THE POWER OF SPIRITUAL POWERLESSNESS IN THE MISSIONARY OUTREACH OF JOHN WESLEY

Introduction

The underlying insight of the present paper is the gospel paradox of power in weakness: the conviction that gospel powerlessness shaped the whole of John Wesley's spiritual itinerary, subsequent to his immediate conversion experiences and underpinned every stage of the rapid growth of the movement of spiritual renewal over which Wesley exercised undisputed authority until his death. To substantiate this conviction we shall need to take up again, in greater detail, the two major conclusions which were reached in the first of the Flemington lectures entitled, 'Inward love. This more detailed analysis will inevitably lead on to asking what place the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience held both in the personal spiritual itinerary of Wesley and the Methodist Movement to which it gave birth. Hence the two parts of the exposition which follows:

I - Wesley and Gospel Powerlessness

II - Wesley and the Evangelical Counsels
I. Wesley and Gospel Powerlessness

The first conclusion of the first of the Remington lectures entitled: "Inward love was that, whatever conceptual framework Wesley may have borrowed from classical Protestant holinessism, the real content of the Aldersgate conversion experience on May 24th, 1738 was not limited to justifying faith. It was a total act of self-surrender, in love as well as trusting faith, to the redeeming mercy of God, made known to him in the Passion and Death of Jesus. The obstacle overcome in this self-surrender was the ever-recurring tendency towards moral egocentrism of a hypernarcissistic conscience, typically English and Puritan, and not in the least, German and Lutheran. Wesley's high ideal of Christian perfection, although pursued out of genuine self-dedication to God, still remained a pursuit of moral self-determination and moral self-possession. A Copernican revolution had to take place at the deepest level of the soul. Wesley had to give up, in surrender to God, all that he was attempting to achieve spiritually and morally for God's very sake. This is not classical Protestant justification by faith. It is the experience of all the great saints of the Catholic Church, prior to the Protestant Reformation and going back to St. Peter and the other apostles: "Covent thou me more than these others?" says Jesus to Peter after the resurrection. To Peter's triple reply in the affirmative, Jesus adds: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkest whithersoever thou wouldest: But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another..."
shall guide thee, and carry thee whether thou wilt not. And the gospel center concludes: This make the Gene, signifying by what death he should glorify God. (John 2, 15 and 3, 14). Peter raised failed to follow Jesus faithfully, on his own initiative and religion upon his own strength. More embrace that spiritual poverty, which consists in following Jesus to the Cross. Cynical reliance on the Cross of Jesus alone.

Wesley it is true, would never have thought of using this text of St. John's gospel, in illustration of his own surrender in spiritual poverty to the Cross of Jesus. In thought, in Christian perfection, however, published in 1759, he says of his encounter with the Swedish priest, David Cordelin at Hernshut, only three months after his ordination: "After he had given me an account of his experience, I desired him to give me, in writing, a definition of the full assurance of faith, which he did in the following words: "Pope (requires) in the blood of Christ a firm confidence in God and persevering in His favor, the highest tranquility, serenity, and peace of mind; with a deliverance from every fleshly desire and a cessation of all evil inclination. This was the first account I ever heard from any living man of what I had before learned myself from the oracles of God, and had been praying for (with the little company of friends) and expecting for several years." (A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, London, 1st edition, 1778, p. 9-10). What Wesley had learned in his eminently practical and realistic turn of mind was never reducible to a forensic covering with the blood of Christ, according to classical Protestant solifidicism, as clearly felt out in statements, made three years later, in Tract 47, 'Thoughts on Christian Perfection', 1762. Of course,
relationship with Jesus he says: "To abandon all, to
strip one's self of all in order to seek and follow Jesus
Christ, naked to Bethlehem, where he was born, naked to the
hills where he was crucified, and naked to Calvary, when
he died on the Cross, is so great a mercy that nothing the
universe the knowledge of it is given away, Calvary
faith in the Son of God." (p. 99). In other words, spiritual
poverty is a gift of God's merciful love. There is a likeness
to Jesus in intimacy with him, which only the elements
of trusting faith, inherent in that poverty can make
known. "Knowledge" in the quotation and above all
communicate as a living reality. (See there).

However, an objection inevitably springs to mind.
How can we be sure of interpreting correctly
statements of this kind, made by Wesley, without setting them
within the context of his spiritual itinerary? But it
is precisely concerning this itinerary that Wesley is so
tantalizingly silent after Aldersgate. Apart from
occasional references in his correspondence to inner
anguish or darkness, quite the opposite to the joyful
progress towards perfection which he preached to others;
he never refers to the state of his soul. To a steward
who challenged him at a love-feast in Newcastle
"I say to you, like others present, he had or not,
"By the grace of God I am at least James." (J. C. BAKER, ed.)
and the love-feast London, Sowerby, 1957, p. 33). Here then
is possibly a reference to a passage of Charles VI, Book II,
The Imitation of Christ. A Remise says: "What thou art
that thou art not canst thou be said to be greater than
God sees thee to be." (Can 3). If then, Wesley chose to stand
under the judgment of God alone, how can we know in
what way he applied to himself statements which he
made in his treatises on Christian perfection elsewhere?

One approach to a partial solution
of this difficult is to chart out the influence.
Wesley of writers on mysticism and of his successors and changing reactions to them. Such is the very laudable approach taken by Robert TURLE in his Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition. But from a Roman Catholic standpoint, it is faced with another insurmountable obstacle. Wesley drew quite considerably, not only on authors standing within orthodox Roman Catholicism, but also on Jansenists and Quietists who deviated from it. (See Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition, Chapter 1.) The resulting conflict in the messages received by Wesley cannot but have contributed, in part at least, to both his caution and his changes of attitude towards all Christian mysticism. Mysticism as a system of thought, albeit in the realm of spiritual conduct and, therefore, of what Wesley called "practical divinity," could no more satisfy the deepest aspirations of his heart and soul than the formal dogmatic propositions of clerical Protestantism. In the last resort, what saved him from becoming completely muddled in his efforts to arrive at a correct understanding of the conflicting views with which he was confronted, by genuine Catholic mystics on the one hand and deviant Jansenists and Quietists on the other, was his ultimate practical and personal adherence to the fruits of his inner spiritual development in outward ministering service, and his incomparable knowledge of the content of Holy Scripture and his interpretation of it, according to the inspiration stemming from total spiritual self-dedication, an acutely sensitive Reformed conscience and deep-seated common sense. Hence the crucial importance of the second conclusion reached in the first of the Flemington lectures: the intimate connection between conviction...
to spiritual poverty at Aldersgate and a preferential love of those who had been disenchanted by the English society to which Wesley belonged. The inseparability of this link could be stated in this way. Awareness of total dependence in poverty, on God's redeeming love in Jesus made Wesley aware of how unconditional that redeeming love is for every member of the human race without exception, but more especially for those whom sin and spiritual powerlessness seemed to put at the furthest distance from it. Consequently, Wesley could no longer bear the scandal of an exclusion of a large proportion of the population of England from the material, social and cultural benefits of society, of which the consequence was the even greater scandal of deprivation of Christian pastoral care and of the very possibility of hearing the good news of the love of God focused in Jesus. He would then leave aside classical pastoral channels of communication. He would go to the disenchanted poor where they were. The would tell them that there was not a single one of them who was incapable of that self-surrender, which allows Jesus to enfold us in His love and of which he had had a privileged experience at Aldersgate. But at Aldersgate, he could not embrace, in his personal self-surrender, all the demands face of which, as resulting from his preferential attention for the poor, the Methodist Movement was going to make on his pastoral generosity. The clearest indication, therefore, of how far, or in what way, there was a deficiency of that self-surrender after Aldersgate lies in the interrelation of the between...
the other participants in that movement, especially the preachers and other active collaborators, and the person of Wesley. It is in this interaction that the increasing spiritual and pastoral demands progressively unfold. But what are those demands?

In his American Academy of Religion lecture, Early Methodism and the Poor, Tom Albin says of the first Methodist Societies: "In short, the Methodist Societies functioned like a lay religious order which enabled men and women to work out their own salvation, and at the same time maintain a socially redeeming involvement with the poor and vulnerable around them." (Quoted according to Enlightenment in the Wesleyan Tradition, p. 164). A large number of such "lay religious orders" do in fact exist within the Catholic Church at the present time. Of such a kind are what are called "Secular Institutes." As distinct from the public profession of the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, in the permanent community life of religious orders or congregations, in the strict sense, the members of a Secular Institute profess these vows in an individual and hidden way, thus leaving room for all the diverse forms of responsibility in the secular world. But although hidden, the practice of the vows involves a detachment from worldly possessions and worldly power which lifts the exercise of secular responsibilities into the sphere of Christian Agape. Thus the powerlessness of the gospel is destined to "heaven" with its power the whole lump of secular living. This is what the early Methodist Movement, at least in its early stage, actually did to English society under the leadership of Wesley, and we can conclude that...
that Wesley accepted the spiritual ideal embodied in the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience as the most effective way of enabling the Methodist movement to lend the power of gospel powerlessness to the economic, social, moral, and spiritual integration of the disenchanted and marginalised poor into the mainstream of English society? Did the impact of the Methodist Movement upon Wesley himself cause him to deepen his abandonment of himself to the Will of God, in terms of the practice of poverty, chastity and obedience? It is to these fundamental questions that we must now turn.

I - Wesley and The Evangelical Counsels

Poverty

Wesley knew full well that the spiritual poverty entailed in the giving up of oneself in love to a love which is first given to us in the Redemptive Act of Jesus cannot take root in the soil without a medicine of material poverty. On Tuesday, August 25th, 1776, he writes in his Journal:

"In the evening, I preached in one open space at Bethesda to most of the inhabitants of the town; where I saw a very rare scene - men swiftly increasing in substance, and yet not decreasing in holiness." The reality of increase in wealth not leading to a stunting of the spiritual life causes him, over and over again, to bewail the possession of stately homes who have exported their energy on the semester of transient material goods. On Thursday, July 16th, 1778, of Lord Charlemont's estate he writes, "But what is all this, unless God is here? listen to the sons loved and enjoyed? Not only, "Imite me, I am unable to give sorrow, but occasion of sin" (Eccles. 11:14)."

Wesley was greatly influenced by the example of the Jerusalem community (Acts 2), in which there was a complete sharing of material goods, as one considers anything to be thrown (Acts 4, 32). This example was, of course, taken up by the monastic movement in both East and West. Paul VI has also stressed that he would
not ask this of his followers whom, apart from the itinerant preacher, he encouraged in their commitment to all the economic consequences of social, professional and family life. In his eighth sermon on the Sermon on the Mount, he therefore asks the Methodists to live if not according to the state of the Jerusalem community at least according to its spirit: "We exhort you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be willing to communicate. To have used as means to be of the same spirit (though not in the same outward state) with those believers of ancient time, who remained, ever so poor, and shared and held fellowship wherein none said that anything was his own, but they had all in common." (Culver, 28)

Once again, it is precisely this spirit which members of Secular Institutes in the Catholic Church, at the present day, who may of necessity have to dispose of large sums of money, are asked to cultivate. Hence the crucial importance of Wesley's teaching about this spirit of poverty. The key to Wesley's teaching is the ideal of Christian stewardship. Whatever possessions we may have we have received through the bounty of God's particular providence for each one of us. Therefore we must be stewards of these possessions, in accordance with the providential will of God and in the light of the central gospel precept of love of neighbor. Thus, Wesley continues his application of the Jerusalem community example to the Methodists as follows: "Be a steward, a faithful and wise steward of God and of the poor. Differing from them in these two circumstances only—that your wants are first supplied out of the portion of your Lord's goods which remains in your hand; and that you have the special care of giving thus lay up for yourselves a good foundation not in the world which now is, but rather for the time to come that ye may lay hold on eternal life." (Culver, 28)
Legitimate gainful employment and the thrift of a simple life-style lead to the acquisition of more than is necessary for the sustenance of that life-style, then all of the surplus must be given to the poor.

This is the true meaning of the triple injunction of His sermon on "The Use of Money." "Give, all you can," "Save, all you can," "Owe, all you can," at least right hands would seem to be advocating economic individualism and not voluntary poverty or frugal means of goods.

In fact, the true injunction, according to Wesley's understanding is: "Give all you can." It transforms the "Save all you can" into not hoarding back from the poor and needy any surplus possessions. Nor indeed can man properly be said to save anything, if he only buys it up. You may as well throw your money into the sea as bury it in the earth. And you may as well bury it in the earth as in your chest or in the Bank of England... If, therefore, you would indeed "make yourself friends," if any man righteous can add to the third rule to the two preceding, having first of all gained all you can, and secondly, saved all you can, then give all you can." (ibid)

Hence Wesley's disappointment at the end of his life in seeing material prosperity cause Methodists to completely forget or put aside the true ideal of Christian Stewardship. In 1780, he writes:

"I give you one more adage before I sink into the dust... I am pained for you who are rich in this world. Do you give all you can?... I pray consider who are you the better for what you have behind you?... O leave nothing behind you." (ibid)

Perhaps you may you can now afford the expense. This is the quintessence of nonsense. Who gave you this addition to your fortune or (to speak properly) who lent it to you? To speak more truly, he did.
Of his own life-style Wesley says: "Permit me to speak truly of myself as I would of another man. I am all I can (namely by writing) without hurting either so many words I cannot say, all I can not willingly waste anything, not a sheet of paper, not a cup of water. I do not buy out anything, not a shilling, think of all as a sacrifice to God. Yet by quitting all I can, I am effectively secured from losing all treasure upon earth... "(p. 310)

In this Wesley blowing his own trumpet? Not at all! His shrill and personal realization tells him that by virtue of his solidarity with his followers he had spun the judgment of good or evil by public opinion of his personal behavior will redound for either the good or ill of the Methodist movement as a whole. Hence the judicious comment of Cudgelon in the second volume of Wesley's 'Standard Errors': 'Apart from his book concern, he only left the loose money in his clothes and haversack and left for the poor men who would carry his body to the grave..." (p. 310)

Yet, however important Wesley's solidary in material poverty, with the poor, who entered the ranks of Methodism may have been to him, it would have meant nothing to him unless it had been only one of the outward consequences of the all-encompassing inward discovery of spiritual poverty at Aldersgate. Indeed it would have been reducible—and not a few modern commentators have tried the check so to reduce it to a sociological stance motivated by class ideology—that such was never the case for Wesley is lucidly demonstrated by a more radical consequence of the Aldersgate discovery. After this conversion experience, Wesley gave to the disinherited poor of England not just his material resources, not only his intellectual, cultural and spiritual very resources, but to share them with others.
Furthermore, a gift so total could not but have made him vulnerable and open to interaction between the complex network of human relationships involved in his leadership of the Methodist Movement and his personal spiritual life. That Movement owed as much to his leadership and yet by that very fact, could not not have a deep impact in its rapid growth, on his own growth in inward poverty in loving surrender to the Love of Jesus for him. Despite his extreme discretion about his own state of soul, many pieces of evidence provided his journal and this correspondence substantiate the existence of this impact. The scope of the present paper makes it necessary to limit our enquiry to two of its major characteristics: the growing spiritual needs of the Methodist movement challenged Wesley to an ever-increasing other-directedness of his inner self-surrender in relation both to God and to neighbors; given it an almost static quality, the very opposite of fiendish seeking for spiritual experience for its own sake; secondly, the ever-increasing number of the poor, who swell the ranks of the Society, drawn out to the full Wesley's capacity for direct and deeply spiritual contact with them.

A few dated references will suffice to show how he is challenged to self-sacrifice, inner-directedness. The entries in the Journal to the effect that he is not insensitive to the settled life advantages, both spiritual and material of the settled life which his brother had chosen and that, from his point of view, itinerant preaching is a hard sacrifice for him, are too numerous to cite in their entirety. The five following underline how single-minded dedication to what is eternal gives him the strength to carry on. On Wednesday, 18th April 1752 he wrote: "I saw not one whom I knew but Mr. 5's aunt, who could not long
forbear telling me how sorry she was that I
should leave all my friends to lead this vagabond life.

Why, indeed it is not pleasing to flesh and blood; and I
would not do it if I did not believe there was another
world." On Wednesday, June 23, 1779: "I greeted her lovely
place! And lovely company! But, I believe there is another
world. Therefore I must "anière and hence." The force
of the final phrase: "anière and go hence," lies in its being
a quotation of Words of Jesus (John 14, 3), which
seems to interrupt the discourse after the last sufferer, when
at all events underline the imminence of His Passion
and Death. Here indeed is the key to Wesley's relentless
itinerary. Ten years previous a beneficent Swedish
Professor of Theology, J. H. Linnaeus, on a visit to England
had said of him: "This is the real reason why Mr.
Wesley created so great attention by his sermons, because
he spoke of a crucified Saviour and faith in his words-
such the people never heard." (R. R. HEITFELD T
The Earlier Mr. Wesley, vol. 2, Nashville: Abingdon, 1934
p. 85).

This continually going forward in response to
the urgency of the task of evangelisation produces in
him a self-forgetfulness which makes him rise
above all the conflicting voices, all the uncertainty,
all the calumnies and gossip, which would otherwise
have torn him to pieces. In February 23rd 1763, he
writes: "The greatest part of this spring I was fully
employed in visiting the southern, and settling the minds
of those who had been confused and distressed by a
thousand misrepresentations, indeed a flood of calumny
and evil-speaking (as was early foreseen) and been
sounded out on every side. My present was still to go
straight forward in the work where I was called."
Yet this capacity to keep going forward in response
to the gigantic pastoral burden laid on his shoulders, itself turns into a constraint which becomes a cross to him. In a letter of June 1766, Wesley complained to his brother Charles: "And yet to lie employed by God! and so hedged in that I can neither get forward nor backward, and little further on: 'I am so useless (Come along), I know not how, that I can't stand still." In the landscape the interior Jeremias which keep her on an even keel, in spite of all the fruit of grace rewarding his self-surrender, "I feel and grieve; But by the grace of God, I feel at nothing. But still 'the help that is upon earth He cloth it himself." (Ps. 13) And thus he doth in answer to many prayers." (June 25th, 1776, his 70th birthday). Wesley does, indeed, prove well how much he owes to so many hidden points of the Wesleyan societies who in the midst of suffering and death have abandoned themselves totally to the love of God and self-surrender; of Mr. Elizabeth Holmes whom he has known for thirty years, he says what we know of many others: "I preached at Smith House for the sake of that lovely woman, Mrs. Holmes. It does me good to see her with her patience or rather thankfulness, under almost continuous pain April 19, 1776." Of this unique capacity for spiritual rather than merely social contact, Wesley gives proof especially in his relationship with the poor. Numerous journal entries show him not only organizing planned giving to the poor by the societies, not only himself begging for them in the streets of London, or elsewhere, even in his own cells, but above all, entering into direct contact with them in their dingy garrets and hovels of the spiritual as well as the temporal fruit of such contact he says: "I began visiting the society (Bristol) from hence to hence setting apart at least two hours or the day for that purpose. I was surprised to find the
simplicity with which we and all others talk of our temporal and spiritual state, nor could I have easily known by any other means how great a work God has wrought among them (Morley, September 9th, 1776). The same message comes across in a Journal entry for November 24th, 1760, but with the added comment that the poor are a spiritual benefit to us, as well as we to them: "How much better it is, when it can be done to carry relief to the poor, than to send it! And that both for our own sakes and theirs. For their part, it is so much more comfortable to them, and as we may assist them in spiritual as well as temporal, and for our own, it is for more apt to soften our hearts, and to make us naturally care for each other." It is precisely to produce in them the softening of their heart, that Wesley so much wants the rich not to be content with giving to the poor at a distance, but to make direct contact with them. "I began visiting those of our society who lived in Bethnal Green, Hanwell. Many of them I found in such poverty as few can conceive without seeing it. O, why do not all the rich that fear God constantly visit the poor! Can they spend part of their spare time better? Certainly not! In the last resort the softening of heart which Wesley wanted to see the poor communicate to the rich, stemmed in his own heart from his surrender to the love of Jesus: "The sympathies of grace far surpass those formed by nature. The true devout shows that passion as naturally flow from time as from false love: as deeply sensible are those of the good and evils of those whom they love for God's sake. But this can only be comprehended by those who understand the language of love." (Clark, Account of Christian Perfection, London, Epworth Press, p. 28).
(2) Calibrate Chastity and Obedience to Authority

The detailed reference to the foregoing analysis to Wesley's own statements about himself and others are sufficient proof of the global impact which the growing Methodist movement had on the spiritual dispositions underlying the Aldersgate conversion experience. They show how the 'living ordinance of God' dried out of Wesley's self-surrender fruits for the sanctification, Christ himself personally and of his followers. These fruits transformed his self-surrender into a daily starving in the sufferings of the Cross of Christ.

What still needs to be demonstrated, but much more briefly is how the practice of chastity, in a celibate state of complete continence, and accountability to external authority, as a visible consequence of fraternal communion in love with neighbor, and stemming from the invisible, but absolute accountability of the soul to God, enters into the framework of that global impact in so far as the Methodist Movement, at least in its early stages, functioned - to take us again the illuminating companion of Tom Albin, like a lay religious order.

Wesley himself in the sermons makes the explicit link between surrender to God in trusting faith and the call to the celibate, giving response again that for him, there is a love in this surrender, which is absent from classical Protestant holiness. In thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life of 1743, he makes this link categorically. "But who are able to keep themselves thus pure?" (thus, meaning, in a celibate state) answer, Every Believer in Christ. Everyone who hath living faith in the Name of the only Begotten Son of God... (cited according to R.G. Hare, John Wesley and Marriage, Methuen, which Unwin, Pro. 1976 p.30)
In Thoughts on a Single Life (1764), (Jackson vol. 31, pp. 456-463), which he presents as representing the former limit, he is much more sensitive to the intensities of the spiritual life. The call to celibacy is still linked to trusting self-surrender in faith, but the link is to be understood in general terms and does not therefore preclude what God may expect of individuals in his particular providence. In general, I believe every man is able to receive it (the gift about which Jesus speaks in Matthew 19:10-12) when he is first justified. I believe everyone then receives this gift. But with most it does not continue long. This much is clear: it is a plain matter of fact, which no man can deny. It is not so clear, whether God withdraws it of His own good pleasure or for any fault of ours, (I am inclined to think it is not withdrawn without some fault on our part.) (Id. p. 458). Clearly the reason for this Wesley approving celibacy in this way is that openness to God's gift of justifying faith means for him, in the light of his deist-skeptical experience, readiness to give up everything for God to become as he will say, when beginning open-air field preaching, "cite for God's sake.

This is the positive side of what is, nevertheless, a too limited framework of reference. Wesley rejects the Catholic concept of an intervention of external authority to claim, and give statutory, an inner call to celibacy, so that it can be lived out as a permanent state of life in complementarity with other states in visible ecclesial communion. Yet the impact on him of the growing Methodist Movement makes him move part way towards this position, via a kind of piece-meal, empirical way. He realizes that his role is to show a reliving of the Bible.
conceived understanding of the relationship between celibacy and the willipren to give all to God, because he is aware that the majority of those, with whom his leadership of the Methodist Societies bring him into contact, have the vocation to commit themselves to family and socio-infernal responsibilities in the secular world. Thus his relationship, by correspondence with women, shows that he is always ready to recommend to them the celibate ideal whilst they remain single. When they decided to marry, he does not disapprove, rather does he show them how in God's service in love to God is possible in that also.

In relation to his immediate collaborators, the itinerant preacher, he is much more insistent on the advantages of celibacy over marriage. Just after he had decided to withdraw himself from the general rule not to marry, thereby breaking all the rules of accountability, God to his brother and to the Societies, which he had managed to keep. In the case Murray affair, he has the courage to write on February 6th, 1757, in his Journal: "I met the single men, and showed them on how many accounts it was good for those who had received that gift from God to remain single for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Much later in his life, he urges the preacher Zachariah Youdall three times to remain celibate (See R.BUTLER, Methodist, and Paper, DLT, 1875, pp. 70-71) and also the reference figure to Wesley's letter in Philad. Oct 8. 1757 (58-154, 274).

In the last resort, Wesley admits to the contradiction between his position as a bachelor and his call to celibacy, he had received for the full
accomplishment of his ministerial vocation. In his "Thought Upon Marriage (1785)" (Jackson vol II, pp.462-464), he humorously sets the instance of celibacy within the framework of the coexistence of someone like himself is tempted to draw back from the reception, on the surrender of loving faith to God, that marriage must begin and for the sake of the declaration of the gospel. The Witness of Henry Moore, in his life of Wesley, is even more telling: "He repeatedly told me that he believed the Lord carried this painful burden (Wesley's unsuccessful marriage) for his good; and that, if Mr. Wesley had been a better wife, he might have been unfaithful in the great work to which God had called him; and might have too much sought to please her according to her own view." (Vol 2, p.175).

Wesley's following of his footsteps impels to many, linked as it is to his putting aside all the rules of accountability to others, which he had promised to accept, from the days of the Holy Club onwards, necessarily raises the issue of obedience. Was it not virtually impossible for Wesley to remain faithful to all the outward implications of the total inner obedience to the will of God, to which he had vowed himself? For instance, his prayer of self-dedication at the end of the tract "Modern Christianity: Exemplified At Wesnesburg (1745)" (Revd. M.A. Robertson, The Methodist Societies, vol. I, of the Critical Edition, p.158) unless he was prepared to submit to a measure of ecclesiastical human authority exercised over him in the name of God?

Accountability is at the very heart of genuine Methodist spirituality, one says
has to peruse the Rules of the Band Societies, as early as December 25th, 1938, to see the stringency with which those who were prepared to commit themselves to Methodist spirituality to the full were expected to save their souls to others, for the promoting of their spiritual progress.

But as uncontrived head of the Methodist movement in its entirety, could not Friend did not, Wesley hold himself aloof from all of this? Did he not ask obedience of his preachers to his own authority, whilst himself owing obedience to no one?

There is at least one indication that such a situation of solitude in leadership did not correspond with his deepest desire. Of the purpose of the Select Societies, the setting up of which entailed a spiritual commitment over and beyond that was required in the Bands, he says:

"My design was not only to direct them (those denizens of this further commitment) now to press after perfection, to exercise their every grace, and improve every talent they had received; and to exhort them to love one another more, and to walk more carefully over one another's feet; but also to have a select company to whom I might unburden myself on all occasions, without reserve, and whom I could confide to all their bretheren as a pattern of love, of holiness, and of all good works." (Revd. David, Critical Edition, vol. 9, p. 267-270)

The fact that such a possibility never materialised for Wesley was not his fault.

But perhaps the most conclusive for Wesley's interior readiness to be accountable, if Providence so arranged, is his time in close detachment from the position of leadership which he held...
according to the last revision of the large Minutes
in 1789. Wesley faces time who accuses him of
being autocratic with these courageous words:
"But I reply, "several gentlemen are offended at
your talking so much power. I did not seek any part
of it. But when it was done unaware, not daring
to use that talent. I used it to the best of judgment.
Yet I never was fond of it. I always did and do now
bear it as my burden - the burden which God laid
upon me, and therefore I dare not lay it down. But if
you can tell me anyone, many fine men, to whom I
may transfer this burden, who can and will do just
what I do now, I will heartily thank both them
and you." In fact Wesley had to perform his thankless task to
the end.

Conclusion
Was Wesley a mystic? If the question means: "Did
Wesley refute the teaching of the mystics that the
spiritual journey inward involves passage through
the dark night of the soul in the soul's search for
union with God?" Then the reply must be in the negative.
But the great Catholic mystics have also taught
that difficulty and suffering in the world, especially
when they stem from commitment to the preaching
of the gospel, bring about a purification of the soul
analogous to what is wrought in it in the dark night?
Was this not the road taken by Wesley? Furthermore
what are we to make of Wesley's constant repeated
complaints that he does not share in the joy of
a relationship of love to God which he so often
preaches to others? Would it be that God wanted
him to share something of the submission of the
sinner to whom he preached? Did he stand in the
cry of Jesus on the Cross: My God, My God, why hast
thee forsaken me?"