Success and the Prosperity Gospel: From Commodification to Transformation
A Wesleyan Perspective

Forthcoming in *Journal of Religious Leadership*

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Introduction

The church today is called to be attentive to social ethics, particularly in the current era where globalization is driven politically and economically by Western governments and transnational corporations. John Wesley, through his own ministry and writing at the advent of Methodism in the eighteenth century, provides churches in the Wesleyan tradition with social ethics pertinent to the twenty-first century global village. The thesis of this paper is to suggest that Wesley's social ethics introduce a challenge to the current neocolonial or "empire" success model driving the global economy by proposing instead a "transformative community model." This model is based on Wesley's interpretation of the role of Christians in light of the Great Commandment.

Recent statements about American socioeconomic status, such as those found in Thomas Friedman's The World is Flat,[1] address the desire for the United States to regain economic dominance in the world. Often American authors in this realm analyze economic statistics with an implicit agenda, hoping to continue advancing Western and primarily North American hegemony as a means of socioeconomic success and political dominance. Wesley's 18th century challenge to Christians regarding the notion of socioeconomic success offers an alternative mindset for the roles of both the Wesleyan church and Western governments today.

Contemporary Context

1. Post-Christendom and Power

The notion of Christendom, which means "the Christian world," reached its zenith in the fifth through sixteenth centuries, the Middle Ages.[2] For example, because of its legal and political clout, the church could reinforce obedience to its faith constructs and disciplines through inquisitions and crusades when heresies arose.[3] It also gained significant power through land acquisition and labor during the Middle Ages. The church had become an important force in Europe compared to its early days when it had functioned as a house movement. In addition, Christendom during this time frame allowed Christian clergy to associate closely with civic leaders, powerful organizations and government entities: the power establishments. The church's presence was an unquestioned part of these establishments. Further, the Christian religion became

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[1]Thomas Friedman, The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

[2]Colin Morris, "Christian Civilization," in The Oxford History of Christianity, ed. John McManners (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 208.

[3]See David L. Edwards, Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 245-246, for examples of persecution.

identified with dominant races and classes. A significant component of living in the Christendom era was that the good news of the gospel was not necessarily life-changing news; it was not appealing as a counter-cultural, alternative to power establishments, but rather a sanctioned, law-abiding way of living.[4]

Christendom faced significant challenges however by the late Middle Ages, particularly at the advent of the Protestant Reformation, nationalism and the rise of secularism which followed the Renaissance.[5] The ideal of church-state partnership did not survive the quest for human freedom of religion and political rule once the church itself adopted hegemonic tendencies. Church power was challenged as an institution promoting aristocratic rule.

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Protestant Christianity provided the Western European church with detailed doctrinal systems, based on a theory of scripture that had not been held by classical Reformers themselves. Biblical infallibility, the verbal words of God spoken and recorded verbatim, led to literalism with accompanying doctrinal and organizational structures of power. In response, Pietism emerged in the last third of the seventeenth century, focusing on the experiential nature of religion, the religion of the heart. Pietists organized themselves in small groups for scripture study, peacefully accepted other Christians and focused on ministerial skill in pastoral arts.[6] John Wesley was born into this context which later informed his and his brother Charles's development of the Oxford University "holy club," eventually called "The Methodists." Their intent was to invite men to join them in the discipline of scriptural reading and conversation to promote lived (scriptural) holiness.

The evolution of the Western church in post-Christendom rendered it less powerful in each progressing century. By the late eighteenth century, the French Revolution and the establishment of independent states in North America brought about the secular state, dividing church from state so that civil society no longer was controlled by the church. The ideals of democracy, citizenship and inalienable rights rose to the fore at this time, though Wesley himself questioned the notion of democracy and remained loyal to monarchy in England.

In the late nineteenth century, "modern theology" re-examined orthodox theology in light of the need for the church to "come to terms with scientific, critical and historical developments in the post-Enlightenment world."[7] Modernists differed sharply among themselves, but understood the church to be a necessary historical extension of the gospel.[8]

In the early 1900s, modern theology had begun to devolve into Western cultural religion. God was considered to be a benevolent patriarch, Jesus the moral example which we all should follow. Under this notion of benevolent Christianity, the Western

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[4] An in-depth discussion of post-Christendom can be found in Lisa Withrow, Claiming New Life: A Church for the Future. (St Louis: Chalice Press, pending 2008).

[5] Alan Richardson, "Christendom," in The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 94.

[6] John W. Riggs, Postmodern Christianity: Doing Theology in the Contemporary World, (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 139.

[7] G. Daly, "Modernism," in The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology, ed. Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 376.

[8] Ibid., 376-377.

world promoted Christianity as bringing both Christianity and democratic civilization to the world.[9]

This Western imperialist nature of Christianity, often hidden in the notion of evangelism, posed a danger for the world as it attached Western cultural values to itself. As European and North American societies gained strength, the good news of the gospel became embedded in the good news of Western, capitalist culture.[10]

2. Globalization and Economic Success: Commodifying the World

The rise of global connections among cultures and faith practices adds another layer of complexity for the church to consider in its approach to ministry. "Globalization" may be defined as the compression of the world, referring both to increasing sociocultural interdependence and to rapidly expanding political and cultural consciousness. Globalization is simultaneously cultural, economic and political but not necessarily cohesive normatively; instead, it is networked multidimensionally in a complex and constantly changing web.[11]

Globalization, it can be argued, has existed since explorers set out to discover new worlds, bringing their own cultures to bear in the midst of existing religious and social constructs. What has emerged as unique in the twentieth century, with roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is the primary focus on success defined as globally-based economic gain. The rise of secularism and the de-divinization of nature contributed to this shift.[12]

Worldly powers have their own purposes, often defining human beings as rational subjects who pursue their own self-interest, mostly through economic possessions. People are consumers. Economic wealth is equated with human well-being, and hence, with happiness. Rosemary Radford Ruether is succinct in describing "The more one owns, the better off one is. The better off one is, the happier one will be."[13] Possessions are equated with consumption and domination of nature with the assumption that limitless growth in terms of resources and economics is possible. Little attention is given to distribution of goods, to power differentials between transnational corporations and local workers or to human dignity. The market system is considered inevitable because it has been defined as the means of human progress.[14] Indeed, the market system can be connected easily to the notion of the prosperity gospel, where God rewards the talented and successful with further material success.

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[9]Riggs, 139.
[10]Anthony B. Robinson, Transforming Congregational Culture (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 92-93.
[11]Roland Robertson "Globalization and the Future of 'Traditional Religion' in God and Globalization: Religion and the Powers of Common Life, ed. Max L. Stackhouse with Peter J. Parish, vol. 1 (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 53.
[12]Jurgen Moltmann, "The Destruction and Healing of the Earth," in God and Globalization: The Spirit and the Modern Authorities, ed. Max L. Stackhouse and Don S. Browning, vol. 2 (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 216.
[13]Rosemary Radford Ruether, Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religions (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), ix.
[14]Ibid., ix.

As people not only consume commodities, but become commodities themselves, a new exclusion, sometimes becoming slavery is emerging in the global economy. "This new exclusion goes beyond the economic exploitation of people in Third World countries to produce new forms of total control over people's lives. According to conservative estimates, 27 million people, and perhaps as many as 200 million, live in such slave-like conditions all over the globe, and the numbers are growing."[15]

Further, economic theory has become the theological discourse in the Western world and perhaps even more widely. "In other words, instead of having the economy embedded in society, which in turn is embedded in the wider ecological context, we have made the economy the overall context. Education is for the sake of the economy, government is for the sake of the economy, and sometimes religion is for the sake of the economy." [16] The Western church has colluded with this notion of the economy being the moral basis for salvation of the world. Therefore, it has applauded economic success as the way forward nationally and internationally, frequently at the expense of just distribution of goods, health care, education and the health of the environment. Measuring benefits to the poor through international aid programs is less important than incorporating all nation-states into a global economy directed by the United States. Cobb calls this phenomenon "unilaterial imperialism."[17] The mission of the twenty-first century for the Western world is global economic governance, with transnational corporations included as important players through sponsorship and connection with Western governments.

Finally, the most dangerous element of the global economy manifests itself in dominant nation-states ruling by military action as the means to achieve global economic governance. International problems often are construed as military problems. In countries like the United States, the result is unprecedented military spending, with some researchers in the Bureau of Economic Analysis arguing that two-thirds of American tax dollars are spent on the military-industrial complex (versus twenty percent claimed by the Department of Defense).[18] This trend becomes more problematic when religious leaders promote the establishment of a "benign imperial world order," representing international morality; "the United States would bring a better life and superior values to the rest of the world."[19] Thus, war becomes an indispensable social institution.

As the mainline church acknowledges this global meta-context with its propensity to draw the world together through technology and communication while harming local markets, the church finds itself in a position to make a choice: it can continue to strive to have a voice that works in conjunction with socioeconomic powers such as governments and transnational corporations, or it can turn to prophetic work on the margins of society.

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[15] Joerg Rieger, God and the Excluded: Visions and Blind Spots in Contemporary Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 6.

[16] John B. Cobb, Jr., "Imperialism in American Economic Policy," in The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God, eds. John B. Cobb, Jr. et. al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 23.

[17] Ibid., 38.

[18] David Ray Griggin, "America's Non-Accidental, Non-Benign Empire," in The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God, eds. John B. Cobb, Jr. et. al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 18.

[19] Richard Falk, "Slouching Toward a Fascist World Order," in The American Empire and the Commonwealth of God, eds. John B. Cobb, Jr. et. al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 60.

If the church chooses the latter, it will find freedom to critique the negative aspects of globalization in light of a Christian ethic: loving God and neighbor, respecting creation and promoting human dignity and wholeness over and against marketplace profit margins. The potential for the church to influence secular powers from this ethical point of view remains significant. Those who engage in a proactive, change-oriented task of ethical living and discourse promote a new kind of influence based on love of neighbor: wholeness, justice and hospitality for each and for all peoples. This goal is not new: John Wesley himself hoped to accomplish this very thing. .

3. The Prosperity Gospel

Success defined as economic prosperity as a blessing from God if individuals and churches are appropriately faithful is a notion that has been propagated as a personal approach for gain since the eighteenth century Western Enlightenment. Success was a moral issue, celebrated and admired. In the twenty-first century, this prosperity gospel has expanded from Western cultures to churches around the world. For example, on the continent of Africa, "the success which these churches see as the right of a Christian covers all areas. God will meet you, in the standard phrase, 'at the point of your need.' In practice, however, success refers primarily to financial prosperity."[20] The prosperity gospel has expanded its influence beyond the Western self-justification for unfettered accumulation into worldwide church networks claiming evidence of the power of faith seen in the fruits of God-given prosperity.

The implication of this message is that true faithfulness leads to prosperous living as been modeled by the rich and powerful. The United States in particular promotes this gospel by claiming blessing as increasing *per capita* income, a sign of personal and social progress. However, increases in income do not improve the human condition, particularly if personal or national success is denoted by accumulation of goods and power. Money used to be an instrument of exchange, now it is the means of investment, or transferred around the world buying other units of money. Prosperity is not only a well-deserved blessing but a sign of intelligent maneuvering for investment purposes.

What makes this gospel particularly dangerous is its propensity to claim innocence of any motive other than fulfilling God's will for human beings. All people have opportunities to make life better and the only reason some people remain poor is because they do not exert enough effort to promote their own success. They are considered lazy, ineffectual or misdirected and therefore, "unblessed."

The temptation that presents itself even through the church for power and wealth is not one overcome easily in the United States or in Two-Thirds World countries. The fact remains that the gap continues to widen between the rich and the poor.

In this state of growing economic disparity based on an ethic of prosperity the church is called to redefine success in light of the Gospel message that commands love of God and love of neighbor as one would love self. In the twenty-first century, the vast majority of neighbors are living in poverty. John Wesley's social ethics provide insight for the church's necessary challenge to the prosperity gospel and notions of success.

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[20] Paul Gifford, "Expecting Miracles: The Prosperity Gospel in Africa," The Christian Century, July 10, 2007, 20.

Wesley's Eighteenth Century Social Ethics

John Wesley was known in his day for his challenge to the Anglican Church regarding its inattention to the plight of the common person, and particularly its own accumulation of power and wealth in the midst of surrounding poverty. A focal point for Wesley's preaching and teaching was that material wealth led to spiritual corruption if it were not used for the improvement of the lives of others. Indeed, for Wesley giving away surplus accumulation was a sign of being a faithful Christian. Wesley's social emphasis included attending to relationships with the poor, seen in his insistence that Methodists visit those living in dire conditions: alms houses, orphanages and prisons in particular. His aim was to ease conditions for people who were hungry, ill-treated or sick. As his ministry expanded and matured into a movement, Wesley instituted an interest-free loan fund system and dedicated a significant portion of his own time toward finding jobs for the poor. Methodist societies provided food and clothing, visited the sick, dispensed medicines and instituted comprehensive educational efforts.

As a result, Wesley affected change in the social consciousness of the middle and upper classes through his work, though he did not set about the change social structures that addressed economic disparity. At that time much as in contemporary times, poverty was viewed as self-incurred fate.[21] To address this assumption, Wesley emphasized personal contacts over anonymous charitable gifts, with the aim to challenge the voluntary ignorance of the self-sustaining classes about poverty. He had learned through his own experience that personal contact offered opportunity for compassion to grow out of love for one's neighbor, the ultimate biblical commandment.[22] This approach to ministry aided Wesley in challenging the prevailing public opinion about the laziness of the poor.

Wesley not only established programs for the poor, he preached about the difficulties encountered by poor people and the appropriate response of the middle and upper classes to the poor. His distinctive view of gaining, saving and sharing wealth challenged his constituents to give all that they could in an era of newly evolving capitalism. Sermons such as "The Danger of Riches," "The Use of Money," "On Riches," and "The Danger of Increasing Riches," situated Wesley against the prevailing capitalist, upwardly mobile, middle-class spirit of his age. He alienated many constituents who were philanthropically-minded but not inclined to give to such an extreme.

Wesley, in his sermon "The Use of Money,"[23] sets forth three rules for the use of money. First, "gain all you can," but do so without expense to life and health and without hurting one's neighbor in body, substance or soul. One must gain all one can through

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[21]Manfred Marquardt, John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles, trans. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 30.
[22]Ibid., 31.
[23]John Wesley, "The Use of Money," in John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology, eds. Albert Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991). 350-357.

honest diligence, bearing in mind the commandment to love neighbors as one loves self.[24] Second, "save all you can." Wesley instructs his hearers to avoid gratifying desires of the flesh through procuring expensive food or apparel for self or children. He eschews gratification of desires and exhorts persons simply to fill their needs. Third, the most controversial of the three rules, is "give all you can." Human beings are stewards of God's creation, and all of creation, including body and soul, belong to God. Therefore, those who are earners must provide for basic needs of self and family, but are to give the rest away for the good of the poor.[25]

Wesley's first two rules made sense to those moving upward on the economic ladder, but his third proved difficult. Methodists refused to believe that affluence was sinful or a doorway to sin. Thus, Wesley published three subsequent sermons indicating that surplus accumulation was a primary element of sin; the concern was so urgent that Wesley feared for a Christian's hope of salvation. His stance directly opposed the notion of a prosperity gospel, where Puritans and other groups posited that wealth honestly earned with a sign of God's divine favor.[26]

Today, the church can orient itself to Wesley's prophetic voice in his time. The Western church can find meaning in the pursuit of universal justice through personal piety and integrity (holiness). The church can choose models of success that include giving away all it can, and can challenge and even transform the Western-driven, global consumer culture. Wesley's words invite the Western church to pay attention to Wesley's social ethics by finding new language and behavior for success. Transforming the church's approach to the world by redefining economic success models internally and externally results in advocacy for marginalized and invisible persons, promoting effective development of sustainable communities. Doing so responds to the call to adopt a particular social ethic: to love God and neighbor and live a life of responsible grace.

A Different Definition of Success

Wesley's understanding of God's grace incorporated an understanding of human response to God in terms of accountable action. Christians were given biblical commandments to guide moral behavior, though these commandments needed to be focused on appropriate deeds for particular social contexts. Wesley understood love to be the indispensable condition for all deeds that could be considered truly good.[27] Only those who were believers could perceive the love of God, thereby enabling them to respond in love through works. "Faith and love now belonged inseparably together. Neither was a substitute for the other, nor could the sequence of faith and love be reversed: 'It is in consequence of our knowing that God loves us, that we love him [sic] and love our neighbor as ourselves.'"[28]

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[24] Ibid., 351
[25] Ibid., 356.
[26] Ibid., 451.
[27] Marquardt, 103.
[28] Marquardt, 104, quoting The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 7:269.

> It is in the consequence of our knowing God loves us that we love him, and love our neighbour as ourselves. Gratitude toward our Creator cannot but produce benevolence to our fellow-creatures. The love of Christ constrains us, not only to be harmless, to do no ill to our neighbour, but to be useful, to be "zealous of good works," "as we have time to do unto all men," and be patterns to all of true genuine morality, of justice, mercy and truth.[29]

Wesley understood the love of God to be reciprocal and personal, a source necessary for the emergence and implementation of unselfish love. "Equally necessary as a result of the love of God known and experienced in faith was the active love of one's neighbor."[30] Those renewed by God's love and given the gift of faith could not resist sharing the love he or she received.

Wesley's social ethics for his time challenged not only his constituents but made inroads in critiquing economic imperialism. His critique provides a starting point for challenges Christians are called to voice today. It is important to note that Wesley did not challenge the political system of Britain at the time; such notions of challenging forms of government to bring about change did not arise in any popular form until the nineteenth century. Though he remained disturbed throughout his life by the ill-effects on the local poor and the worldwide enslavement of persons based on British economic disparity within its own classes and its growing imperialism, Wesley approached change through theological understanding rather than systemic political reform.[31]

At the same time, a direct transcription from Wesley's eighteenth century British perspective to the different arenas where poverty is found today is not possible. Wesley lived during the emergence of capitalism and industrialization. Today, the world knows little else.

> Simply put, Wesley's picture belongs to a society that was moving into industrial capitalism. As Wesley himself recognizes in several writings, they are experiencing growth in production, an expansion of business, and an appropriation of resources and markets through material expansion. A new social class is emerging, and many of the poor who have been rescued by the Methodist movement are coming into a new condition, through work and a clean and sober life.[32]

Since Wesley's time, the long-term effects of industrial capitalism have emerged, for both good and ill. The widening gap between rich and poor that began in the eighteenth century continues to widen at alarming rates. The prosperity gospel is alive and well, defining success as the accumulation of wealth. Nonetheless, Wesley remains instructive: he refutes the gospel of prosperity by denying that economic success (wealth

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[29]D. Stephen Long, John Wesley's Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2005), 120 quoting John Wesley, Sermon 120, "The Unity of the Divine Being," The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 4:67

[30] Marquardt, 107.

[31] Theodore R. Weber, Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 30.

[32]Jose Miguez Bonino, "The Poor Will Be Always With You," in The Poor and the People Called Methodists, ed. Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood, 2002), 185

and privilege) are signs of God's favor and further, that these things are signs of robbery from the poor and that the poor have God's ear, heart and response and requires of us to have the same relationship

Today, particularly in Two-Thirds World countries, the socioeconomic situation differs greatly from eighteenth century Britain. Western countries have entered a neocolonial era, where former colonies that have political freedom today do not necessarily have economic freedom as a result. Neocolonialism itself is based in the connection between transnational corporations, international Western-based banks and Western governmental support. Technological, economic, political and cultural systems transcend the nation-state and often locate their centers in interactions among transnational corporations at the expense of local economies and local qualities of life.[33]

The theology that Wesley bequeathed to Christianity calls for not only concern about poverty in contemporary times, but to address it effective ways in current context. A definition of success for the church cannot mimic Wesley's thought and work so much as align itself with Wesley's conviction that love and care for neighbor puts a human face back on the category of "the poor." Success also requires the church to challenge making humanity and all of creation commodities for consumption that particularly benefit the wealthy through neocolonial imperialism. The ongoing pursuit of power in the guise of promoting democracy as a means to live the prosperity gospel sits at odds with the power of love, the divine desire for connection with humanity through wholeness in community that is interdependent with local and global communities and creation. The notion that wholeness can be created by coercion, that freedom can be achieved by dominance, legitimacy can be accomplished through lies, peace by war and Christian love by hatred of the Other promotes an imperialistic piety. [34]

Wesley's social ethics even when viewed from a twenty-first century perspective leads to a sound basis for defining success for the Western church. Wesley preached this good news and also envisioned local social structures that provided ways to aid people in improving their own plights. Today, the church is called to work with the poor as advocates for change while living in political and ecclesiastical structures that ignore the poor as irrelevant to the pursuit of the global empire. Competition and militaristic imperialism runs counter to the commandment to love neighbor taken up by John Wesley seventeen centuries after Jesus. Wesley teaches us that radical love for the poor in particular is the Christian focus of success.

Transformation and Community

Throughout history, the church has struggled to love its neighbor. The Western mainline church of the twenty-first century has become inwardly focused, caring for neighbor absentmindedly or not at all. Those churches that do pay attention to the world outside their doors often struggle with living out the Great Commandment in a diverse, globalizing, multicultural world. To be a transformative community, the church is called to move into areas heretofore unknown to it, addressing people in poverty and the natural world as increasing distress pervades the world.

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[33] Bonino, 187.

[34] Catherine Keller, "Omnipotence and Preemption," in The American Emprie and the Commonwealth of God (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 136.

To address the world that continually crucifies itself through emphasis on the prosperity gospel, Christians must redefine success in light of the Great Commandment. Love is meant to be a generous gift that cares for neighbor, even if neighbor is stranger or enemy. This radical love reverses the value of "gaining all one can" for the end-result of personal accumulation, by compelling each person to "give away all one can." Such a definition moves us from an imperial notion of success through domination and wealth to a generosity of spirit that cares about the network of life.

While Wesley did not attempt to change political or social systems in his time, his emphasis on love of neighbor and the potential of wealth to lead to greed and avarice for more wealth and power strikes a chord for the church today. According to Wesley, to be successful as a Christian one must act out of love with particular preference for the poor. To do so, one must have garnered a sense of compassion for the poor, rather than dehumanizing those living in poverty as either lazy or worse, as commodities available for the rich to accrue more wealth. He called for people to forego vengeance, personal security, gain and privilege.

Wesley helps us to ask the questions of the contemporary Christian mindset regarding success. He challenges Christians to understand the conditions that cause poverty through discourse about economic dimensions of moral and political issues, particularly when the poor were blamed for their own condition.[35] He calls Christians to move deeper into a critique of that which allows globalization to benefit only the rich and how political and social systems encourage this system to continue. To extrapolate Wesley's thinking further into current context, thoughtful consideration and theological reflection need to be given to international input into the capitalist market, the nature of the market itself and regional coalitions that balance worldwide power. The end-results of international banking that reinforce ever-growing debt in poor countries must be analyzed in terms of whether this method of "aid" is in fact benefiting those who need opportunity rather than charity.

The church has its own opportunity to strengthen civil society with an eye toward Wesley's ethics as he exercised his ministry. [36] Theologian Rebecca Chopp envisions Wesley inviting the United States and other hegemonic cultures to a discourse that names destruction and suffering from unjust systems as sin, thereby revealing depravity of hegemonic culture itself.[37] For her, discourse is a reality check. Suffering comes from selfish practices in the world that stem from willful ignorance of realities of the Other, lack of internal health in those who hold power and environmental domination that assumes that the earth exists primarily for human consumption. Instead, a focus on a flourishing for all the world drives Wesley's call to love neighbor.[38]

What would it be like if the church were to start such discourse in the Western world, much as church leaders did so in South Africa during and after apartheid? To do so, the church must examine its theological and ethical understanding of what it means to be in community with Christ and each other. Wesley affirmed that every human being is loved by God and the human response to this love led to desire to live a life of holiness.

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[35] Bonino, 188.
[36] Bonino, 189.
[37] Rebecca S. Chopp, "Anointed to Preach: Speaking of Sin in the Midst of Grace," in The Portion of the Poor, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995). 99.
[38] Chopp, 106-107.

His emphasis on scriptural holiness for individuals, living a holy life based on the scriptural mandates, eventually was meant to transform not only individuals, but a nation.[39]

Conclusion

Today, scriptural holiness leads Christians to recognize the need for transformation of the ethical self-understanding of the church, society in the midst of neocolonialism and the "new world order." The goal is to change attitudes based on a call of radical love. Infusing Wesley's insight into grassrootsr movements that redefine success as walking with poor people as neighbors in the midst of self-destructive imperialism breaks through the prosperity gospel mindset. Developing a respect for the poor by being present with people who are poor as Wesley did, rather than promoting pity through charitable giving, is a step. Further, confession about racism, greed or an over-emphasis on charity through institutional over-programming to meet governmental and service-based agreements all are part of the discourse that Chopp speaks of as being necessary before transformation can begin. Social holiness for Wesley meant gathering as Christian community with a call to undertake works of mercy. Today, social holiness can be defined in a broader sense: a care based in the love of God that calls us to love neighbor by addressing socioeconomic inequities on both the local and global scales. Christians are called to make sacred space for the poor to gain voice and opportunity for holistic living. This is the radical love of the gospel to which Wesley was inexorably drawn and to which the church is called to foster again and again.

Transformation is a far-reaching reform, informed by Wesley's social ethics based on his understanding of the Great Commandment. Success is breaking open exploitative systems that continue to damage people who are poor. It is advocating for change regarding beleaguered environments and communities with a radical notion of love of neighbor. It is a movement to re-humanize people, to call into question commodification of all things and people on earth. Finally, it is repeatedly, consistently setting forth a vision in all arenas of power for the holistic healing of the world based on radical love. Such is the notion of success that boldly and courageously provides transformation for all.

[39] Bonino, 191.

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