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TWO CRITIQUES OF WEALTH: JOHN WESLEY AND SAMUEL JOHNSON ASSESS THE MACHINATIONS OF MAMMON

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Samuel Johnson paid John Wesley a handsome compliment in a letter he penned on Tuesday, February 6, 1776. Writing to thank Wesley for sending him his "Commentary on the Bible," Johnson noted Wesley's use, which amounted to plagiarism, of Johnson's *Taxation No Tyranny*. Wesley had extracted Johnson's principal arguments in his own *Calm Address To Our American Colonies*. Johnson, instead of charging Wesley with unconscionable borrowing, wrote to Wesley: "To have gained such a mind as yours, may justly confirm me in my own opinion."[1]

Some years later, in 1780, Wesley had an occasion to return Johnson's compliment. Writing about "The Danger of Riches," Wesley insisted that even if wealth has been amassed honestly, it becomes for its possessors "a snare," dangling before them "many foolish and hurtful desires, which drown [the wealthy] in destruction and perdition."[2] Having made this point, he asked, rhetorically: ". . . who . . . has the courage to declare so unfashionable a truth? I do not remember that in threescore years I have heard one sermon preached upon this subject. And what author within the same term has declared it from the press? At least in the English tongue? I do not know one."[3]

Wesley, however, did know such an author—Samuel Johnson. No one, not even Wesley, had exposed the lure of mammon to sharper criticism than had "Dictionary Johnson." During the decade of the 1750s, Johnson published *Rambler, Adventurer* and *Idler* essays in which he held up to merciless derision the pursuit of happiness through acquiring wealth.

Even if Wesley did not have copies of Johnson's essays at hand, he knew their author. On Thursday, December 18, 1783, when Wesley was 80 and Johnson 74, Wesley visited the latter and recorded in his Journal: "I spent two hours with that great man, Dr. Johnson, who is sinking into the grave by a gentle decay."[4] Five years earlier, in 1778, Johnson remarked

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[1]Bruce Redford, Editor, *The Letters of Samuel Johnson, Volume II, 1773–1776* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 290.

[2]Albert C. Outler, Editor, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3, Sermons III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 229.

[3]Outler, *Volume III*, 229.

[4]Thomas Jackson, Editor, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume IV* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, no date), 265.

to his biographer Boswell: "John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have out his talk, as I do."[5]

It is reasonable to assume that Johnson and Wesley occasionally folded their legs and talked about the wiles of wealth. For, as this article will show, the two—Wesley, a priest of the Church of England, and Johnson, a devout lay communicant—shared similar views about the machinations of mammon. Therefore, in 1780, when Wesley evaluated his efforts to convince men and women that wealth, no matter how accumulated, is a dangerous thing, he had an opportunity to say that only he and Johnson had declared the wiles of wealth from the press. But Wesley muffed his chance to say that Dr. Johnson's thinking on lucre's lures confirmed him in his own opinion.

Nevertheless, Johnson's and Wesley's assessments of the wiles of wealth—articulated in Johnson's newspaper columns and Wesley's sermonic essays—place Johnson and Wesley among the clearest-eyed critics of the machinations of mammon. Indeed, they may be without peer in their critique of the "opinion" which "prevails almost universally in the world, that he who has money has every thing."[6]

Samuel Johnson

John Wesley worked out his analysis of lucre's lures in closely reasoned theological essays, many of which had their origin in preached sermons. Samuel Johnson wrote for bourgeois newspaper readers, offering them his classification of the wiles of wealth. But while Wesley, the preacher, seldom included illustrations in his published sermons, Johnson, the columnist, created fictional anecdotes to illustrate his points.

Johnson understood human beings as creatures of desire, who deduce from their humdrum experiences of unhappiness that their lives lack something desirable. They set out to find it, assuming that when it is found, happiness will be theirs. What is this elusive thing that satisfies human longing? For many, money. Men and women conclude that by becoming rich they will be happy.

The problem, however, as Johnson sees it, is that human beings, as creatures kept in motion by desire, never find happiness in any pile of amassed wealth. Always someone richer looms on the horizon. With the result that happiness pursued through gaining and spending money remains

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[5]James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, Volume II* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 167-168.

[6]W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt, and L. F. Powell, Editors, *Samuel Johnson: The Idler and The Adventurer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 193.

unrealized. But its pursuit leads to the realization of unholiness. Those who chase wealth practice fraud, injustice, violence, and extortion. They prostitute themselves to life's lotteries—gambling, marrying wealth, or seeking an inheritance. As their wealth increases, they wax proud and see themselves in lying mirrors. No one dares tell them how they look, pointing out their moral blemishes, because those who surround the wealthy live in the hope of gaining money or position by flattering them.

Johnson created fictional portraits to add flesh to the argument just summarized. He portrayed the manner in which the allure of wealth takes hold of the human imagination in his sketch of *Captator*, "a legacy hunter," who sucked in with his mother's milk the notion that money was the only thing that mattered. "My parents," he tells us ". . . took care that the blank of my understanding should be filled with impressions of the value of money."[7] His mother urged him again and again "to keep what I had, and get what I could"; she said that "all must catch that catch can."[8] The point Johnson made in his portrait of *Captator*—that the passion for riches is passed from parent to child and easily becomes an all-consuming human desire—is underscored in this typically Johnsonian sentence: "Wealth is the general center of inclination, the point to which all minds preserve an invariable tendency, and from which they afterwards diverge in numberless directions."[9]

The reason "human minds preserve an invariable tendency" toward money is the assumption that its possession guarantees happiness. "An opinion," Johnson said, "prevails almost universally in the world, that he who has money has every thing."[10] Johnson's "every thing" included happiness, as he emphasized in a sermon he ghostwrote for a friend: "It is apparently the opinion of the civilized world, that he who would be happy must be rich."[11]

Riches, however, do not deliver what they promise; they prove deceptive. We seek wealth in the fond hope that, possessing it, we shall also possess happiness. But that hope is delusive, as *Mercator*, another of Johnson's fictional money-seekers, discovered. *Mercator* toiled for years to make enough money to buy an estate in the country, supposing that when he was wealthy enough to retire to it he would be happy. But once ensconced on his estate, he discovered money had deceived him: ". . . the

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[7]W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, Editors, *Samuel Johnson: The Rambler, Volume III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 262.

[8]Bate and Strauss, *Volume III*, 262–263.

[9]W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, Editors, *Samuel Johnson: The Rambler, Volume II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 331.

[10]Bate, Bullitt, and Powell, 193.

[11]Jean Hagstrum and James Gray, Editors, *Samuel Johnson: Sermons* (New Haven and London: Yale Unviersity Press, 1978), 195.

happiness that I have been so long procuring is now at an end, because it has been procured; . . ."[12]

The problem, as Johnson understood it, is this: We pursue wealth because we are convinced that the things it will permit us to buy will make us happy. Unfortunately, each new possession only opens our eyes to things not yet possessed. Our craving for things grows with our growing ability to acquire them, leaving us always with something more to crave.

Johnson embodied his grasp of the way that happiness always eludes our pursuit of it in his sketch of *Cupidus*, whose parents lived, and taught him to live, in anticipation of inheriting money from three unmarried aunts. The parents of *Cupidus* died first, bequeathing to him their longing for the wealthy aunts to die. When the first aunt died, she left her money to the second, who later died and left all she had to the third; who lingered on into her 94th year before dying and fulfilling *Cupidus*' dream of being rich. "For two months after her death I was rich," he says, "and was pleased with that obsequiousness and reverence which wealth instantaneously procures. But this joy is now past, and I have returned again to my old habit of wishing."[13]

Once we possess the object we have dreamed of possessing, the object proves itself incapable of keeping us occupied. "[N]o sooner do we sit down to enjoy our acquisitions," Johnson said, "than we find them insufficient to fill up the vacuities of life."[14] He gave flesh to this insight in his portrait of *Ned Drugget*, who dreamed of retiring to the country. *Ned* filled his vacant time in the city with pictures of the glories of leisure in the country; he filled his work days with the pursuit of enough money to afford a suburban retreat. At last, he rented the second floor of a house in a country village. But settling in there, he found nothing sufficient "to fill up the vacuities of life." All he could do was spend his time counting the carriages that passed by his window.[15]

We humans fill our time by wishing for what we lack. We keep from going crazy by craving what we do not possess. Because money is a particularly tangible thing to crave, we hitch our desires to riches. We do this even though riches fail, when put to the test, to make us happy. Not only do they fail to make us happy, their pursuit tends to bring out the worst in us. "[I]t is generally agreed," Johnson wrote, "that few men are made better by affluence. . . ."[16]

Some people, itching for money, practice fraud in a variety of guises. They use shoddy materials in their work. They misrepresent items they

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[12]Bate, Bullitt, and Powell, 438.

[13]Bate and Strauss, *Volume II*, 22.

[14]Bate, Bullitt, and Powell, 228.

[15]Bate, Bullitt, and Powell, 50–53.

[16]Bate and Strauss, *Volume III*, 146.

are selling, and misrepresent themselves when peddling their services. They engage in cutthroat competition. The best that can be said for people who are dead set on getting rich is that some deviate from the straight and narrow path of honesty and integrity less than others.[17]

In addition to the seamy side of human nature revealed by those who work for money, there is the seaminess of turning to one of life's lotteries, such as gambling, marrying or inheriting money, to gain riches. "[T]here are multitudes," Johnson assures us, "whose life is nothing but a continual lottery; . . . ."[18] They involve themselves in greed, deception, and crime, the accomplices of gambling. They assume the false faces worn by those desirous of marrying or inheriting money.

Those who possess riches are no better than those scrambling to be rich. The rich thrust their noses into the air, demonstrating what Johnson calls "the habitual arrogance of wealth."[19] They enjoy the lies told by flatterers, with the result that they fail to see themselves clearly. *Melissa*, another of Johnson's character sketches, "was born to a large fortune."[20] Therefore flatterers surrounded her, telling her she was beautiful and intelligent. Reflecting upon that toadying after she had lost her fortune and consequently had lost her acolytes, *Melissa* said: "It is impossible for those that have only known affluence and prosperity, to judge rightly of themselves or others. The rich and the powerful live in a perpetual masquerade, in which all about them wear borrowed characters; and we only discover in what estimation we are held, when we can no longer give hopes or fears."[21]

Johnson, like moralists before him, expatiated on ". . . the folly of devoting the heart to the accumulation of riches."[22] He asserted: "As there is no desire so extensive, or so continual in its exertions, that possesses so many minds, or operates with such restless activity; there is none that deviates into greater irregularity, or more frequently corrupts the heart of man, than the wish to enlarge possession and accumulate wealth."[23]

Repeated assertions of wealth's corrupting tendencies fail, however, to root out the desire for money. And this is good, Johnson argued, because without the desire for money and the necessities and luxuries it can buy, people would lack a motive for working. Human beings are lazy creatures, who only get up and get going when enticed by the prospect of gain. "[T]he

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[17]Bate and Strauss, *Volume II*, 334.

[18]Bate and Strauss, *Volume III*, 192.

[19]Bate and Strauss, *Volume III*, 119.

[20]Bate and Strauss, *Volume II*, 28.

[21]Bate and Strauss, *Volume II*, 33.

[22]W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, Editors, *Samuel Johnson: The Rambler, Volume I* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), 309.

[23]Hagstrum and Gray, 195.

whole world," Johnson writes, "is put in motion, by the desire of . . . wealth, ..."[24] Men and women go to work because they dread poverty and hope for enough money to build a wall of defense against it. Once the fear of poverty has put a person to work, then the desire for more money takes over. "[I]t almost always happens," Johnson said, "that the man who grows rich changes his notions of poverty, states his wants by some new measure, and from flying the enemy [poverty] that persued him, bends his endeavours to overtake those whom he sees before him."[25]

For all that Johnson said about wealth's failure to make us happy, there is at least this much, he thought, to be said about our eagerness for more money: It keeps us busy. His view of human nature, the epitome of eighteenth-century evenhandedness, recognizes that riches do not purchase happiness. At best, they defend us against poverty. Yet, without the machinations of mammon we drift into inactivity.

Samuel Johnson staked out a middle position, maintaining, on the one hand, that nothing corrupts like the pursuit and possession of riches; insisting, on the other, that human beings require that pursuit to get them going, keep them going, and hold them steady. His ideal is the golden mean. "[T]he middle path," he wrote, "is the road to security,. . . ."[26] Those who carp without qualification on the danger of riches ignore the fact that humans beings need the lure of money to put them to work, keep them working, and provide a steadying influence as they move through life. Equally blind, however, are those who extrol the pursuit of wealth as the means of achieving happiness. "[I]t cannot be found," Johnson reported, "that riches produce happiness."[27] Indeed, he recalled reading about a man, who, when he hated another man, "made him rich." Johnson's mother "could never conceive that riches could bring any evil."[28] But she conceived a son who looked at life with eyes unclouded by the cataracts of mammon.

John Wesley

Wesley, too, looked unblinkingly at mammon's machinations. He opened his analysis of mammon, however, by insisting that money itself is not evil. "Not that money is an evil of itself:" he wrote, "it is applicable to good as well as bad purposes."[29] Also, in and of itself, ". . . it is no

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[24]Bate and Strauss, *Volume I*, 285.

[25]Bate and Strauss, *Volume I*, 208.

[26]Bate and Strauss, *Volume I*, 206.

[27]Bate, Bullitt, and Powell, 228.

[28]Hagstrum and Gray, 195.

[29]Albert C. Outler, Editor, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 2, Sermons II* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 468.

more sinful to be rich than to be poor."[30] Nevertheless, those who possess wealth stand in a dangerous place.[31]

The possession of wealth is dangerous because it paves the "way to hell."[32] It accomplishes this by tempting the wealthy to shy away from accepting happiness and holiness as God's gifts; they suppose they can buy salvation as one more of the world's commodities. They vainly imagine that their wealth, in addition to affording them life's luxuries, will procure for them the necessities of happiness and holiness and life eternal.

Wesley began his analysis of the vanity of heaping up wealth by defining what it means to be rich. He wrote: "Whosoever has food to eat and raiment to put on, with something over, is rich. Whoever has the necessaries and conveniencies of life for himself and his family, and a little to spare for them that have not, is properly a rich man."[33] Wesley enlarged this definition in 1790, when he was 87. "A person," he wrote, "may have more than necessaries and conveniencies for his family, and yet not be rich. For he may be in debt; and his debts may amount to more than he is worth."[34] Wesley, continuing that thought, exclaimed: "How many that are engaged in trade are in this very condition! Those especially that trade to a very large amount! For their affairs are frequently so entangled that it is not possible to determine with any exactness how much they are worth, or indeed whether they are worth anything or nothing."[35]

No matter how much or how little an accountant's balance sheet shows a person to be worth, the problem remains that money paves the road to hell. It deludes us with the belief that it has happiness in its gift. "O ye 'lovers of money'," Wesley cried out, "hear the word of the Lord! Suppose ye that money, though multiplied as the sand of the sea, can give happiness? Then you are 'given up to a strong delusion, to believe a lie'; a palpable lie, confuted daily by a thousand experiments. Open your eyes! Look all around you! Are the richest men the happiest? Have those the largest share of content who have the largest possessions? Is not the very reverse true? Is it not a common observation that the richest of men are in general the most discontented, the most miserable?"[36]

Wesley coined a striking image to underscore the point that lucre lures humans into a futile quest. "You know," he addressed those who supposed happiness to be a by-product of being rich, "that in seeking happiness from

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[30]Albert C. Outler, Editor, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 4, Sermons IV* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 11.

[31]John Telford, Editor, *The Letters of John Wesley, Volume IV* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), 59–60. Outler, *Volume IV*, 11.

[32]John Telford, Editor, *The Letters of John Wesley, Volume VII* (London: The Epworth Press, 1960), 356.

[33]Outler, *Volume IV*, 179.

[34]Outler, *Volume IV*, 179.

[35]Outler, *Volume IV*, 179.

[36]Outler, *Volume III*, 240.

riches you are only striving to drink out of empty cups. And let them be painted and gilded ever so finely, they are empty still."[37] Riches, possessions—"silver and gold, and eating and drinking, and horses and servants, and glittering apparel, and diversions and pleasures"[38]—fail to make those who have them happy. "They can as soon," Wesley shot home his point, "make thee immortal."[39]

Not only is money dangerously delusive with regard to happiness, it also hinders the achievement of faith and hope. Wesley supplied a detailed analysis of how wealth hinders the realization of faith in his sermon "On Riches."[40] Faith, he noted, involves "evidence of things not seen;" wealth concentrates a person's attention on what can be seen and counted. Second, faith involves trust in God's providence; wealth urges us only to trust what we can bank on, saying, "I'll be your sure defense against the slings and darts of outrageous fortune." Finally, Wesley asserted that faith, kneeling in penitence, seeks God's pardon; wealth convinces us there is no need to grovel penitently before the Mercy Seat.

Hope, too, is hindered by riches, because the rich stake their hope for coming out ahead on their ability to pay for doctors, lawyers, and accountants. This hope in purchased professional assistance is a delusion, however; the best we can hope for is God's companionship along life's potholed way.

Money paves the way to hell by hindering the realization of faith and hope. It also reins in the pursuit of other spiritual qualities, which Wesley ticked off methodically, beginning with humility. "Many will think you a better, because you are a richer man;" Wesley wrote, "and how can you help thinking so yourself?"[41] If the wealthy find it difficult to be humble, they also are hard pressed to be meek. Those who lack meekness lack a quality Wesley termed yieldingness, which he defined as being "easy to be convinced of what is true;" the rich are so sure that possession of money implies possession of truth, that they refuse to accept correction.[42]

Lucre, while not filthy in and of itself, deposits its possessors in a dangerous place. It deludes them into believing they can purchase happiness. It hinders their achievement of holiness. It panders to destructive desires, a description of which Wesley found in 1 John 2:16—"For all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."[43]

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[37]Outler, *Volume III*, 240-241.

[38]Albert C. Outler, Editor, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 1, Sermons I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 625.

[39]Outler, *Volume I*, 625.

[40]Outler, *Volume III*, 521-523.

[41]Outler, *Volume III*, 242.

[42]Outler, *Volume III*, 523.

[43]John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1981), note on I John 2:16.

Riches endanger us by convincing us we shall be happy if we purchase things that pander to the desire of the flesh—our senses of taste, smell, and touch. Wealth also baits a trap with the desire of the eye, by which Wesley meant everything that comes before the inner eye, our imagination: visiting scenes of natural grandeur; purchasing new or beautiful things; wearing pretty, elegant, or new apparel; collecting furniture, books, or paintings; laying out and planting gardens.[44] Money can buy all those things. So money endangers us by empowering our imagination to dream of the happiness that will be ours when we have purchased the next new thing.

Even learning something new, Wesley noted, fails ultimately to be satisfying. He wrote: "Seeking happiness in learning, of whatever kind, falls under 'the desire of the eyes'; whether it be in history, languages, poetry, or any branch of natural or experimental philosophy; yea, we must include the several kinds of learning, such as geometry, algebra, and metaphysics. For if our supreme delight be in any of these, we are herein gratifying 'the desire of the eyes'."[45]

Riches also use the pride of life to ensnare us. For Wesley, the term pride of life referred to things money can buy which call attention to their owner, which brings their possessor honor. They are collected therefore not for themselves but for their ability to burnish the lustrous reputation of the collector. They also are collected because, as Wesley noted, "[t]he whole city of London uses the words 'rich' and 'good' as equivalent terms. 'Yes', say they, 'He is a good man: he is worth a hundred thousand pounds.'"[46]

Wesley's analysis of the plague of money was now complete. What was his antidote? The remedy consisted of denying self and taking "up [our] cross daily."[47] Wesley challenged those who had been seeking their happiness in the things money can buy to "[s]it as loose to all things here below as if you was a poor beggar."[48] He admonished them to "use the world, and enjoy God."[49] All these prescriptions for the plague of riches—denying self, taking up one's cross daily; sitting loose to material things; using the world, enjoying God—came together in the third injunction of the familiar Wesleyan formula: Gain all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.[50]

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[44]Outler, *Volume II*, 561.

[45]Outler, *Volume III*, 235.

[46]Outler, *Volume III*, 525.

[47]Outler, *Volume III*, 527.

[48]Outler, *Volume III*, 528.

[49]Outler, *Volume III*, 528.

[50]Outler, *Volume II*, 278-279.

Wesley practiced what he preached. Describing his experience of self-denial, he wrote: "I 'gain all I can' (namely, by writing) without hurting either my soul or body. I 'save all I can', not willingly wasting anything, not a sheet of paper, not a cup of water. I do not lay out anything, not a shilling, unless as a sacrifice to God. Yet by 'giving all I can' I am effectually secured from 'laying up treasures upon earth'."[51]

But no matter how forcefully he preached and how visibly he set an example, Wesley failed to persuade many people of the danger of riches. "But Oh!" he exclaimed, less than a year before his death, "who can convince a rich man that he sets his heart upon riches? For considerably above half a century I have spoken on this head, with all the plainness that was in my power. But with how little effect! I doubt whether I have in all that time convinced fifty misers of covetousness."[52]

Johnson and Wesley As Commentators on Acts 4:32

Samuel Johnson hammered home his analysis of how wealth deceives the human desire for happiness. Yet, after all that spilled ink about mammon's machinations, he admitted that he had failed to convince money-seekers that they were plotting a dangerous course. He shared John Wesley's conclusion that even the most penetrating analysis of lucre's lures finds few attentive listeners. But Johnson did not share Wesley's belief that perfect love would eliminate the need to pursue private possessions.

Johnson remembered the mythic "Golden Age," in which there was an idyllic communism. He wrote: "Such were indeed happy times, but such times can return no more. Community of possession must include spontaneity of production; for what is obtained by labour, will be of right the property of him by whose labour it is gained."[53] Johnson argued that since manufactured things do not come into being spontaneously, those who make them have a right to the proceeds of their labor. He thought communism was not feasible, not even for Christians.

If Wesley had been listening to Johnson's argument, he would have called his attention to the Christian communism in the first days after Pentecost. Writing in his sermon on "The Wisdom of God's Counsels," Wesley said: "In the fullness of time, just when it seemed best to his infinite wisdom, God brought his first-begotten into the world. He then laid the foundation of his church, though it hardly appeared till the day of Pentecost. And it was then a glorious church; all the members thereof being 'filled with the Holy Ghost', 'being of one heart and of one mind', 'and continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship,

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[51]Outler, *Volume III*, 237–238.

[52]Outler, *Volume IV*, 181–182.

[53]Bate and Strauss, *Volume II*, 334.

in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers'. 'In fellowship', that is, having 'all things in common', no man counting 'anything he had his own'."[54]

Johnson knew, of course, that, according to the book of Acts, "the whole group of those who believed [immediately after Pentecost] were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possession, but everything they owned was held in common."[55] But Johnson thought that situation was extraordinary. "[I]t does not appear, even then," he wrote, "to have been required as a necessary condition: . . . ."[56]

Wesley agreed that a common treasury was not a necessary condition of Christian community. In his comment on this phrase from Acts 4:34, "For whosoever were possessors of houses or lands sold them," he said, "Not that there was any particular command for this: but there was great grace and great love; of which this was the natural fruit."[57] To underscore his point, Wesley asserted, "So long as that truly Christian love continued, they could not but have all things in common."[58]

Johnson disagreed with Wesley's view that the inevitable consequence of true Christian love is having all things in common. He noted, in a charity sermon he composed for his friend Henry Hervey Aston to preach at St. Paul's Cathedral on May 2, 1745, that some Christian sects have demanded a Christian communism: "They have introduced an absolute community of possessions, and asserted, that distinction of property, is inconsistent with that love, which we are commanded to exercise towards one another. The absurdity of this notion, it is not difficult to shew. Every man must easily discern . . . that, where there is no property, there can be no motive to industry, but virtue; . . . ."[59]

From Johnson's point of view, then, Ananias and Sapphira did the early Christian community a favor by making clear that there will never be enough virtue around to put people to work and keep them working. The profit motive must receive proper recognition as the lure that keeps people—both the unvirtuous and those who, in Wesley's view, are going on toward perfection—busy making their contribution to the common good.

Wesley never doubted the possibility of realizing perfect love, but he recognized that history offered no examples of enduring communities of love, in which possessions were held in common. He even considered the possibility that a community of perfect love carried its own seeds of destruction.

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[54]Outler, *Volume II*, 554.

[55]Acts 4:32, *New Revised Standard Version*.

[56]Hagstrum and Gray, 291.

[57]Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon The New Testament*, note on Acts 4:34.

[58]Wesley, note on Acts 4:32.

[59]Hagstrum and Gray, 290–291.

To follow Wesley's line of thought, we begin with his interpretation of the Ananias and Sapphira incident. It was for him the incursion once more—the first time being in the Garden of Eden—of the mystery of iniquity. "But how soon," he exclaimed, "did 'the mystery of iniquity' work again and obscure the glorious prospect! It began to work (not openly indeed, but covertly) in two of the Christians, Ananias and Sapphira. 'They sold their possessions' like the rest, and probably for the same motive. But afterwards, giving place to the devil, and reasoning with flesh and blood, they 'kept back part of the price'. . . . Mark the first plague which infected the Christian church! Namely, the love of money! And will it not be the grand plague in all generations, whenever God shall revive the same work?"[60]

Wesley noticed, however reluctantly, that whenever God puts "the mystery of godliness" into motion, then "the mystery of iniquity" begins to spin its web. Wherever God creates or saves in the mystery of perfect love, there the mystery of opposition to perfect love becomes active. In the Garden of Eden, where love was at first perfect, it was not long until "the mystery of iniquity" went to work and obscured the glorious prospect. With the result that the passion for possessions rooted itself in human hearts, and the grand plague of money was passed on from generation to generation.

After that plague had infested all human communities, God sent Jesus Christ, in "the mystery of godliness," to restore the condition of perfect love that existed in Paradise. For a brief period following Pentecost, Paradise reappeared in the Christian community. The passion for possessions relinquished its sway. But the strand of "the mystery of godliness" did not exist pure and simple; entangled with it was the cord of "the mystery of iniquity." With the result that "Ananias and Sapphira, through the love of money ('the root of all evil') [made] the first breach in the community of goods."[61]

Wesley recognized the interplay of the mysteries of godliness and iniquity in each actual Christian community; he never, however, systematically articulated this recognition in his theology. He noticed that wherever God revives love to the extent that people put all their possessions in a common treasury, there the opposing force of iniquity becomes active. Money creates lovers of money, and the love of money—which "has been in all ages the principal cause of the decay of true religion"[62]—will bring about "the Fall" of the community of Christian love.

Wesley found an illustration of "the Fall" of the community of Christian love among his own Methodist people. God, Wesley believed,

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[60]Outler, *Volume II*, 456.

[61]Outler, *Volume II*, 555.

[62]Outler, *Volume II*, 468.

had revived the mystery of godliness in and through Methodist preaching and organizing. With the result that women and men got religion and began to work hard, live frugally, and sock away a few shillings. Then, in and among these accumulating shillings, the mystery of iniquity began to weave its spell. Which moved Wesley to write in 1786: I do "not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality. And these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches."[63]

Wesley ended his life, never having found anything good to say about the machinations of mammom. Johnson, on the other hand, embodied the eighteenth century's ideal of the golden mean. While Wesley sometimes argued that "the truth lies between . . . both" extremes,[64] he never admitted that persons going on toward perfection might need money's enticements to get them up in the morning and send them out to work. He supposed that in the justified the quest for perfection in love would satisfy the human need for always going on toward something—for, in Johnson's words, "passing from one step of success to another, forming new wishes and seeing them gratified."[65] He did not assume, as Johnson did, that even those who were pursuing holiness would need the machinations of money to keep them from being lazy in worldly things.

[63]Rupert E. Davies, Editor, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 9, The Methodist Societies* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 529.

[64]Outler, *Volume I*, 593.

[65]Bate, Bullitt, and Powell, 455.