny a week for a charitable fund Wesley encouraged each member to help others.⁴⁵ Charity did not depend upon one's income nor was one expected to be rich to participate. This feature of Methodism that again took into account the possibilities and perspectives of the poor. Although Puritans were insistent on charity, those who could afford to give were expected to carry the larger burden of poor relief.

Direct charity to needy poor was, however, only one feature of Wesley's practical efforts to relieve the conditions of poverty. In an attempt to care for immediate needs and to teach the poor to handle money, Wesley established an interest free loan fund or "lending stock".⁴⁶ At the Foundry Wesley experimented in establishing work programs when he could not find jobs for the unemployed.⁴⁷ Along with this experiment Wesley also founded a "poor house for destitute widows and children."⁴⁸ The poor were often imprisoned and so found themselves recipients of Methodist prison ministries. Wesley's publications describing the plight of the poor may also have contributed to prison reform.⁴⁹

From Oxford days Wesley regularly "visited the sick" and required his preachers to follow his lead along with organizing such visits among the societies members. London in the 1740's was

divided into districts with two society members each serving as visitors of the sick.⁵⁰ This direct involvement with the ill made him acutely conscious of the dismal medical situation of many, particularly the poor. Responding to these needs Wesley himself occasionally dispensed medicine and treated simple illnesses enlisting the aid of pharmacists and referring more serious cases to doctors.⁵¹ Perhaps the best known of his medical helps was his *Primitive Physic* published in many editions. Here were provided simple remedies and helps for his society members and the general public, especially the poor. As Jennings has shown us, Wesley's distrust of physicians may have added to his anxiousness to offer medical help to the uninformed and poor.⁵²

Each of these efforts to assist the poor provided significant help, but perhaps Wesley's most lasting and broad contribution to the betterment of the poor were his provisions for their education. This was done in several ways. A variety of schools were provided: day schools for boys and girls, orphanages which included education, and schools with a more advanced curriculum such as the widely known Kingswood School.⁵³ Day schools usually provided basic instruction while Kingswood became a school for the training of the children of itinerants and for the preparation of ministers. The poor were welcome in all of the schools for Wesley was convinced education was a path to responsibility and discipline through which all could enrich themselves and others. Wesley also encouraged Sunday Schools when they began to emerge late in his life.⁵⁴ The most lasting and perhaps most important educational benefits arose out of Wesley's life long publishing efforts. Through a vast array of writings, both original and borrowed from others, Wesley provided his followers instruction in faith and everyday living. He was convinced that all persons could, through reading, expand their faith and improve their Christian living whatever their personal circumstances. Books and pamphlets were provided at the lowest cost possible and when purchase was still not possible circulating libraries were established.

In his pragmatic efforts to meet needs where he found them John Wesley's endeavors on behalf of the poor were certainly similar to those initiated by the Puritans earlier. Schools, hospitals and medical treatments, loan funds, charitable funds, prison ministries, work programs, and "poor houses," were all familiar patterns of poor relief. In Wesley's case many of the efforts did not attain permanent establishment since he could not maintain each of them personally. Where they could be sustained through local leadership many succeeded for some years. Several of the schools were built on lasting foundations. Unlike the gentry and merchant Puritans, Methodists, at least through most of Wesley's life, did not have the resources to establish endowments to support these projects. Perhaps the most important Methodist distinction from the Puritan activities in these areas lies in the fact that Wesley's projects were formed among the poor and included the poor in their operation. They were not something done *for* the poor as often as they were done *with* the poor.

Ted Jennings has suggestively investigated Wesley's comments on the New Testament pentecostal church in which Christians held all material goods in common.⁵⁵ Wesley clearly was attracted by the concept and held it as an ideal pattern of Christian living. There were even a few experiments in the practice among Methodists. To that extent Wesley's views are similar to those found among the Diggers of the sixteenth century. However, it is doubtful, considering his usual political conservatism, that he would have approved of their attempt to change the social and economic fabric of the society through the creation of such communities. Wesley's interest in

communal living rose from his preoccupation with how to practically apply Gospel teachings. The Diggers' biblical quotations often have the ring of proof texting for political and economic ideas emanating from other sources.

RETROSPECT

This discussion of Wesley's identification with the poor and his efforts to alleviate poverty and its effects, has not commented on what Max Weber understood to be Wesley's close identification with Puritan emphasis upon conduct. For Weber the stress upon calling and discipline in both movements resulted in a "worldly asceticism" whereby labor became a calling for the common person and acquisition had the same characteristics for the business manager. According to Weber such understandings resulted in the accumulation of capital and therefore wealth--a capitalistic spirit.⁵⁶ Weber's thesis has certainly been questioned but he points to an important reality.⁵⁷

The patterns of personal discipline, thrift, work, and calling taught by the Puritans and Wesley resulted in raising many of the craftsmen and artisans among them into economic independence and sometimes wealth. The more responsible merchant and gentry Puritan theologians worked out a "careful casuistry" which allowed them to accept these successes without claiming them as God's favor or as rewards for righteous works.⁵⁸ Their extensive charity was understood to be an obligation of their own salvation as well as a fruit of their wealth. The more radical of the Puritan poor questioned these explanations but their experience was very different and some of them experienced the same phenomenon.

Wesley's growing anxiety in his later years about the wealth being accumulated by diligent Methodists is well known.⁵⁹ In spite of Wesley's continual warnings about the dangers of riches and his admonitions to give generously of their profits, Methodists appear, like to Puritans before them, to have rationalized their new situation. Ted Jennings suggests that Wesley "failed" in his teachings because he provided "Hedges and Qualifications" which allowed Methodists to justify accumulation of goods and money.⁶⁰ When these "hedges" are examined they turn out to be conventional truths. Wesley recognizes that money in itself is not bad; only the misuse of it is to be condemned, good uses are to be accepted and praised. Riches *are* dangerous, they can indeed lead one into false dependence and selfishness. Maintenance of oneself and one's family requires responsible use and retention of some of one's earnings; one must take "some thought" in caring for oneself and for one's business. These are the same truths that gave content to Puritan casuistry; they are true even if they can be and often were misunderstood and misused. In the hands of Wesley and more conscientious Puritans they were carefully guarded and their dangers are clearly noted. Whether Wesley is to be judged as a failure because of their misuse among Methodists we will leave for others to decide, but it is clear that his teachings on the use of money correspond to those of many Puritan theologians. His distrust of riches may be more pronounced than the Puritans but the general teachings are similar.

Along side these teachings, or perhaps underneath as Jennings suggests, Wesley's critique of riches, his identification with the poor and his insistence upon giving "all that you can" so that every person shares in the fruit of diligent labor imply a substantially different picture of Christian life. One in which human distinctions whether based on money, position or education are

irrelevant. One in which sharing is synonymous with living. A life grounded in grace. This image of life does indeed correspond more closely to concepts and ideas fostered by the groups of Puritans I have called the "Puritan poor." These Puritans sought to modify the inequalities of the economic system, had little use for the distinctions of place and position, insisted on sharing, and tenaciously held to their freedom of conscience. Again Wesley would not have supported their radical political ideas but was certainly sympathetic with many of their concepts.

One studying Wesley should not be surprised to discover this investigation demonstrating his endorsement of two contrasting patterns which produced among Puritans substantially different parties. After all, his theology holds in creative tension faith and works, tradition and experience, scripture and reason. His eclecticism, particularly in publishing, more than once carried him into tension filled positions. Jennings may be correct in suggesting Wesley's followers could not sustain the tension and succumbed to the siren song of wealth, but for Wesley this was not the case. He tenaciously taught the disciplines of holiness *expecting* that as holiness grasped love and its equality it would be guarded against the dangers produced by the successes of discipline. That others could not sustain the tension such a position imposes should not take away from Wesley's vision.

E.D. Thompson in his *The Making of the English Working Class* comments on some of the consequences such tensions produced among late eighteenth and nineteenth century Methodists. Thompson points out that, among Methodists, democratic ideas of equality and self determination were building in Wesley's last years. Within a decade of Wesley's death Alexander Kilham, acting on these principles, led a secession forming the Methodist New Connection. The Primitive Methodists followed early in the nineteenth century. "Throughout the whole period of the Industrial Revolution, Methodism never overcame this tension between authoritarian and democratic tendencies."⁶¹ According to Thompson, a tradition of conservative disciplined authoritarian Methodism, represented by Jabez Bunting, emerged in the Wesleyan Conference while a more democratic, individualist and egalitarian Methodism was represented by the secessionist groups. Whether Thompson's analysis is fair to the dynamics of nineteenth century Methodism may be questioned, but it does paint an intriguing picture of Methodist groups. One that bears amazing similarity to what I discovered to be present among the seventeenth century Puritans; a merchant and gentry Puritanism supporting traditional patterns of authority and Puritan poor groups exemplifying more egalitarian, democratic ideals which embrace the poor.

Perhaps then it is true that Wesley's vision of a disciplined holiness which could grasp both success *and* sharing along with authority *and* individual self-reliance could not be sustained among his followers. Nevertheless, the two sides of the equation were not totally lost among Methodists. They may have been maintained in distinct groups as Thompson suggests. More often, it appears to me, the vision is still reflected in the significant social consciousness of Methodists around the world which never seems to die even when it is burdened down by the husks of convention, wealth, self-centeredness, and bureaucracy in the modern church. We still live with the tension, perhaps poorly, but it *is* present. Patterns and attitudes toward poverty which manifested themselves in two clearly distinguishable Puritan groups are still held in uneasy and often disturbing union among modern Methodists.

FOOTNOTES

1. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, (New York, Schocken Books, 1964), p. 20. The many uses of Puritan is discussed in detail by Hill in this chapter.
2. Henry Denne, *Grace, Mercy and Peace* (1645) quoted in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 11.
3. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 262
4. G.M. Trevelyan suggests that the dissolution of the monasteries and the enclosure movements were perhaps not so immediately devastating to the people of the land as contemporaries and historians have sometimes claimed, yet the changes, even if driven by other economic policies and developments, ultimately brought major agrarian change. See *English Social History* (New York, David McKay Co., 1965). pp. 116-123.
5. Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603-1714* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961, p. 18-20.
6. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson(14 vols.; London, Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872)[Hereafter noted as *Works*(Jackson)], XI, p. 54.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
8. *Ibid.* p. 55-56.
9. *Ibid.* p. 56.
10. *Ibid.* p. 56-57.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
13. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, pp. 271-74.
14. William Perkins, *A Treatise of Callings, Workes*, p. 755. Quoted in Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 259. The statute Perkins refers to is the comprehensive Poor Law which sought to control begging while it relieved the working poor who were unable to sustain themselves. Each parish was to be responsible for the poor within its bounds. One could only receive the poor dole within the parish of their home.
15. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 278.

16. W.K. Jordan, *The Charities of London, 1480-1660*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1960), p. 88. This study and its companion volumes constitute an immensely detailed study of charity in England. See also *The Charities of Rural England, 1480-1660* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1961); p. 241, 247-49; *The Forming of The Charitable Institutions of the West of England* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1960).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 153, 155.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-194.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 174-75. Thomas White, an early Puritan, provided a complex network of such funds.
21. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 277.
22. Jordan, *The Charities of London*, p. 236.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 244; Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England*, p. 336, 302.
24. Valerie Pearl, "Puritans and Poor Relief: The London Workhouse, 1649-1660," *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, ed. D. Pennington and K. Thomas (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 206-232. The Corporation for the Poor was renewed in 1698 and 1700 for orphans and vagrants. After 1720 they became a common feature of the societal program to alleviate poverty (p. 232).
25. Jordan, *The Charities of London*, p. 111.
26. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 293.
27. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 310-12. Walzer also offers an interesting critique of Max Weber's suggestions that Calvinism provided the puritans with a capitalist understanding of "systematic acquisition." p. 304-6.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 313.
29. Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, p. 39.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
32. William Dell, *Several Sermons and Discourses* (1709) pp. 264-66; 273-4. Quoted by Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, p.80.
33. Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, p. 129-33.

34. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 148ff.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
36. Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, pp.132-33.
37. Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, trans. John Steely and W. Stephen Gunter, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), p. 29.
38. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1990), See especially Chapter 3.
39. "The Danger of Riches," *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985) [hereafter noted as *Works*], Vol. 3, p. 227-46; "On Riches," *Works*, Vol. 3, p. 518-28.
40. Joseph Hall, *Works*, VII, p. 167-8. Quoted in Hall, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 286.
41. *Works*, Vol. 20, p. 10.
42. "On Visiting the Sick," *Works*, Vol. 3, pp. 387, 390.
43. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: Epworth Press, 1931), Vol. IV, p. 295; See also Vol. IV, p. 451; *Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 15, 18.
44. Henry Rack. *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), p. 361. Wesley notes in the "Danger of Riches" that he had "unawares" become rich through the sale of books. *Works*, Vol. 3, p. 239.
45. *Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 10,15,159; Vol. 19, pp. 135-6.
46. "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," *Works*, Vol. 9, p. 279; *Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 19, 193; Vol. 20, p. 125.
47. *Works*, Vol. 19, pp. 173, 193.
48. *Works*, Vol. 9, p. 277.
49. *Works*, Vol. 19; p. 22; Vol. 11, p. 241; *Letters*, Vol. IV, p. 84; See also Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, pp. 83-86.
50. *Works*, Vol. 9, p. 275; Vol. 19, p. 193.
51. *Works*, Vol. 9, pp. 274-76; Vol 20, p. 171; *Journal*, Vol. V, p. 513; For these continuing needs a dispensary was established in 1747, *Works*, Vol. 20, p. 151.

52. Jennings, *Good News for the Poor*, pp. 74-76.
53. See Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 354-39. See Wesley's *Plain Account of Kingswood School, Works*(Jackson), Vol. XIII, pp. 289-300.
54. *Journal*, Vol. VII, pp. 3, 20, 71; *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford, (London: The Epworth Press) Vol. VII, p. 364.
55. Jennings, *Good News for the Poor*, p. 111-116; 124-26.
56. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans., Talcott Parsons(London: Allen and Unwin, 1930), pp. 139-43, 178-83.
57. Marquardt, *John Wesley's Social Ethics*, p. 41; E.D. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1964), p. 365; Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints*, pp. 304-6.
58. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 366.
59. Ted Jennings carefully documents this reality and suggestively interprets it meaning. *Good News for the Poor*, Chapters 2, 5, 7.
60. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-65.
61. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1964), p. 46-47.