

WESLEY'S HERITAGE AND THE GLOBAL CHURCH

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The man whose tricentennial we celebrated in 2003 was very much engaged with the events of his time. He was fascinated by the mysteries of electricity, by seismic events, and by medical theories. He followed events in India, in the West Indies, and in the American colonies. He wrote against slavery and against American independence. He commented on the economy of his time, and developed theories about why eggs had become so expensive. While he was very much interested in history, this was not out of mere antiquarian curiosity, but as a tool for contemporary obedience.

This means that, as we gathered to celebrate his tricentennial and to study his life and contribution, we can only be faithful to his legacy by asking ourselves what this has to do with life and obedience today. While I was preparing for the 2003 Historical Convocation on a flight I shared with over two hundred people, and I suddenly wondered what I would say if they had asked me what this Convocation was about, what I was going to do here, and why it was important. Next to me sat a young man in a business suit crunching numbers and working on the design of some newfangled contraption that may well have been part of a space vehicle or an attachment for a sewing machine. On the other side sat a young woman with purple and green hair, listening enraptured to a CD player, so loud that I might as well have been wearing her earphones. As I reflected on this occasion and this address, it occurred to me that these two people, so different from each other, yet probably had one thing in common: they both belong to the "age of now." They are part of a generation that has grown up with such radical changes practically every day, that they are ready to discard the past as easily as they would discard a banana peel. The past may be the wrapping in which today came. But what is important is the present. If for some reason one is to look to another time, that should be the future, and not the past.

So, if today we are to be faithful to the Wesley who was intrigued by electricity, who wrote against slavery, and who was incensed by American independence, we must face the question, why Wesley? Why gather to discuss the life and contribution of a man who lived three centuries ago when things were so different? Wesley crossed the Atlantic twice, and never forgot the experience. I can no longer tell how many times I have crossed the Atlantic.

Wesley amazed his contemporaries with the many miles he traveled every year. I suspect that during the past week some of us have traveled more miles than Wesley did in a year.

The question is important, because history is not a mere compilation of facts. History is never written from the past, but from the present and from a future which we expect with either hope or dread. At the second centennial of his birth, in 1903, Wesley was not valued, read, and interpreted in the same way as he was in the first centennial, in 1803. In this third centennial we must begin by admitting that we are reading Wesley, not only from the 18th century, but also from the 21st.

The question, “why Wesley?” is another way of asking, “what Wesley?” And the question “what Wesley?” is another way of asking, “who are we and where are we reading Wesley from?”

There is no doubt that there are many different ways of reading Wesley and during this Historical Convocation we have been made amply aware of that. This should not surprise us, for scholars make a living by differing from each other. But I submit to you that there is also the possibility and the urgency of reading Wesley in wider terms than most of us have grown accustomed to.

Very briefly and bluntly stated, I would suggest that a 21st-century reading of Wesley must be a global reading. The Wesley most of us read in the 20th century was the founder of a movement that had become a major religious force in the United States as well as in Great Britain and in a number of its former colonies. The Wesley we read in the 20th century was to a great extent an American Methodist Wesley, and if not that, then an English Methodist Wesley. That was as it should be, for in the 20th century it was mostly American and British Methodism that carried the legacy of Wesley’s work and theology.

However, during the 20th century great events were taking place in the life of the church, and of the Wesleyan tradition in particular, that may well be described as nothing short of cataclysmic. In 1900, Methodism and other movements of Wesleyan extraction had barely established small beachheads in countries other than the United Kingdom and its former colonies including the United States. The centers of Wesleyan vitality were clearly in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand. There were also significant numbers of Methodists in Tonga, Samoa, and other islands of the Pacific, as well as in India, the British Caribbean, and the English colonies in Africa. But by and large, Methodism was still essentially an Anglo-Saxon, mostly North-Atlantic movement.

Still, during that century, often unnoticed by the traditional centers of Methodism, the Wesleyan movement spread far and wide. This was partly the result of the growth of Methodist churches in various parts of the world. But it was mostly the result of the growth of churches and movements that had come out of Methodist roots – first the holiness churches, and then the

various branches of the Pentecostal movement coming out of them.¹

The result is that today, while there is a certain malaise of numbers and statistics in The United Methodist Church and in other similar bodies in the United States, Great Britain, Australia and other traditional centers of Methodism, the Wesleyan movement in general is growing at vertiginous speed in other parts of the world. It may be difficult for us to see this from our perspective, for in The United Methodist Church we see our membership dwindling. But the fact of the matter is that the Wesleyan movement as a whole, counting not only Methodists of various sorts, but also holiness denominations and Pentecostal groups derived from them, is exploding throughout the world.

In 1900, there were 10,000, or at most 15,000, Wesleyans in Chile. Now they are at least 5,000,000 out of a population of 15,000,000, approximately one-third of the population. In Brazil, the figures are even more astounding, with some estimates that there are almost 80 million in a population of 170 million, almost one-half of the population. In other countries, the figures are not as staggering. Still, in Mexico there seem to be about 13 million out of a total population of 100 million. In the Philippines, 20 million out of 76 million. In Congo, 4 million out of 52 million.²

These figures should suffice to show why I am convinced that the change that has taken place can be described as cataclysmic. The centers of growth in the various branches of the Wesleyan movement have shifted and continue to shift. The movement has become more polycentric than it ever was in its history. Most of the resources in terms of finances, publications, and tools for research still remain in the traditional centers. New York and the General Board of Global Ministries are still a center for economic resources; Nashville and the United Methodist Publishing House are still a center for publications; Durham and Madison, Duke and Drew and Oxford, and the General Commission on Archives and History, are still centers for research. But these centers no longer coincide with the centers of vitality and growth. Those centers have moved south to Latin America, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, and most of this in connection with movements that are not in an organic relationship with The United Methodist Church or with British Methodism.

It is impossible to foretell all that this will mean for Wesley studies in the 21st century. But I would suggest that at least one thing is certain: the American Methodist Wesley of the early 20th century will be replaced by a global Wesley and this Wesley will be strangely catholic, catholic in ways

¹For a brief outline of these developments, see Donald W. Dayton, "The Global Impact of the Wesleyan Traditions and Their Related Movements," in Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., ed. *The Global Impact of the Wesleyan Traditions and Their Related Movements* (Lanham, MD, and London: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 3-11.

²These figures are obviously approximate, and are based on several charts in David K. Barrett et al., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2nd edition (Oxford: University Press, 2001).

that the traditional, conciliar, ecumenical movement is only beginning to fathom. This will be a Wesley read in Swahili, in Spanish, and in Korean—and therefore with a different accent than the American Methodist Wesley. To this Wesley questions will be posed that are different from the questions traditionally posed in the North-Atlantic. This Wesley may well give surprising answers to some of those questions.

I can see some of that beginning to happen in Latin America, particularly after the translation and publication of the fourteen volumes of the *Obras de Wesley* in Spanish. I must confess that when I agreed to undertake the task of editing that series, I conceived of it as something whose impact would be slow in coming. My vision was one where these fourteen volumes would be distributed at best among some hundred theological libraries in Latin America, there to remain as a potential resource for the time when some above-average student decided to do some research on Wesley's actual works. I did not envision what I have witnessed in the last few years. In a small town in Cuba a pastor whose library has no more than fifty volumes has these fourteen in a prominent place and asks me some probing questions about what Wesley means by sanctification. At a Nazarene seminary in Chile a group of students is discussing what value there might still be in Wesley's sermons as models for homiletics. At another institution, also in Chile, a professor asks me to look over his notes for a lecture on the dangers of "enthusiasm," as it was understood in Wesley's time, and on Wesley's rejection of it. Similar experiences are reported by José Míguez Bonino in commenting about the reaction of pastors from various Wesleyan backgrounds—Methodists, Nazarenes, Salvation Army, and various holiness and Pentecostal groups, when presented with a wider range of Wesley's writings than they had ever seen. Míguez reports:

The pastors, many of them from rural and small village congregations, were introduced to a wide variety of Wesley's writings. Their interest in these works was intense. They felt a sense of familiarity with them, but it was a spontaneous response that did not come so much from their prior theological education as from the natural connection they found Wesley making with their own everyday pastoral experience.³

I find all of this quite surprising, encouraging, and a bit frightening, for it may well be the first signs of the birth of a new, global Wesley who will be different from the Wesley I studied in seminary, and probably even from the Wesley I thought we were translating!

While I suppose the same is true in other parts of the world, my experience comes mostly from Latin America, and therefore it is from that perspective that I dare outline some of the themes that will be emphasized in the

³"Wesley in Latin America: A Theological and Historical Reflection," in Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 173.

21st-century, global Wesley—or, what is tantamount to it, elements in Wesley's life and work that most readily connect with current interests and issues in Latin America.

Obviously, Latin American readers of Wesley are keenly interested in what Wesley has to say about their culture. In this regard, Wesley's interest in the Spanish language and in some elements of Spanish religiosity constitute a very valuable bridge.

This is one of the points at which a new Wesley is being discovered in Latin America. We had been told that our first contacts with Wesley were the result of the missionaries who brought Methodism to us. That is true to an extent. But we are now also discovering that Wesley, the global Wesley, had interests in Spanish culture and religiosity and even in some events in Latin America that went far beyond the interests of the missionaries who first came to us.

Wesley began studying Spanish while he was still in Georgia. In his *Diary* in June, 1736, he noted that he began studying Spanish in order to be able to speak directly with the native inhabitants of Georgia, some of whom had learned Spanish from missionaries, explorers, and colonizers. Some were also descendants of the Spanish, such as the *mestizo* of a native mother and a Spanish father whom he taught in a plantation on May 27, 1737. Oddly, in his published *Journal* for April 4, 1737, he tells a slightly different story: "I began learning Spanish, in order to converse with my Jewish parishioners; some of whom seem nearer the mind of Christ than many of those who call him Lord." Most likely, he studied Spanish with both purposes in mind, as well as simply because he was always fascinated with languages.⁴ Very soon, apparently just a few days after he began studying Spanish, he translated a poem by the Spanish mystic Miguel de Molinos, to whom I shall return shortly. Although he wrote grammars for five other languages, he never tackled the task of writing a Spanish grammar, perhaps because he never really mastered the language. Indeed, by 1762, he felt the need to ask a Sephardic Jew to translate the Spanish of two people who claimed to be Turks, and who knew Spanish, although in this case it is possible that his difficulty may have been connected with the ancient form of Spanish spoken still by Sephardic Jews which was probably also the form of Spanish that these Turks spoke.⁵ At any rate, six years earlier, he commented after reading Voltaire's *Henriade*:

I read over a curiosity indeed, —a French heroic poem, Voltaire's "Henriade." He is a very lively writer, of a fine imagination; and allowed, I suppose, by all competent

⁴This paragraph, in a slightly different form, is taken from my earlier, "Can Wesley Be Read in Spanish?," in Maddox, 162. Most of the other examples I mention here, of the early connection between Wesley and Spanish culture, are discussed there more fully.

⁵Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996). *Journal*, December 4, 1762, and January 5, 1763.

judges to be a perfect master of the French language: And by him I was more than ever convinced, that the French is the poorest, meanest language in Europe; that it is no more comparable to the German or Spanish, than a bag-pipe is to an organ.⁶

Although Wesley said that he learned Spanish in order to communicate in that language—either to the natives of Georgia, or to the Sephardic Jews there—in fact he used it for religious readings. At first he was fascinated by Miguel de Molinos, who in 1665 had published *Guía espiritual que desembaraza el alma y la conduce al interior camino para alcanzar la perfecta contemplación*. This was translated into English in 1688 as *The Spiritual Life Which Disentangles the Soul*. Thus, it is not altogether clear that Wesley read the entire book in Spanish—although, again, he did translate some of Molinos' poetry from Spanish.

Miguel de Molinos was a proponent of a quietist mysticism, according to which the soul is to be absolutely passive before God, for even the act of seeking holiness usurps God's sovereign grace. Among his most famous follower were Madame Jeanne-Marie de Guyon and, through her, François Fénelon. Molinos had been condemned to life imprisonment by the Inquisition, having been accused of claiming that such total passivity before God means that the body is free to do as it will, for the acts of the body will never stain the soul. On that basis, he was said to have lapsed into licentiousness. Whether he actually taught and did this or not, is still debated. Certainly in Wesley's time, in England, it was thought that this was a false accusation brought by the Inquisition against a man whose holiness it could not stand.

Wesley's attitude towards Molinos was complex. At first he was enthused enough by the teachings of Molinos to translate that one poem. But very shortly thereafter he wrote to his brother Samuel that, "the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was the writings of the mystics,"⁷ among whom he listed Molinos. Samuel agreed on this negative judgment of Molinos and on the death of a friend wrote:

To means of grace the last respect he show'd,
Nor sought new paths, as wiser than his God:
Their sacred strength preserved him from extremes
Of empty outside or enthusiast dreams;
Whims of Molinos, lost in rapture's mist,
Or Quaker, late-reforming quietist.⁸

⁶Jackson, *Journal*, October 11, 1756.

⁷Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 25:487. The notation in the footnote that Molinos' teachings, "brought him to death in the hands of the Inquisition," is true only in the sense that he died in the prisons of the Inquisition. It is quite possible that he was spared execution thanks to the intercession of Innocent XI.

⁸Jackson, 1:16.

Still, eighteen years after writing to Samuel that Molinos had been part of the rock of mysticism on which he almost made shipwreck, John Wesley included an abridged version of Molinos' book in his *Christian Library*, which according to him contained, "the choicest Pieces of practical Divinity which have been published in the English Tongue."

Another Spaniard whom Wesley held in high regard, and about whom he had much less doubt, was Gregorio López.⁹ López was born in Madrid in 1542, almost two centuries before Wesley's time. His early life is shrouded in mystery, to the point that even during his lifetime the rumor circulated that he was the son of Philip II, Don Carlos. The fate of Don Carlos, and the reasons for that fate, are as mysterious as the origins of Gregorio López. Quite suddenly in January 1568, King Philip ordered his son imprisoned with very little explanation. Philip declared that he had explained his reasons to the Pope, to whom alone he considered himself accountable. He also declared that as a father he was loath to punish his son in this manner, but that as a king and as a Christian he had to do it. This gave rise to rumors and attempted explanations. Those inclined to lewd explanations suggested that Don Carlos was too fond of his stepmother Elizabeth of Valois. Those who sought political answers suggested that he had been conspiring to usurp the throne, or at least that Philip had decided that he was an unworthy heir to the crown who would bring disaster to Spain. The more theologically inclined said that he had embraced heretical notions, or at least that he had embraced a sort of mysticism that led him to clash with the Inquisition and the hierarchy of the church. Six months after his arrest, it was announced that he had died in prison. Soon rumors circulated, that he had been killed at his father's command. Other rumors, perhaps created in order to present Philip under a more positive light, claimed that he had been freed and allowed to live, on condition that he leave immediately for the New World and never declare his true identity. A few weeks later, Gregorio López arrived in New Spain—Mexico. All that he ever declared about his background was that he was born in Madrid in 1545—the same year of Don Carlos' birth. He was clearly of aristocratic origin, and well educated. Soon, even during his lifetime, it was widely suggested that he was Don Carlos, who had come to New Spain to fulfill his vow.

Whatever the truth behind such rumors, Gregorio López soon became a very respected spiritual leader in his adoptive land. He lived for a while in Mexico City where he served as a secretary and became known as a wise and loving person. After two years he moved north, to the land of the Chichimecas, where he devoted himself to the care of the sick, the contemplative life—which he never allowed to divert him from the practice of love to neighbors—and the writing of a number of books. While most of these

⁹In spite of its age, the most complete biography is still that of Francis C. Doyle, *The Life of Gregory López* (London: R. Washbourne, 1876).

were works of devotion, he also composed a *Libro de remedios contra enfermedades*—*Book of Remedies against Diseases*—and a *Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. At the time of his death, it was said that for the last thirty years he had lived in a constant consciousness of the direct presence of God. Soon miracles were attributed to him. Thirty years after his death Philip IV began the process that would have led to his official beatification by Rome. After a brief time the process was interrupted and no more was said on the matter—some think because the continuation of the process would have led to unwelcome delving into the history of Philip II and Don Carlos.

John Wesley was fascinated by the life of Gregorio López, although not by the rumors and legends about his royal interests, but rather by the particular character of his faith and piety. When, in the ongoing debate about Christian perfection, he was asked for cases that showed that such perfection was attainable, he repeatedly pointed to Gregorio López. The fact that López had been a Roman Catholic did not detract from Wesley's admiration, who referred to López as, "that good and wise (though much mistaken) man."¹⁰

After dining with some of the aristocracy, Wesley commented:

I dined with some serious persons in a large, stately house, standing on the brow of a delightful hill. In this paradise they live in ease, in honour, and in elegant abundance. And this they call retiring from the world! What would Gregory Lopez have called it?¹¹

Upon the death of John William Fletcher, when seeking a way to honor the memory of this exceptional friend and collaborator, Wesley found no better way than to compare him with Gregorio López:

...for many years I despaired of finding any inhabitant of Great Britain, that could stand in any degree of comparison with Gregory Lopez or Monsieur de Renty. But let any impartial person judge, if Mr. Fletcher was at all inferior to them.¹²

When attempting to describe the experience of the fulness of faith, Wesley would quote López, "all is midday now."¹³ When confronting someone who claimed that in order to have communion with God she found it necessary to withdraw from others, he would quote an episode in which López advised someone with similar inclinations to "go be a hermit in Mexico [City]."¹⁴ In his *Letters to a Young Disciple*, he invited his reader to, "such an open intercourse with God, such a close, uninterrupted communion with him, as G. Lopez experienced."¹⁵ And he makes it clear to this reader

¹⁰Jackson, *Journal*, October 30, 1742.

¹¹Jackson, *Journal*, October 15, 1755.

¹²*On the Death of the Rev. John Fletcher* (Jackson, 7:448; Bicentennial ed., 3:627).

¹³Jackson, 12:294.

¹⁴Jackson, 12:305.

¹⁵Jackson, 12:445.

that communion with God does not exclude communion with the neighbor, or other service of God, by referring to both M. De Renty and Gregorio López:

While Mr. De Renty was serving the poor, he was in constant communion with God. So was Gregory Lopez, while he was writing books. "At first, indeed," as Lopez observed, "large manifestations from God were apt to suspend the exercise of his senses, as well as of his understanding. But, after some time, they made no difference at all, but left him the full exercise of his understanding and senses."¹⁶

The point of all this is not simply that Wesley was interested in some elements of Hispanic culture, but even more, that he appreciated at least some elements in the sort of piety that had long prevailed in Spain and its colonies. At the present time, there is much research and discussion among Latin American Roman Catholic theologians on the significance and value of popular religion. Protestants have generally remained aloof from such discussions—apparently in part at least because the Reformation has been vaunted as a return to biblical Christianity, which had been corrupted over the centuries precisely by the accretions of popular religious practices and beliefs. In Latin America, Protestant missionaries, evangelists and proselytizers have almost unanimously insisted on the purity of their religion in contrast with Roman Catholicism, which they have seen as corrupted by popular religiosity. Since such popular religiosity is very much part of the culture, for decades this resulted in a Protestantism that was quite alien to the culture in which it sought to make an impact. In the latter part of the 20th century, however, there has been—and there still continues to be—an explosion of Protestant growth in Latin America. Interestingly, the vast majority of such growth is taking place among churches of Wesleyan extraction. Is this just a coincidence? Or is there something in those churches, a distant echo of John Wesley's admiration of Gregorio López, that is allowing them to develop their own sort of Protestant Latin American religiosity? Future research into the global Wesley of the 21st century may provide interesting insights in this respect.

This is just one of the directions in which I would expect Wesleyan research to move in coming decades. A related issue that will probably come to the foreground will most likely be the matter of what in Wesley's time was called "enthusiasm," and Wesley's constant struggle to refute the persistent accusation that he and his movement were enthusiasts. There were many accusations leveled against Wesley throughout his career. But none was as constant, and none appears to have bothered Wesley as much, as the accusation of enthusiasm. His bitter comment on such an accusation is well known, "The reproach of Christ I am willing to bear; but not the reproach of

¹⁶Jackson, 12:447. He used the same example in a letter to Miss Loxdale, June 6, 1781. Jackson, 13:127.

enthusiasm.”¹⁷ His own frustration is apparent in his sermon, “The Nature of Enthusiasm”:

A term this, which is exceeding frequently used, which is scarce ever out of some men's mouths; and yet it is exceeding rarely understood, even by those who use it most. It may be, therefore, not unacceptable to serious men, to all who desire to understand what they speak or hear, if I endeavour to explain the meaning of this term, — to show what enthusiasm is. It may be an encouragement to those who are unjustly charged therewith; and may possibly be of use to some who are justly charged with it; at least to others who might be so, were they not cautioned against it.¹⁸

Wesley's perennial difficulty with this accusation is an indication that, although clearly untrue from Wesley's perspective, it was at least credible from the perspective of his accusers. It was made even more so by the occurrence within Methodist circles of instances of what could properly be called “enthusiasm.” In his own *Journal* in 1741, Wesley wrote:

I returned to Oxford, and on Wednesday rode to Bristol. My brother, I found, was already gone to Wales; so that I came just in season; and that, indeed, on another account also; for a spirit of enthusiasm was breaking in upon many, who charged their own imaginations on the will of God, and that not written, but impressed on their hearts. If these impressions be received as the rule of action, instead of the written word, I know nothing so wicked or absurd but we may fall into, and that without remedy.¹⁹

And almost twenty-two years later he was still dealing with outbreaks of “enthusiasm” within Methodist ranks:

I desired George Bell, with two or three of his friends, to meet me with one or two others. We took much pains to convince him of his mistakes; particularly that which he had lately adopted, — that the end of the world was to be on February 28th; which at first he had earnestly withstood. But we could make no impression upon him at all. He was as unmoved as a rock.

Thus, it appears that those who accused Wesley of “enthusiasm” were correct at least in that there were “enthusiastic” tendencies within Methodism. Their suspicions about Wesley himself were not allayed by Wesley's revisionist evaluation of Montanus and of Tertullian's decision to become a Montanist:

...if the state of the Church in the very first century was so bad, we cannot suppose it was any better in the second. Undoubtedly it grew worse and worse. Tertullian, one of the most eminent Christians of that age, has given us all account of it in various parts of his writings. whence we learn that real, internal religion was hardly found; nay, that not only the tempers of the Christians were exactly the same with

¹⁷Jackson, *Journal*, December 22, 1762.

¹⁸Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 2:47-48.

¹⁹Jackson, *Journal*, July 13, 1741.

those of their heathen neighbours, (pride, passion, love of the world, reigning alike in both,) but their lives and manners also. The bearing a faithful testimony against the general corruption of Christians, seems to have raised the outcry against Montanus; and against Tertullian himself, when he was convinced that the testimony of Montanus was true. As to the heresies fathered upon Montanus, it is not easy to find what they were. I believe his grand heresy was, the maintaining that “without” inward and outward “holiness no man shall see the Lord.”²⁰

Thus, while one can certainly understand why this Anglican priest, so faithful to the tradition of the church, was galled by the repeated accusation of enthusiasm, one can also understand why those accusations would not go away.

As we now look at the vast family of spiritual descendants of Wesley throughout the world—and certainly in Latin America—it is apparent that the vast majority of them have difficulties with accusations of what today would be the counterpart of 18th-century “enthusiasm.” Wesley himself described some of the “enthusiasts” of his time in terms that many today use to criticize the burgeoning movements, mostly within the Wesleyan tradition, that today bear what he would call “the reproach of enthusiasm”:

These are usually such as “have no root in themselves;” no deep repentance, or thorough conviction. “Therefore they receive the word with joy.” And “because they have no deepness of earth,” no deep work in their heart, therefore the seed “immediately springs up:” There is immediately a superficial change, which, together with that light joy, striking in with the pride of their unbroken heart, and with their inordinate self-love, easily persuades them they have already “tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.”²¹

This is almost word-for-word the most common criticism I hear today in Latin America leveled against Pentecostalism, most of which has Wesleyan roots.

Wesley then declared that:

A Second sort of enthusiasm is that of those who imagine they have such gifts from God as they have not. Thus some have imagined themselves to be endued with a power of working miracles, of healing the sick by a word or a touch, of restoring sight to the blind; yea, even of raising the dead, — a notorious instance of which is still fresh in our own history. Others have undertaken to prophesy, to foretell things to come, and that with the utmost certainty and exactness.²²

This too is a common comment made today about much of the contemporary Wesleyan derived movement in Latin America and elsewhere. Although what Wesley then said does not happen as often in Latin America, “But a little time usually convinces these enthusiasts. When plain facts run counter to their predictions, experience performs what reason could not, and sinks them down into their senses.”²³

²⁰Outler, 2:461.

²¹Outler, 2:50.

²²Outler, 2:52-53.

²³Outler, 2:53.

Thirdly, Wesley spoke of enthusiasts:

... who think to attain the end without using the means, by the immediate power of God. If, indeed, those means were providentially withheld, they would not fall under this charge. God can, and sometimes does, in cases of this nature, exert his own immediate power. But they who expect this when they have those means, and will not use them, are proper enthusiasts. Such are they who expect to understand the Holy Scriptures, without reading them, and meditating thereon; yea, without using all such helps as are in their power, and may probably conduce to that end. Such are they who designedly speak in the public assembly without any premeditation. I say designedly; because there may be such circumstances as, at some times, make it unavoidable. But whoever despises that great means of speaking profitably is so far an enthusiast.²⁴

Some of this is quite common in some Pentecostal circles, in Latin America, as elsewhere. While the lack of attention to the means of grace seldom includes Scripture, which is most often held in high regard, it does quite often mean a lack of attention to the eucharist, which in some circles is seldom celebrated. It is also clear that in some circles what Wesley calls speaking, “in the public assembly without premeditation,” the ability to preach without preparation, is considered to be a sign of the presence of the Spirit, and in the passage just quoted Wesley seems to be describing the practices of many Pentecostal preachers today.

On the other hand, while these comments are often made from the outside, as one looks at the movement from the inside, one finds that these criticisms are being made within Pentecostalism itself, and in that sense much of today’s Pentecostal movement finds itself in a similar position to Wesley in the 18th century trying to respond to the accusation of “enthusiasm”—or of today’s counterparts—and at the same time insisting that, as Wesley would say, God is doing a “great and extraordinary work” in their midst.

Latin America, and much of the world, have been bequeathed a dychotomized Wesley. On the one hand, there is a falsified Wesley that he would have called an “enthusiast.” The preaching of this Wesley has led to private revelations which often contradict the clear message of Scripture, to so-called “gifts” of the Spirit that rather than healing and uniting divide and hurt, and to a constant fragmentation of the body of believers which would make it seem that an individual’s purity in morals, doctrine, and worship practices are of such paramount importance that the upbuilding of the body can be neglected for their sake. On the other hand, and with greater emphasis in recent times as a response to that first Wesley, there is another falsified Wesley that has come to us. This Wesley correctly stresses the value of tradition and of faithfulness to it, the importance of order and reason in worship, the unity of the body as an essential part of Christian living. But in exchange for this, the other Wesley is no longer surprised by the “great and

²⁴Outler, 2:57.

extraordinary work” of the Spirit in our midst, by the unpredictability of the Spirit. Thus, while the first Wesley is an enthusiast, the second would never be accused of being such. John Wesley would probably reject both.

As we move into the 21st century, the Wesley that will emerge out of Wesley studies in a global context will be one for whom these issues will be central, and one who, like many of his spiritual descendants today, will constantly be walking the fine line between being an “enthusiast” and forgetting that God is indeed doing a great and extraordinary work.

Many other examples could be given of the way in which the shift in the centers of Wesleyan vitality will also produce a different reading of Wesley. One that is well known and therefore need not be explored here in any great detail is the renewed interest in Wesley’s economic theories and teachings. Anyone who looks at the bibliography on Wesley in the last fifteen or twenty years will note a significant increase in studies on Wesley’s economics. This is due in part to the convergence in the poorer nations of the world of a growing interest in Wesley with a renewed discussion of the relationship between faith and wealth. Many in Latin America who found Wesley attractive because he somehow stood at the root of their religious tradition are now finding him attractive also because the economic questions he asked in the 18th century are somehow parallel to those they are asking in the 21st. If Wesley looked at the economic order of his time and declared that the reason food was so scarce and expensive was the luxurious living of the rich, feeding cereal to their fancy horses, can Wesleyans now not declare that the reason why food is so dear and resources so scarce, in some parts of the world is, at least in part, that resources are so concentrated and so wastefully mismanaged, in other parts of the world? In other words, the global Wesley of the 21st century will be made to face at a global level some of the economic questions he asked at the national level.

Or take the matter of freedom and democracy, so much in the headlines these days. As American Methodists came to Wesley’s first centennial, in 1803, they had to deal with his attitude toward American independence. The question has never gone away for American Methodism which has responded to it in a variety of ways. On this point, Theodore Weber is right:

No “improvement” on Wesley’s political portrait through new historical research can overturn his hierarchical view of authority and its consequent exclusion of the people from all aspects of the political process.²⁵

Weber’s solution is quite attractive and deserves serious consideration and testing. He proposes, “developing a Wesleyan political language that remains Wesleyan in its theology while transcending the limitations of Wesley’s political thought,” and doing this by, “the drawing of politics into

²⁵Theodore R. Weber, *Politics in the Order of Salvation: Transforming Wesleyan Political Ethics* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 416.

the order of salvation.”²⁶ In other words, on the question of democracy and of the political order in general, Wesley was not Wesleyan enough. He could not grant the common people the power and authority that democracy requires because he did not fully apply his own understanding of prevenient grace to its ultimate consequences and allowed himself to be led astray by traditional, hierarchical notions of God and of God’s grace that were not wholly consistent with his understanding of grace in the *ordo salutis*. This is probably true and would help Methodists think about their commitment to democracy in theological terms that are consonant with their own understanding of salvation and of the universality of God’s grace.

On the other hand, when the matter is approached from the perspective of the global Wesleyan movement, there are other issues to consider. This global movement has grown impressively in countries where political freedom has often meant the freedom to remain forever poor, where democratic discourse has often obscured legalized oppression and exploitation. From that perspective, what is most remarkable about Wesley’s opposition to the independence of the American colonies is not his clearly conservative posture, but the radical claim that one cannot call for one’s own freedom while denying it to others. What Wesleyans all over the world find surprising is not that John Wesley, an Englishman, defended England’s rights over its colonies—after all, that is the common experience in most colonial empires. What is surprising and enlightening is that he rejected the call for freedom on the part of those who themselves oppress others. From this perspective the remarkable insight in Wesley’s *Calm Address to Our American Colonies* is not his opposition to independence, but the manner in which he defined freedom almost at the very beginning of that treatise, refuting the American claim for “no taxation without representation”:

The writer asserts twenty times, “He that is taxed without his own consent, that is, without being represented, is a slave.” I answer, No; I have no representative in Parliament; but I am taxed; yet I am no slave. Yea, nine in ten throughout England have no representative, no vote; yet they are no slaves; they enjoy both civil and religious liberty to the utmost extent.

.....

“Who then is a slave?” Look into America, and you may easily see. See that Negro, fainting under the load, bleeding under the lash! He is a slave. And is there “no difference” between him and his master? Yes; the one is screaming, “Murder! Slavery!” the other silently bleeds and dies!

“But wherein then consists the difference between liberty and slavery?” Herein: You and I, and the English in general, go where we will, and enjoy the fruit of our labours: This is liberty. The Negro does not: This is slavery.

Is not then all this outcry about liberty and slavery mere rant, and playing upon words?²⁷

²⁶Weber, 416.

²⁷*A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, Jackson ed., 11:80-81.

For this global Wesley, the essence of freedom is not representation. It is the right to enjoy the fruits of one's labor—which for the vast majority in today's world is the freedom most urgently needed. For the spiritual heirs of this global Wesley, reading him from the poverty-stricken nations of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, all the much vaunted efforts of this 21st century to “establish democracy” while ignoring the right of people to freedom from absolute poverty, the rights of people to enjoy the fruits of their labor, will never lead to freedom. For this global Wesley, there is a radical contradiction between the claim to be establishing freedom in a country in the Middle East and at the same time defending the right of American companies freely to exploit the resources of that country and its people.

As we gathered to commemorate the third centennial of Wesley's birth, I cannot but wonder what the fourth centennial will be like. I know that any such guess is risky business. But, since I do not expect to be around to account for the accuracy of my predictions, I feel free to offer them.

If the trends that we have seen in the last fifty years continue, I would expect that the Wesley of the fourth centennial will be a Wesley read from a wide variety of perspectives from various parts of the globe and various social locations. He will be a Wesley, the echoes of whose preaching will be heard in cities and hamlets throughout the world, in churches which taken together will be second in membership only to the Roman Catholic Church—and perhaps even ahead of it. He will be a discomfiting Wesley to those who place the order of the church ahead of its mission. He will be the Wesley who bemoaned British colonial policies in India, and the Wesley of those Wesleyans who equally bemoaned American policies in Iraq. He will probably be a Wesley whose experience with the poor in Bristol will be just as important as his experience in Aldersgate—or if not, he will be a Wesley stretched to the limit in the struggle between those two. And, strange and perhaps even sad to say, the Wesley whom most of United Methodism celebrated in the third centennial will only be part of the whole—and not a central part at that!

What, then, are we to do as United Methodists between this centennial and the next? What are we to do, both to benefit from this emerging Wesley, and to contribute to his shaping? We must realize that the Wesleyan movement is rapidly becoming polycentric as it has never been before, and that therefore we are both center and periphery. We still have unequalled resources in terms of libraries, finances, research institutions, scholars with the time and the means necessary for scholarship. But we are no longer the center of the Wesleyan movement. We are a center that must be nourished by other centers, that must be in dialogue with other centers. We can no longer read Wesley only in terms of our libraries and our United Methodist churches. We must discover why a poor pastor in rural Cuba is so excited about Wesley and perhaps thus recover some of the enthusiasm that our

declining statistics seem to have taken from us. We must learn how Wesley is being read by the millions upon millions of Wesleyans who are not Methodists, how he is being read in other parts of the world, by non-whites even in this part of the world, by the poor everywhere in the world. In short, we must learn to rejoice upon realizing that, even while United Methodist numbers do not look good, and even though we might not like the changes that are taking place, God is still active in the Wesleyan tradition, and God is still doing, as Wesley would have said, a “great and extraordinary work.”