

## **IN SEARCH OF JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGICAL OUTLOOK TO ENGAGE INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: A Challenge to Methodists in Myanmar Context**

**Abstract:** Myanmar is facing religious conflict. It is becoming a big problem, especially between majority Buddhists and minority Muslims. The situation of the country today strongly challenges political and religious leaders to address the problem for peaceful coexistence between different religious groups. Methodists in Myanmar have to look into John Wesley's theological outlook for interreligious engagement.

**Key words:** Religious conflict, Methodists, interreligious dialogue, preventient grace approach, liberation approach, catholic spirit approach, holiness approach.

### **1. Introduction**

In this pluralistic world, it is essential to study John Wesley's theological outlook to discover a way of interreligious engagement. Today Myanmar Methodists are strongly challenged to engage and work together with other faiths in interreligious dialogue due to a consequence of political, religious and ethnic issues. Interreligious dialogue essentially becomes a useful instrument to have mutual respect and understanding among different religious people. It is needed to consider whether Wesley followed liberalism or fundamentalism, inclusivism or exclusivism. I have noticed that fundamentalists and exclusivists do not pay enough attention to interreligious dialogue. Regarding theological trend, perhaps most of Myanmar Methodists are fundamentalists, evangelical and conservative. Stressing how to enter into heaven much, exclusivists believe that it is only by accepting Jesus' atoning sacrifice while inclusivists are not taking seriously faith in the atoning work of Jesus. The most liberalists generally reject the necessity of salvation. They also reject the entire concept of eternal punishment in Hell for anyone – saved or unsaved. The vast majority of evangelical Christians, however, hold the view that belief in Jesus is necessary for salvation. This study will possibly help Myanmar Methodists to see the situation of the country and realize the urgent need for building up a peaceful society by engaging in interreligious dialogue.

### **2. Religious Conflict in Myanmar Today**

Myanmar has faced Buddhist-Muslim religious conflict since 2012. The religious and ethnic conflict in Arakan/ Rakhain State has become a chronic problem in the country. In looking back to how the entire crisis started, it has been observed that a 28-year-old Arakanese Buddhist woman was raped and killed by three Muslim men on 28 May 2012. The sectarian violence was, as a direct result, sparked in June. Another incident was the Buddhist-Muslim riot which broke out on 21 March 2013 in Meiktila town, Mandalay Region. This time, violence claimed at least 25 lives. We can say that it is the affect of revenge being taken against each other.

Presently, there is a serious problem of *Bengali Muslims* crisis in Arakan State, which shares the border line with Bangladesh. They are called Rohingya, but Myanmar does not recognize it. The government has also denied them citizenship and sees them as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Some western media and journalists went so far as to call it ethnic genocide or ethnic cleansing. We have read and heard news about some world leaders and fellow peace prize winners criticized Aung San SuuKyi's response to the Bengali crisis.

Whenever we talk about this crisis in Rakhine State, we always need to remember a ragtag Islamic rebel group called Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). ARSA was formed in 2013 to "defend, salvage and protect" the Rohingya against state repression "in line with the principle of self-defense".<sup>1</sup> It is, however, unclear how this small rebel group would protect Muslims in Rakhine State. More than that, this militant group never gets support from the vast majority of Muslims in the country. For instance, local newspapers mention that the All Myanmar Islamic Religious Organization<sup>2</sup> on Saturday, 10 September 2017, strongly condemned the ARSA for its terrorist acts in northern Arakan State, and pledged collaboration with the government, interfaith groups and the public to prevent such acts.

### **3. Interreligious Dialogue and John Wesley**

"Interreligious Dialogue" or "Interfaith Dialogue" is used as a tool to solve religious conflict in Myanmar context. The U.N. official said, "More interfaith dialogues are needed in Myanmar."<sup>3</sup> Presently, NGOs, Myanmar Council of Churches, theological institutions and other religious organizations have taken interreligious dialogue seriously to have mutual understanding towards lasting peace. The government also calls for dialogue and invites religious leaders to build a peaceful society in the country. Some argue that participants in dialogue are people who have the same mind. So, it is not useful. They think that those who are pessimistic should join in interreligious dialogue. However, interreligious dialogue groups have a positive view that it is a useful tool for building up peace, harmony and mutual understanding in a multi religious society like Myanmar.

Nowadays, interreligious/interfaith dialogue groups are actively working in Myanmar. Remarkably, for an interfaith dialogue to promote global peace, harmony, and security, 135 religious leaders and diplomats from 32 countries gathered 5–6 August 2017 at Sitagu International Buddhist Academy (SIBA) in Yangon.<sup>4</sup> As a Buddhist dominated country, if Buddhist monks lead and organize dialogue meetings among different faiths, it would be surely more effective. It is natural that they would fascinate the majority people of Burmese Buddhists. It does not mean, however, that we, Christians, will not play any active role in religious dialogue for peace and coexistence in the country we share.

What must be noted here is that there has been a lingering challenge facing the work of interreligious dialogue in Myanmar, given the restriction of using certain Pali words in Christianity and other non-Buddhist religions. For instance, some Burmese Buddhists prohibited Christians from using Buddhist terms, such as *Pongdawgyi* (monk/priest) and *Thingan* (robe). During the time of State Peace and Development Council (2010-2015), *Buddha Gongyi*, a Buddhist organization, wrote a formal letter of complaint to President Thein Sein not to use such sacred Buddhist terms in Christianity. Even they want to not only revise but also replace Adoniram Judson's Burmese Bible translation, which employed several Buddhist terms, with new terms. Recently, the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee (a government-

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<sup>1</sup> "Myanmar: Who are the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army?", *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41160679> (accessed 12 September 2017).

<sup>2</sup> This national Islamic organization made up of five local Muslim organizations — including Jamiat Ulama-al Islam (H.Q), The Islamic Religious Affairs Council, All Myanmar Muslim Youth (Religious Affairs) and Myanmar Muslim Nation Affairs Organization.

<sup>3</sup> U.N. Official: 'More Interfaith Dialogue' needed in Myanmar, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/asia/2013/09/25/U-N-official-more-interfaith-dialogue-needed-in-Myanmar-.html> (accessed 23 January 2018).

<sup>4</sup> B. D. Dipananda, "Interfaith Dialogue for Peace, Harmony, and Security Held in Myanmar", *Buddhistdoor Global News*, <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/news/interfaith-dialogue-for-peace-harmony-and-security-held-in-myanmar> (accessed 14 September 2017).

appointed body of high-ranking Buddhist Monks) had made announcement regarding the use of some Burmese Buddhist terms in other religions.<sup>5</sup>

In Myanmar, we have to consider this: Is interreligious dialogue relevant and helpful to solving religious conflict and building a peaceful society? Generally, speakers in interreligious dialogue largely share their beliefs with other religious people. For example, Leonard Swidler rightly observes that "Inter-religious occurs when religious insiders, that is, members of two or more religions, come together primarily to learn from each other what the other thinks/does and why."<sup>6</sup> Interreligious dialogue helps participants for a mutual understanding. Then this supports to construct good relationship and common good in multi religious context. However, some argue that participants are those who have the same mind. It is observed that religious extremists who need more to have mutual understanding are very much reluctant to participate in such event.

What is Wesley's view of interreligious engagement? There is no doubt that there was no religious conflict during the era when he served the Lord as an evangelist in England. However we know that he met some Jews in Rotterdam and some places in Britain. He also knew Muslims and called them as "Mohametans."<sup>7</sup> Although Wesley did not deal with interfaith, we can see his theological view that Ron Robinson and Erin Simmonds note as follow:

... we contend that the pastoral bent of Wesley's theology is indicative of his keen interest in how Christian lives and brings a distinctive emphasis to the project of interfaith engagement. This way of living, grounded in love of God and love of neighbor, is what he stressed in his sermons and letters. It provides an important imperative for engagement with and treatment of others...<sup>8</sup>

So, we can safely conclude from this fact that Wesley is *not* an exclusivist. He could engage interreligious dialogue for common good when and if it is needed in his time.

#### **4. Methodists in Myanmar and Social Issues**

Let's look into the history of Methodists in Myanmar briefly from a social perspective to see their understanding of religious and ethnic conflicts. There are five Methodist churches in Myanmar, viz.,

- (i) *The Methodist Church (Lower Myanmar)*: The American Methodist missionaries established this church in 1879; Membership: 3,756 in 2017.
- (ii) *The Methodist Church (Upper Myanmar)*: This church was founded by the British Methodist missionaries in 1887; membership: 28,738 in 2018.
- (iii) *Free Methodist Church*: This church was formed by a person who separated from the Upper Myanmar Methodist Church in Haka, Chin State, in 1993; membership: about 1,500.
- (iv) *Wesleyan Church*: The people who broke away from the Upper Myanmar Methodist Church due to doctrinal problems and ethnic issues established this church in 1997; membership: 11,222 in 2018.

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<sup>5</sup> It is noted that Malaysian court has ruled non-Muslims not to use the word Allah to refer to God, even in their own faiths. See "Malaysia court rules non-Muslims cannot use 'Allah'," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24516181> (accessed 4 July 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Swidler, *Dialogue for Interreligious Understanding: Strategies for the Transformation of Culture-Shaping Institutions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), [https://books.google.com.mm/books?id=dfe\\_CQAAQBAJ&pg=PT21&dq=definition+of+interreligious+dialogue&hl=en&sa=X&redir\\_esc=y#v=one\\_page&q=definition%20of%20interreligious%20dialogue&f=false](https://books.google.com.mm/books?id=dfe_CQAAQBAJ&pg=PT21&dq=definition+of+interreligious+dialogue&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=one_page&q=definition%20of%20interreligious%20dialogue&f=false) (accessed 28 September 2017).

<sup>7</sup> See John Wesley, "On Faith," Sermon 106, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-106-on-faith/> (accessed 10 September 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Ron Robinson and Erin Simmonds, "Practical Divinity: Pluralism in a Liberal Arts Community," in Matthew W. Charlton and M. Kathryn Armistead, ed. *The Prophetic Voice and Making Peace* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist General Board of Higher Education, 2016), 71.

(v) *Evangelical Methodist Church*: These people who separated from the Upper Myanmar Methodist Church, Falam District, Chin State, founded this church in 2003; membership: 7,093.<sup>9</sup>

The number of Methodists in Myanmar is about 51,000.

I have looked at whether Methodist churches work together in solving social issues. I have found that:

The Lower and Upper Myanmar Methodist churches are trying to unite. Notably, Methodist churches in Yangon have had fellowship as a Wesleyan community on *Aldersgate Day* (May 24) since some years ago. They worship together and sometime have seminars. They helped the victims of Cyclone Nargis in 2008.<sup>10</sup>

However, they do not organize nor engage in interreligious dialogue while it is a strong challenge to Christianity in Myanmar.

Some elements of Wesley's theological outlook, indeed, encourage church leaders to address public issues in our society, because he maintains that the church, which is the Body of Christ, should always live in society. The living church must pay adequate attention to social issues that people are facing in their daily life.

## 5. John Wesley's Theological Outlook for Interreligious Engagement: A Challenge to the Myanmar Methodists

I have tried to look into John Wesley's theological outlook to find its approach to other religions/faiths. He is a well known Evangelist. We can also see him as "the Liberal,"<sup>11</sup> "the Liberationist,"<sup>12</sup> and "the Inclusivist."<sup>13</sup> I have found four theological approaches that could illustrate Wesley's attitude to interreligious engagement.

### 5.1. A Preventive Grace Approach

A theological term "grace" is derived from a Latin word *gratia*. The New Testament employs it "God's good-will and His empowering of His people." Paul used the Greek word "Charia" (χάρις) for "grace," which is "the free and unmerited favour of God as manifested in the salvation of sinners."<sup>14</sup> It is a favorite word of Paul in his letters to Christians in different churches. For him, salvation is by the grace of God through faith (Eph. 2:8).

Along with Paul, Wesley seriously took the word "grace" to explore its concept deeply in his sermon, "Free Grace." He emphasized the significance of God's Grace for all humankind. He said,

First. It is free in all to whom it is given. It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part... It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all these flow from the free grace of God; they are the streams only, not the fountain. They are the fruits of free grace, and not the root...<sup>15</sup>

Free Grace is given to humanity by God through his Son, Jesus Christ who died on the cross for the world's salvation.

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<sup>9</sup> K.M.Y. Khawsama, "John Wesley's View of Salvation as Liberation: A Perspective of *Dukkha*-ridden People in Myanmar Context," *A paper submitted to the 13<sup>th</sup> Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr. "Wesley the Liberal", *Religious Online*, <http://www.religion-online.org/article/wesley-the-liberal/> (accessed 14 September 2017).

<sup>12</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., "Wesley the Liberationist", *Religious Online*, <http://www.religion-online.org/article/wesley-the-liberationist/> (accessed 10 August 2017)

<sup>13</sup> "Wesley the Inclusivist," *Wesleyan Armenian*, <https://wesleyanarminian.wordpress.com/2011/04/06/wesley-the-inclusivist/> (accessed 15 September 2017).

<sup>14</sup> *Dictionary of the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "Grace"

<sup>15</sup> John Wesley, "Free Grace," *Sermon 128*, <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Sermon-128-Free-Grace> (accessed 10 September 2017).

John Wesley's concept of Free Grace is also meant as Prevenient Grace. He explained as follows,

But it is free for ALL, as well as IN ALL. To this some have answered, "No: It is free only for those whom God hath ordained to life; and they are but a little flock. The greater part of God hath ordained to death; and it is not free for them. Them God hateth; and, therefore, before they were born, decreed they should die eternally..."

Wesley had learned the significance of God's grace. Indeed he is recognized as a theologian of grace.

Certainly, for him, the prevenient grace approaches everyone. In other words, God loves everyone regardless of his or her religion or ethnicity. Therefore, He sent His only Son to save all humankind in the world. There is no favoritism. In broad sense, Wesley used the idea of prevenient grace to refer to the restraint of evil throughout the world. It is similar to the Calvinist idea of "Common Grace", and in a more narrow sense to refer to grace drawing people to faith in Christ. Wesley's theological perspective of prevenient grace leads one's life to have a justifying grace, then sanctifying grace.

My observation is that, in connection with Wesley's impression of Prevenient Grace which is "free for ALL, as well as IN ALL," we can clearly see his outlook on other religions/faiths. He saw God's mercy on ALL humankind in the world. Another way of saying this is that the grace of God is for all human beings. There is no discrimination – Christians or non-Christians for God's Grace. This idea challenges Methodists in Myanmar today to share Grace with other religious/faith people.

## 5.2. A Liberation Approach

John Wesley can be seen as "abolitionist" and "liberating evangelist." He was concerned about social issue – slavery, poverty, gambling, etc. We can also see here that "Wesley's theological view reflects God's love, mercy and compassion for slaves who are outcast, downtrodden and helpless. He sees God as a Saviour who can set them free. Like liberation theologians today, Wesley viewed God as a liberator."<sup>16</sup> His salvation begins with Prevenient Grace that leads to liberation. He wanted to liberate the people who are slaves and under any kind of bondage in their lives. He also desired to transform society. Taken together, we can see his liberation approach.

Further, Wesley's theological view of salvation is not only to save one's life from sin but also to liberate his/her life from suffering, which is created by human being in different ways. If we look at his theology of salvation as liberation from a Christian-Buddhist perspective, we can realize that anyone who is saved from personal sin or original sin by the grace of God through Jesus it is also needed to liberate his/her life from socio-political suffering. It is, again, a challenge to Methodists to discover an effective way of liberation.

At the very beginning of the ministry of Holy Club, the then Methodist, in Wesley's time, they loved the Bible as well as *Ministry* or *Serving* to people who are in need, prisoners, sick, etc. Methodists visited them. I can imagine that Wesley and his fellow Methodists helped and encouraged them. Prayer and Preaching are useful instruments in their ministry. I am sure that this liberation approach includes ALL, even if there were possibly non-Christians in those days, anywhere they visited.

What I can see is that Wesley's idea of liberation approach to ALL challenges Myanmar Methodists today. As a church, there is no historical fact of Methodists' involvement in Myanmar liberation movements. We must acknowledge this fact as Christians. Of course, a few persons have been actively participating in interreligious dialogue for peace. As

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<sup>16</sup> K.M.Y. Khawsama, "John Wesley's View of Salvation as Liberation: A Perspective of *Dukkha*-ridden People in Myanmar Context,"

responsible Christians who share Burma with people of other religions, the leaders of the church have to pay attention to religious conflict and solving this problem by participating or organizing interreligious dialogue in the country.

### 5.3. A Catholic Spirit Approach

John Wesley sees the church as "Catholic" and has "Catholic Spirit." The word *Catholic* comes from Latin *catholicus*, from Greek *katholikos*, i.e. "universal," from *katholou* in general. *Catholic* (adj.) means "1. universal; relating to all men; all-inclusive; 2. comprehensive in interests, tastes, etc.; broad-minded; liberal."<sup>17</sup> Wesley contributes the concept of Catholic Spirit in a time of changes in economics, politics and intellectual life. His Catholic Spirit approach is relevant for changes in society and British Christianity in those days. It seeks a common ground – outside and within Methodism.<sup>18</sup>

In his sermon, "A Catholic Spirit," Wesley takes a *Giving Hand Model* based on 2 Kings 10:15-16. This tells us about the 10<sup>th</sup> king of the northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria), Jehu and Jehonadab, a supporter of Jehu, as follows:

After he [Jehu] left there, he came upon Jehonadab son of Rekab, who was on his way to meet him. Jehu greeted him and said, "Are you in accord with me, as I am with you?"

"I am," Jehonadab answered.

"If so," said Jehu, "give me your hand." So he did, and Jehu helped him up into the chariot. Jehu said, "Come with me and see my zeal for the LORD." Then he had him ride along in his chariot.

This shows good relationship or as a symbol of friendship between those who have the same heart. Looking at the story of background Wesley speaks:

Is your heart right toward your neighbor? Do you love as yourself, all mankind without exception? "If you love those only that love you, what reward do you have?" Do you "love your enemies?" Is your soul full of good-will, of tender affection toward them? Do you love even the enemies of God, the unthankful and unholy? Does your heart yearn over them? Could you "wish yourself" temporally "accursed" for their sake? And do you show this by "blessing them that curse you, and praying for those that despitefully use you, and persecute you?"

Wesley also expanded his concept of catholic spirit. To consider its wider view, he raised some questions in his sermon, as follows:

Do you show your love by your works? As you have time and opportunity, do you in fact "do good to all men," neighbors or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad? Do you do them all the good you can, endeavoring to supply all their needs, assisting them both in body and soul, to the uttermost of your power? If you are thus minded (may every Christian say, yes), if you are but sincerely desirous of it, and following on until you attain, then "your heart is right, as my heart is with your heart."<sup>19</sup>

Wesley's theology of catholic spirit focuses "catholic love" or "universal love." This approach creates good relationship in multi religious and ethnic society. This is, once more, a theological and moral challenge to Myanmar Methodists to be people of catholic spirit who can give their hands to other religious people. In other words, *giving hand* is a symbol of catholic spirit that demonstrates understanding and welcoming others.

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<sup>17</sup> Collins English Dictionary, s.v. "Catholic."

<sup>18</sup> See James L. Schwenk, *Catholic Spirit: Wesley, Whitefield, and the Quest for Evangelical Unity in Eighteenth-Century British Methodism* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008).

<sup>19</sup> John Wesley, "A Catholic Spirit," Sermon 53, <http://www.crivoice.org/cathspirit.html> (accessed 21 September 2017).

#### 5.4. A Holiness Approach

"Be holy, because I am holy," Peter speaks, (1 Peter 1:16; cf. Leviticus 11:44). In the Old Testament time, Israelites tried to avoid physical pollutions by keeping the laws seriously. For Wesley, as God is holy, Christian life must be morally holy. He interprets Leviticus 11:44 as follows:

By this he gives them to understand, that all these cautions about eating or touching these creatures was not for any real uncleanness in them, but only that by diligent observation of these rules they might learn with greater care to avoid all moral pollutions, and to keep themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and from all familiar and intimate converse with notorious sinners.<sup>20</sup>

During his studies in Oxford in 1729, Wesley and his younger brother, Charles Wesley who is a hymn writer, with their friends organized a Christian group known as the *Holy Club*. Later, people called it *Methodist*. Wesley founded Methodist Society, but not as a new denomination. He preached and nurtured Christians to grow up and bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their life.

Wesley took holiness of mind and life seriously. However, "*holiness is not* primarily a negative, freedom or *purification* from sin, but a positive."<sup>21</sup> In his view of Christian perfection and praxis, "holiness is both an inward act of grace and the outward embodiment of that spiritual state through concrete actions and spiritual disciplines."<sup>22</sup> Holiness of Christian life is a practical way of sharing the love of God with other people, Christians or non-Christians.

Wesley's theological approach of holiness of mind and life is praxis toward Christian perfection in love. It could be said that Methodism is a way of holiness. In his Sermon, "Christian Perfection," Wesley preached that:

It is true, the children of God do not mistake as to the things essential to salvation: They do not "put darkness for light, or light for darkness;" [Isa. 5:20] neither "seek death in the error of their life." [Wisdom 1:12] For they are "taught of God," and the way which he teaches them, the way of holiness, is so plain, that "the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein." [Isa. 35:8] But in things unessential to salvation they do err, and that frequently...<sup>23</sup>

The starting point of Christian perfection in love is his view on *grace*. Consequently, "holiness theology is filled with an optimism of grace."<sup>24</sup> Wesley is also believed in restoration of *imeigo Dei*. For him, there is power in grace that can transform one's life to have holiness.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley's holiness approach makes a Christian perfection life to love his/her other faith neighbours. In his article, "Holiness of Heart and Life," Steve Manskar remarks that:

More than an assent to a particular belief, holiness is a commitment to a holistic way of living one's life manifest in a vigorous calling and cultivation to the love of God and neighbor. Wesley

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<sup>20</sup> John Wesley's Bible Commentary, <http://www.godrules.net/library/wesley/wesley.htm> (accessed 22 January 2018).

<sup>21</sup> T. A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People: The Theology of Christian Perfecting* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Tiffany L. Steinwert, "A Legacy of Holiness: Toward a Wesleyan Praxis of Interreligious Engagement in Higher Education"

<sup>23</sup> John Wesley, "Christian Perfection," Sermon 40, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-40-christian-perfection/> (accessed 27 September 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Floyd T. Cunningham, ed. S. Mark Heim, "Interreligious Dialogue: A Wesleyan Holiness Perspective, *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 189.

<sup>25</sup> Lars Svanberg, "Wesley on Personal Holiness", [http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/wc\\_Eur\\_Wesley\\_on\\_Personal\\_Holiness\\_Lars\\_Svanberg.pdf](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/wc_Eur_Wesley_on_Personal_Holiness_Lars_Svanberg.pdf) (accessed 28 September 2017).

was adamant that Christianity cannot exist without both the inward experience and outward practice of holiness.<sup>26</sup>

Holiness of heart and life must bear the fruit of the Spirit for all humankind. Thus, Steve is right in saying that:

Persons who strive toward holiness of heart and life join with others to serve the world that God loves. Loving your neighbor as yourself means Christians join with Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, pagan, atheist, and agnostic neighbors who are willing to serve with and improve life for people who are poor, sick, oppressed, voiceless and marginalized by the world.<sup>27</sup>

Wesley's holiness approach encourages today's Methodists in Myanmar to share God's love as forming and nurturing relationships with our neighbours.

### **Concluding Remark**

As far as I know, there is no record of interreligious engagement in Myanmar Methodist church history. Although there was no religious conflict in his time, the four theological approaches of John Wesley clearly illustrate his attitude to other people, including non-Christians. Wesley is seen as abolitionist, liberal, liberationist, and inclucivist, and his theological concept of preventient grace, of liberation, of catholic spirit and of holiness include all humankind in the world. He has an ecumenical mind to work together with others for common good. I feel that Wesley is still challenging us, Methodists in Myanmar, today to organize or engage in interreligious dialogue activities for building up a peaceful society in the country. We should be open to truth and wisdom from whatever source they come. It is essential to share God's love with our faith neighbours. Last but never least, Wesley famously stated: The world is my parish. As Methodist Christians, we are biblically and morally entrusted with responsibility to serve the Burmese regardless of religion, ethnicity, and social status as an instrument of social transformation.

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<sup>26</sup> Steve Manskar, "Holiness of Heart and Life", <https://blog.umcdiscipleship.org/holiness-of-heart-and-life-part-3-of-6/> (accessed 29 September 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.