Justification, Sanctification, and the Liberation of the Person

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This chapter will investigate the relationship between Wesley's teaching on justification and sanctification, and the modern theologies of liberation. Some of these theologies claim to have sprung out of one or another of the Methodist traditions, and this fact alone makes the present investigation important. But a deeper question, affecting our own integrity as Methodist preachers, theologians, and historians, lurks insistently beneath all our inquiries into this matter: Is it possible to claim for ourselves allegiance to the theology of John Wesley—as Methodist ministers in Britain and elsewhere are required each year to assert that they believe and preach "our doctrines"—while embracing a theology of liberation? Or is it necessary to make a decisive choice between two conflicting types of theology, while, of course, admitting that the later type may have been influenced in some ways by the earlier?

Certain preliminary remarks should be made concerning the nature of this investigation. It is evident that the social, cultural, and political context of Wesley's theology is vastly different from that of the liberation theologies; it is equally evident that the thought-forms and language of Wesley are quite different from those employed by the liberation theologians and are, indeed, perhaps quite unintelligible to the Christians among whom they have done their thinking and writing. Moreover, that Christian truth is most effectively expressed (in the sense of appealing in a

persuasive way to the greatest number of people in a position to grasp its import) in the thought-forms of the prevalent culture, or at least in the thought-forms of the culture that is powerfully operative at the time.

From these facts two inferences are commonly drawn—one I reject; the other I accept. The first is that when the thought-forms and language disappear, or are so deeply eroded that they no longer appeal to any except a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist or antiquarian, the truths they were intended to convey will collapse also—in fact, they will be seen by subsequent generations as no longer worthy of the title "truth" at all, except in the feeble and, I believe, meaningless sense of that which is true for *me*, or for hellenistic Jews, or for the men of the Middle Ages, or for Victorians. For instance, taking this view, since the orthodox doctrine of the Person of Christ is creedally expressed in the language of late Greek philosophy, and since that philosophy is now discountenanced, the doctrine no longer need be accepted, except as a historical and social phenomenon.

I reject this inference, in the first place, because it contradicts itself. It is asserting: It is true that nothing is true—or, at greater length—It is true that the Homoousios is *merely* a cultural phenomenon because all statements are determined by the culture in which they are made. But in this case, the inference itself is determined by the culture in which it is made and it, too, is *merely* a cultural phenomenon. So the inference is not credible.

I reject the first inference also because it misunderstands the function of language. Certainly the authors of the Creed believed they were expounding "the last word" in the matter of the Person of Christ. We know that they were wrong, since so many words have been uttered subsequently. In fact, thought and language exist, not to express truth completely and to encapsulate it forever in a verbal formula, but to *point toward* that which is in the last resort

inexpressible and to do it in the best available way—that is, in the language of a prevailing culture. I suspect that this is the case even with everyday matters and with the natural sciences; I am sure that it is the case with the important issues of human existence—the more important the issue, probably, the more it is the case. There is no last word on Christology or justification or sanctification. But the Creeds and the theologians *have* illuminated and pointed toward the inexpressible and cannot be dismissed out of hand as culturally determined.

The second inference, which I accept, is that to "canonize" any particular thought-language—that is, to regard it as a complete and definitive expression of truth and to impose it, if it is theological, on the clergy of a church—is to condemn its content to ultimate and general neglect. This is a fate that has been avoided only very narrowly by both the Roman Catholic and the Calvinist traditions. The well-tried cultural language of the late Greco-Romans remained potent for a remarkably long time, and biblical language, even longer—in some parts of the world they are not dead yet. But Greco-Roman thought-language makes little sense today outside those circles of the west that are still aware of their classical heritage, and biblical terminology is becoming increasingly irrelevant over large areas of the first world, never having reached a high degree of general importance in the third world.

Logically, then, the abandonment of traditional language in no sense involves the abandonment of the truths that the language intended to express. We do not question the truth of the Bible by reexpressing its ideas; we do not deny the Catholic faith by rejecting the Sistine Chapel's ceiling imagery, which depicts the whole history of the universe in terms of biblical mythology, from creation to the final judgment, exquisitely brought to life and rendered unforgettable by the Renaissance art and technique of Michelangelo. Nor does the African or

modern western repudiation of the metaphysics of the Fathers or of the Schoolmen invalidate the doctrines of the Creeds. But on the other hand, it remains a vital concern of the Christian church, which in a pluralistic age continues to be an evangelistic agency, to reexpress in the terms of each succeeding culture the truths that it believes to be committed to it forever.

The question before us therefore is: *Are the Wesley doctrines of justification and sanctification expressed by the liberation theologies in terms of the cultures in which those theologians originate?* Or, if we cannot give an unreserved affirmative answer to that question, is there a distinct similarity between them, or is there evidence of a legitimate development of one from the other? If the answer is yes to one or the other of these questions, then we can say that liberation theology is in tune with Wesley's thought. If the answer in all cases is no, then no doubt we shall have to choose one or the other and deal with our consciences accordingly.

Wesley's Great Salvation

I will begin the investigation proper by reminding you of John Wesley's teaching about God's "grand design for the salvation of mankind," using Wesley's own language as far as possible. We have seen that language is very important in the comparison on which we are embarked, and I have found in the past that the too-ready translation of Wesley's words into modern theological terminology has often blurred the outlines of his theology, especially when it is distasteful to modern man, and thus has begged the very sort of question we are now asking.

Wesley, then, taught that humans in their present state are fallen creatures. The Fall of Adam and Eve corrupted the whole human race; and Adam fell by wrongly using his freedom of choice. Because of Adam, we lost the moral image

of God, with the result that all our thoughts and desires are impure, and with the further result that he introduced all the pain and suffering that exist in the animal world and the human world, including disease and the pain of childbirth. The final consequence of the Fall is death, both spiritual and physical. We are all involved. Fallen humanity, however, has not entirely lost the law of God, though we are incapable of keeping it and though it has the chief effect of condemning us; by the use of conscience—often identified with the prevenient grace of God—we are able to recognize God's law. But conscience can be either tender (which is good), or scrupulous, or hard (either of which is bad). Fallen humanity has lost much, but not all the freedom that originally belonged to Adam. God's grace works within us to enable us to choose the right and reject the wrong, to perform our duty, and above all, to hear and receive the gospel. If persons are not saved, it is not because they are damned in advance by God, but because they do not *will* to be saved. Thus fallen humanity can move toward God, though we cannot, by any means, save ourselves. Our good deeds are done by God's grace, and therefore have no merit toward our salvation.

Salvation is due entirely to God's gracious, unbounded, undiscriminating, and undeserved love, which is absolutely free to all, without exception. God has provided the sacrament of baptism for the cleansing away of original sin, but since the effects of baptism are often—perhaps always—obliterated by subsequent sin, God has provided the "merits of Christ," in his death and resurrection, for our redemption. Without the work of Christ, there is no redemption. Redemption is offered to all, again without any exception, and it is received only with the help of God's grace, through faith in Christ. There are various kinds of faith, but "saving faith," in Wesley's terms, is a "sure trust and confidence that Christ died for *my* sins, that he loved *me* and gave himself for *me*."[1] Thus I am "justified"—and to

Wesley this means, in spite of all the preceding Protestant sophistication of the word, quite simply, "pardon for sins, original and actual." By justification, we are adopted as God's children, and we are born again. The new birth is an elemental change—a change in the very soul—so that we rise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness: Our evil passions turn into virtues, our sensual minds are changed into the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and the image of God is restored in us. Normally, but not invariably, we receive the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God, and that witness is direct, immediate, and unmistakable.

Sanctification begins immediately after justification and is a growth into holiness, by the work of the Spirit, received only through faith. The justified person does not commit outward voluntary sin, but inward sin continues, and sanctification refers to its gradual conquest; the seeds of anger, lust, and pride are as powerful as those of any weed, though they do not involve guilt in themselves. Our persistence in sanctification—for we can fall from grace—leads to Christian perfection, or perfect love. And love is the important word.

Wesley does not teach, of course, that the "perfect" person is free from errors or temptations, or from the limitations of human ignorance, or from illness and death. But he does teach that one who has reached perfection loves God with the whole self, and the neighbor as self. Perfection can be reached in this present life, and has been by some; it follows a steady growth in love and goodness and is conferred instantaneously (Wesley is not always quite sure of this point). If it is not reached in this life, there is no ground for condemnation; it will be conferred by God at the moment of death. In one sense, "perfection" is not perfection; a perfect person still grows in grace—both in this life, if one is perfect here, and in all eternity. And perfection, even though granted in this life, can subsequently be lost.

This process is what Wesley calls the *great salvation,*

whereby we are "perfectly restored" in Christ and "changed from glory into glory."

We will complete this summary of Wesley's theology by noting that he claimed to derive it wholly and exclusively from Scripture. So much has been said about the Methodist appeal to experience—as if Wesley were a Schleiermacher born before his time—that it is necessary to emphasize this. Wesley, of course, highly valued his own and his followers' experience of God—experience certainly was not limited in his mind to what we call feeling (in fact, he did not lay much stress on this element)—it covered the whole of a personal relationship with God as Father. Wesley appealed, moreover, to the experience of the whole church, and to that of certain men and women of God in particular. But he based no doctrine upon it. Doctrine, for him, was derived only from Scripture, and was *confirmed* by experience; experience alone proved nothing. Wesley was thus a strictly biblical theologian.

Theologies of Liberation

When we turn to the liberation theologians of today, we seem to enter an entirely different world. Whether it is essentially a different world, we have still to discover. It is necessary, as well as convenient, to divide the theologies of liberation into three main categories. The first consists of those related to the liberation of people and societies from economic exploitation and oppression. The outstanding example of this is the work of Latin American theologians, both Catholic and Protestant. The second category is made up of those related to the liberation of the female sex from personal, political, legal, social, and economic restrictions and dominations; here we speak of "feminist theology." The third comprises those related to the liberation of societies and individuals from racial discrimination and

degradation; the chief example is the black theology of North America, with certain counterparts in Africa.

Obviously these three categories have much in common: (a) They all draw largely on the prolonged and bitter oppression and partial liberation that the people for whom they speak have experienced—the experience that their oppressors even yet have not recognized for the terrible thing it was—or have not acknowledged that it occurred at all; (b) They all see the Bible, either solely or chiefly, as the record of God's liberation of his people from oppression and injustice, both in the Old Testament, which speaks of God's ancient people, and the New Testament, which speaks of God's new Israel. The new Israel, like the old, is described by the Bible as entering a new life, in spite of its enemies, and finding final vindication and triumph; (c) They all hope—in the biblical sense of hope—for the individual's growth into true personhood, within a just and compassionate community that gives equality of treatment to all.

It is sometimes said that they also have in common the acceptance of Marxist theories of human motivation and historical development. I can find no solid evidence for this acceptance in any of the three categories, although Marxist analysis is from time to time employed; it is hardly possible to find the work of any realistic theologian, or indeed any serious writer on economics or politics, of which this is not true. But it is no more true here than in many other cases. Perhaps I might add that if a liberation theologian accepted any form of Marxist determinism, that would indeed disqualify that person from any claim to thinking with Wesley. Economic determinism is, after all, the modern equivalent of predestination. But there is no sign of this in any of them, so far as I can tell.

Latin American Theology

I select Gustavo Gutiérrez as the representative and exponent of the Latin American theology of liberation,

although there are many others. Gutiérrez is convinced that the people of Latin America are passing beyond the stage of development—which was, no doubt, a useful phase—to that of liberation, or to put it plainly, social revolution. He believes that it is the business of theology to reflect critically on what is actually happening in history (he calls this historical praxis); and what is happening in Latin America is liberation. This fact of liberation offers and requires a new way of doing theology—a way that begins in Latin America but is universal in its application. Theology in this context starts with reflection, but it goes on, he says, "to be part of the process through which the world is transformed. It is a theology which is open—in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of the vast majority of people, in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just and fraternal society—to the gift of the Kingdom of God."[2]

Such theology must abandon the "Christendom concept" in which temporal realities lack autonomy; still more sharply, it must repudiate every form of pietism and any kind of concentration on the unworldly. It must come right down into the arena of political and social conflict, and the church that professes it must work toward the transformation of Latin American life. In this transformation every oppressed person must be helped to attain "conscientization" (as Paulo Freire has called it)—the state in which one not only becomes aware of one's situation but consciously protests the oppression in it and siezes responsibility for modifying that situation and shaping the future, becoming freer and less dependent in the process, and committing oneself to the transformation of society here and now, where one lives.

This transformation, says Gutiérrez, is God's work in our time, just as the Exodus was God's work in Moses' time. The work of Christ forms part of this work of God and brings it to

complete fulfillment. Jesus was no mere religious teacher or holy man; he was deeply involved in the politics of his time, confronting the power groups among the Jewish people, and dying at the hands of the political authorities who were the oppressors and enemies of the people. The salvation that Christ offers is liberation not only from sin, but also from all the consequences of sin—despoliation, injustice, and hatred. It is in fact a new creation and a new person. Christian hope leads us to thrust into the future, which holds for us immense possibilities of human fulfillment within history, and indeed, of a glorious utopia. This is the true eschatology—the promise of the future drawing us into direct and hopeful action in the present. The church is called to proclaim all this in deed as well as in word. The class struggle is a fact; the church does not have the option to say whether it approves or not, but must take part in it on the side of justice. Yet since the church is called to announce the love of God for *all*, it is bound up inexorably in the need to fight for the poor and weak, and at the same time to do good to the oppressors. For the universal love, which requires solidarity with the oppressed, also requires the effort to liberate the oppressors from their ambition and selfishness; oppressors need liberation as much as do the oppressed.

Feminist Theology

Feminist theology takes its point of departure from the oppression that Rosemary Reuther terms "the oldest subjection of all," which also is the most extensive of all, for it is the subjection of more than half the human race. Since it is concerned with a phenomenon to be found everywhere and relates to an aspiration and a hope common to vast numbers of people in every culture, it can be stated in general terms. Women have been subordinated by men throughout most of history, largely because of the physical limitations imposed by childbirth and childraising and the

advantage that men have taken of this. Women have been conditioned by society, which rationalizes the innate desire of men to retain the power they have acquired, to accept this position of inferiority; and this position has been concretized by legislation and custom in all capitalist societies, as well as in others. It has been defended by male thinkers of all persuasions, religious and nonreligious—even by that great liberator of human feelings and enemy of human ignorance, Sigmund Freud. It was no small part of the work of Christ to abolish this subordination of women and to bring them to their true fulfillment. He was himself, by the standards of his time, a feminist. But more than that, the salvation he offers to all is intended equally for women and for men, and the growth into true personhood, which includes full development of God-given powers in the service of God and humanity, is made possible by the Holy Spirit for each man and each woman alike. The image of God is in woman as it is in man, and indeed it is also in the relationship between them. Damaged or destroyed by sin, it is restored by Christ.

In spite of this, most Christian theologians through the ages have applauded the subordination of woman, quoting some culture-conditioned words of Paul and have described her, obscenely, as the source of lust or as defective man. The time has come to reassert the dignity of woman in Christ—not only to reassert it, but to fight against the oppressive law and custom that deny it and to embody the equal dignity of woman and man in the structures of the church and of society.

Black Theology

I chose James H. Cone as the representative of black theology, even though his brother, Cecil Wayne Cone, has criticized his views at various points.[3] James Cone begins with the conviction that blacks think of God differently than do whites and therefore must have a different thelogy, based

on the Bible and on their own experience; and since the theme of the Bible is liberation, there is a natural harmony between it and the black experience. The terrible sufferings of the blacks in America, both before and after the Civil War and into the present age, inescapably form one primary source of black theology. Jesus Christ is the truth for all people and for all societies, and the Bible is the witness to him; the Bible therefore provides the other primary source of theology, but for blacks it must be interpreted in the light of black experience. The essence of this experience is the desire for liberation, political and otherwise—long frustrated, but now gradually taking place. Christ is shown in the Bible to be a liberator, and a Christology that leaves out this fact is a white theology—or rather, a white ideology. Christ is a historical reality as liberator; he is also present as suffering and risen, in the worship of black congregations, and he will come in glory to complete his liberating work. These statements are not to be taken as ideological justification for black politics, for Jesus Christ is above politics, and he is the absolute Lord—the captain who never lost a battle. The Bible is the story of liberation, and black theology is biblical theology.

The meaning of liberation for those who have been oppressed is first, to be free for God, but also to be free to liberate those who are still oppressed. In the setting free of the oppressed, according to Cone, the black Christian is not governed by Jesus' example of nonviolence. We live in a violent, racist society which must be destroyed, he says, and the issue between violence and nonviolence as ways of changing society is a nonquestion. The question is only *what* violence to use and to what extent. It is useless to talk of reconciliation between black and white; reconciliation is impossible unless and until whites are converted to the black viewpoint. Reconciliation can begin only when justice is achieved, says Cone.[4]

Wesley and Liberation Theologies

As we turn to the question of the relation between these theologies and the theology of Wesley, a whole host of questions arise, fully armed. We must select a few. The first is whether Wesley would have countenanced such terms as *liberation* theology, *feminist* theology, *black* theology, at all. Almost certainly, no. For him there was only *Christian* theology, although it might be urged in mitigation of that blanket statement, that Wesley certainly believed some parts of the gospel to be especially necessary for the particular people he was addressing. But the Latin American theologians, probably, and the black theologians, certainly, are saying much more than that—very nearly that their theology is now the only true one for everyone, though it springs out of a particular historical context. Sometimes, on the other hand, they seem to say, "This is the true theology for us; we are not greatly interested in what is the true theology for you." The feminist theologians are much nearer Wesley's position, since they claim that what they say originates not out of a particular historical context, but from the gospel itself.

The next question concerns the theology of fallen, or as we may well say, enslaved humanity. Here there is greater harmony than at first might appear. It is true that the liberation theologians have no concern with the sin of Adam and its alleged historical results. But they are, in all cases, willing to trace the present condition of the human race to a train of historical events rooted in the greed, ambition, and pride common to all human beings. For them, as for Wesley, sin is universal. They do not claim any natural goodness for the oppressed, even when announcing their solidarity with them. The primal sin is no doubt that of the oppressors, but the oppressed have acquiesced in their own oppression until they have taken on a slave mentality; they need to be "conscientized"—that is, awakened and made personally

aware of the state of slavery into which they have sunk. The oppressed are, of course, victims of systems more than of individual oppressors, and we do not find in Wesley indictments of evil political and economic systems. But he does ascribe to the Fall, and to the consequent reign of sin, disordered thinking as well as wrong action. Pain and disease are consequences of the Fall and affect the working of the mind, he says. "Let a musician be ever so skillful, he will make but poor music if his instrument be out of tune. From a disordered brain (such as is, more or less, that of every child of man) there will necessarily arise confusedness of apprehension . . . false judgments . . . and wrong inferences."[8] It would not have been difficult, surely, to persuade Wesley that political systems built by people with perverse desires, inordinate ambition, and disordered brains, have caused untold evil to their citizens and have corrupted the souls of those who built them.

The third question concerns the work of salvation. As we have seen, Wesley ascribes this solely and entirely to the grace of God operative in Christ. We do not cooperate in the work of salvation itself; our repentance before we have true faith is not displeasing to God, but it does nothing to deserve or to achieve salvation. Once we are pardoned and reborn, we put our salvation into practice with the help of the Holy Spirit. But our salvation is the work of God alone, and it has been carried out for us by Christ.

We do not find in the Latin American or in the black theologians the same emphasis on the initiative of God or the same concentration on the saving work of Christ. "Liberation," their word for salvation, is certainly the work of God active in history; but we, in an almost Pelagian way, bring it into effect by our deeds and sacrifices. For Gutiérrez, Christ indeed is part of the process of liberation, which continues from the first act of creation until the complete arrival of the kingdom of God, and Christ (in a sense not clearly defined) fulfills the process. But he is not the sole

mediator and agent of salvation. For James Cone, Christ is the liberator par excellence. He is not only the center of a particular event in time—he is the eternal event of liberation in the divine person who makes freedom a constituent of human existence, for he is the image of the invisible God, who is the liberating God.[6] Thus he is present in every act of liberation. Yet there is still a discrepancy between Wesley's assertion of salvation through Christ alone by his once-for-all act, and even the highest attribution of praise to Christ offered by the black theologians.

Feminist theology, on the other hand, is willing to ascribe full saving power to Christ, by whose reconciling act in death and resurrection the distinction of status between men and women is obliterated.

This leads to a yet more basic question. Is the liberation of which the liberation theologians speak the same as the salvation of which Wesley speaks? We cannot summarily dispose of this question by saying that whereas Wesley's salvation is spiritual, liberation for Latin Americans, blacks, and women is political. Neither logic, nor the Bible, nor the theologians in question, nor John Wesley, would admit this disjunction. Politics, to them (and I hope, to us) as far as the word needs definition, is the art or science of living together in communities; salvation, to Wesley and the Bible—liberation, to the theologians who emphasize it—is of the whole self, which must include the self in relation to others. "Spiritual" and "political" are not mutually exclusive terms.

But it is almost beyond doubt in spite of this, that salvation for Wesley—remembering that in salvation he included justification and sanctification, which are distinct but follow one upon the other as day follows night—concerned an individual's *personal* life and *personal* relations, first with God and then with neighbors and friends and fellow Christians. This was as far as Wesley looked for the

whole self. Liberation as it is expounded, on the other hand, is concerned with nations and races and classes and sexes; there is very little talk of God's forgiveness of the individual, or of personal relations with God and with neighbor, except insofar as the development of the individual is made possible and actual by the reordering of society.

It could be urged by the liberation theologians, and particularly by the feminists, that this is simply a difference of emphasis; that they also are concerned about personal, spiritual growth in grace, but that they have other things to do first—things that must be done first if that growth is even to be possible for the oppressed. There is force in this, but it is hard to read first Wesley, and then the others, without being convinced that the areas of real concern are very different.

Yet it may be suggested that in spite of what the theologians themselves say or fail to say, it is logically and theologically possible to be a Wesleyan and a liberation theologian at the same time, as far as the point under discussion is concerned. The Bible, in both Testaments, as the liberationists can rightly urge, is about the total salvation of humanity through the grace and power of God—and salvation is not total until the corporate as well as the personal life of human beings is redeemed. We are not wholly saved (and in token of this we groan within ourselves) until all are saved—until the whole universe enters upon the liberty and splendor of the children of God. So much Wesley needs to learn. Yet for us, as the liberationists need to learn, these are empty words unless as individual persons we receive the gifts of forgiveness and holiness and grow in grace as the children of God. So Wesley and the liberationists can be on speaking terms after all; the teaching of one complements the teaching of the others.

But next we ask, is the man or woman who has been justified and is in process of being sanctified, the same

person as one who is liberated in the way we have been describing? The marks of justification and sanctification are clearly set out by Wesley: the fulfillment of the law of God in its inward meaning; abstention from sinful acts; the bringing forth of the fruits of the Spirit—that is, love, joy, peace, and the rest; the steady conquest of temptation and inbred sin; a deep and practical love for God and neighbor. Wesley said that he knew of no holiness that was not social holiness, but we must not take this to mean that it was a holiness devoted to changing the social order; Wesley's holiness was social in the narrow sense that it related to personal relations with other people, especially those in the fellowship of believers. Although we cannot legitimately criticize Wesley for not holding views that had not yet been propounded about the social order, or for not analysing society in ways that had not yet been suggested—not even Wesley could do everything!—it is wholly fair to say that he thought of Scriptural holiness as being practised within the existing order. Nor does his belief that Christian perfection is possible in this life really supply a bridge to the belief that *society* can and should be transformed within the present historical process.

The liberated man and woman, on the other hand, have been made aware of the chains that bound them and have thrown off those chains, to live in freedom the life their innate powers enable them to live. Being themselves liberated, they become in their turn liberators, fighting against injustice, by violent means if necessary—since injustice itself is a form of entrenched violence and can be removed only by violence and, at least according to James Cone, by spurning mere reform and all attempts at reconciliation with the oppressors.

The two pictures called up in the mind are thus very different from each other, and although individuals have sometimes claimed to be true to both, in spite of the tension between them, it cannot be said that a theological or ethical

resolution of the issues has yet been offered—so to be a Wesleyan in a revolutionary situation means impalement upon the horns of a very uncomfortable dilemma. The most that can be said is that Wesley himself perhaps would have been somewhat more sympathetic with the exponents of feminist theology than with those of Latin American or black revolutionary theology, since he refrained from those aspersions on womankind that are part of the stock-in-trade of classical theology and plainly believed that the way of holiness was equally open to women and to men. But we cannot really say more than this.

The sixth and last question relates to the sources of theology. For Wesley there was only one source—the Bible—though he himself was, of course, unconsciously influenced by many traditions. Experience was secondary, intended only to confirm. For the liberationists, the nature and history of women and men, the dynamism of events in Latin America, and the black experience (in slavery and emancipation and second-class citizenship and discrimination, and found also in black worship—above all in the words and music of its songs) are also sources of theology, and primary sources at that. The Bible alone for Wesley; the Bible with other things, for the liberationists. This real discrepancy is diminished by the consideration that the Bible, as at least one of its main themes, speaks of the liberation of people and nations from oppression, but the discrepancy remains, nonetheless.

Conclusion

It is by now apparent that Wesleyan theology and liberation theology do not, in most cases, mean the same thing even when they use the same or similar words. In some respects liberation theology indicates a proper development of Wesley's thought, as in the account of fallen humanity; in some instances—as in the description of

salvation—Wesleyan theology can be held in conjunction and mutual complementation with liberation theology. But in other respects, such as the matter of the nature of holiness and the sources of theology, there is a conflict that cannot at the moment be resolved. Yet it is impossible to conclude, as some might be tempted to do, that Wesley's theology justifies the maintenance of the social and political status quo, with a few mild reforms, while liberation theology cannot defend anything except violent revolution. Wesley's theology, reinforced and communicated of course by his preaching, brought into existence a still-growing company of people, most of them from the oppressed classes and/or the subordinate sex, who, forgiven by God through Christ and empowered by the Spirit, have entered upon a new, free, and creative life. Such people are destined to change society—and some of them have done exactly that. And if, when confronted by a situation in which this new life they have received is violently withheld from others, they join in the fight for justice, I doubt very much if Wesley would frown down upon them in disapproval from his celestial seat—for he had an immense and not entirely nontheological sympathy with the oppressed and the deprived.

Methodism and Social Change In Britain

John Kent

This chapter is in two parts. The first, briefer section contains a rapid historical survey of the relationship between Methodism and social change in Britian from 1800 to the present. The second section attempts to interpret this material in a more theoretical fashion.

I

I would like to dissent from, or at least to qualify, Bernard Semmel's fashionable thesis that in England, Wesleyanism was the theological form of the democratic revolution and that its doctrine was essentially a liberal and progressive ideology, confirming and helping to advance the movement from a traditional to a modern society.[1] This is yet another variation on the familiar but quite unprovable Halévy thesis which suggests that one should first suppose that English society was threatened with revolution between 1740 and 1840, and then assume that one will find in Wesleyan history the explanation to show why this revolution did not actually occur. For Halévy, as for many other writers of a variety of political persuasions, Methodism worked this superfluous miracle through its Tory sympathies and its conservative influence; for Semmel, as for Harold Perkin, Wesleyanism weakened the revolutionary impulse in its violent form by substituting a theological rationale, inherently nonviolent and creative and condu-

340-41; *Letters*, 5, p. 264. Cf. Peter Brown's essay on "Human Understanding," which Wesley reprinted as an appendix to his own *Compendium of Natural Philosophy*, vol. 2 (New York: Bangs and Mason, 1823): "Divine metaphor is the substituting our ideas of sensation, which are direct and immediate with words belonging to them, for the things of heaven, of which we have no direct idea, or immediate conception. . . . The words, figuratively transferred from one thing to another, do not agree with the things to which they are transferred, in any part of their literal sense" (pp. 436-37). To be sure, this stricture does not apply to "revealed truth." But theology as such is always an admixture of revelation and human analogy and metaphor and therefore an inexact science at best.

67. Cf. *Works*, 9, pp. 513-14. Wesley was also aware of the human tendency to project, and the inadequacy of those projections, e.g. Peter Brown's comments in Wesley's *Natural Philosophy*: "The multiplying and enlarging our own perfections in number or degree only, to the utmost stretch of our capacity, and attributing them so enlarged to God, is no more than raising up an unwieldy idol of our own imagination, without any foundation in nature" (p. 434). Cf. Míguez Bonino, *Doing Theology*, p. 81.
68. *Works*, 5, p. 46.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
70. *Ibid.*, 11, pp. 366-446.

Chapter 2. José Míguez Bonino

1. *Journal*, 2, p. 488 ff.
2. *"Sicut non potest discerpi Christus in partes, ita inseparabilia sunt haec duo, quae simul et coniunctim in ipso percipimus; iustitiam et sanctificationem,"* Calvin, *Institutes*, 3: 11, 6. (The English translation quoted leaves out the last words, "justice and sanctification," which I have added in the text.)
3. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4:2, p. 504.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 508.
5. Semmel, *Methodist Revolution*, p. 8.
6. Barth, *Dogmatics*, 4:2, p. 502.
7. John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1960), p. 78. I disagree with Deschner's implicit presupposition that an evangelical theology must make justification the absolute norm. This forces Deschner to decide on a question Wesley would not allow and thus tends to distort the perspective of the evaluation.
8. This is how G. C. Berkouwer summarizes Wesley's concern in the discussion with Zinzendorf in *Faith and Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952), p. 51. Berkouwer himself is in sympathy with Wesley at this point. At another point, he gives a good characterization of his own position with the same emphasis:

"Sanctification, if it is to be at all, must not take place merely on some underground level of psychic life, quite in defiance of all outside disturbance, but must be the redemptive touch of our faith on all of life"(p. 13).

9. *Works*, 11, p. 53 ff.
10. Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962). The original German was published in 1845.
11. Quoted by Semmel, *Methodist Revolution*, p. 162.
12. Barth, *Dogmatics*, 4:2, p. 520.
13. *Letters*, 4, p. 158; 6, p. 175.
14. *Works*, 6, p. 2.

Chapter 3. Rupert E. Davies

1. *Works*, 5, p. 60-61.
2. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 15.
3. Cecil Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology* (Nashville: AMEC, 1975), pp. 92-122.
4. James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press), pp. 138-52.
5. *Works*, 7, p. 347.
6. James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1970).

Chapter 4. John Kent

1. Semmel, *Methodist Revolution*. Cf. R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution*, vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 466.
2. See, for instance, Thompson, *English Working Class*, 2nd ed., (1968). Also Perkins, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).
3. When he visited England in the 1840s and 1860s, Finney did not seem to be particularly interested in social reform, as it is said that he was in America (see ch. 6 and 7 in this volume).
4. Cf. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London: Wiederfeld & Nicholson, 1964); also his "Methodism and Threat of Revolution," *History Today*, pp. 115-24.
5. Sarah Hennell and her brother Charles, together with Charles Bray (an ex-Methodist), were the center of the group of Coventry rationalists who helped to educate the young George Eliot. The passage quoted is from Hennell's *Thoughts in the Aid of Faith* (London: G. Manwaring, 1860).
6. William Reginald Ward, *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 303, 309.