

FROM REVOLUTION TO REVOLUTION

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When I was writing my Iowa dissertation in 1969 and 1970, I attended a meeting of the American Society of Church History in Iowa City. While there I shared my goals and interpretations with a well known American church historian (not my teacher, Sidney Mead). Informed that I was developing a thesis at some variance from traditional views of Methodist scholars on the political stance of John Wesley, the scholar curtly responded that I would have to prove it. That was it! Fair enough!

My hypothesis was (and is) that Wesley's so-called Tory view as the definitive characterization of his politics is entirely inadequate. On the basis of the reading of his political and social tracts written between c.1768 and 1782, in particular, as well as other concepts in letters and journals, I have claimed that his central commitment was to civil and religious liberty. For him, the limited monarchy was the best political authority to those ends. Liberty of conscience, the right of private judgment, and a tolerant orthodoxy were central to his political arguments. While he did not argue for universal political liberty – he resisted that for Roman Catholics – his natural law foundations *per se* reveal a view of liberty not greatly different than Richard Price, Joseph Priestley and other “liberal” contemporaries. It is true that he read and copied Samuel Johnson's, *Taxation No Tyranny*, which resisted the American revolutionary polemic, but there are underlying reasons for that.

It was based most probably upon the influence of Sir Robert Filmer's, *Patriarcha* (1680), which built the case for social order upon a primitive compact which established political norms when a society was founded. Filmer argued that God ordained political authority to Adam. Interrupted by the Flood, power was rested in Noah. Wesley used this claim in proposing his original contract theory. Wesley appealed to that conservative argument when he resisted the American Revolution in, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, a copy of Johnson's *Taxation* and other tracts.

There was more to this line of thinking. Concerned that the revolutionary fervor would tear at the fabric of social stability, Wesley proclaimed the great merit of a limited monarchy toward the maintenance of peace and liberty. To understand his arguments against republicanism (or democracy) we observe that he had no real experience with democratic forms. He could admit that democratic governments were one political system along with monarchy and aristocracy, but was worried that the many diverse voices of

democracy would shatter the order so long sought for, and now achieved through the Petition of Rights and the Bill of Rights, and in the benefits of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Englishmen, except for Catholics, were given civil and religious freedoms unknown before the years of the limited monarchical ascendancy. Those “revolutionary” gifts were a watershed of human rights which natural law and Scripture taught. For Wesley, it was proper to understand natural law through the doctrine of prevenient (preventing) grace. By “prevenient grace” the church of Augustine, Gregory the Great, and the Thirty-nine Articles, Wesley sought to establish the prior work of God in the “moral sense” of conscience in the law of nature and in the movement of the Holy Spirit toward justification and regeneration.

The anonymous hymn in the *Book of Common Prayer and Hymnal* reveals this precedence of God’s mercy:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
 He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
 It was not I that found, O Saviour true;
 No, I was found of thee.

...

“‘Twas not so much that I on thee took hold,
 As thou, dear Lord, on me.”¹

The “revolutionary fervor” which worried Wesley might have sustained his non-juring views.² It did not! Although the non-juring stance of men like Archbishop Sancroft and William Law, and the Holy Club, was very conservative, favoring the *status quo*, it contributed to political uncertainty. It upheld the old order, which was in exile, though not in ideology. In the face of the Revolution Settlement it would contribute to civil unrest. Non-jurors would blame the juring factor for the social malaise.

Another factor in the political mix was the over-hanging cloud of Charles I’s lamented death in 1649. Every January 30th, the anniversary of his execution, homilies were preached in his memory. Those doleful sermons continued to 1688 and after. Beyond 1688 the homilies assumed a new character. “The Cult of the Royal Martyr”³ was comprised of “religious cultists” and “constitutional cultists.” The former worried over the consequent evils to church and state, while the latter praised the English liberties gained, while lamenting Charles’ demise.

¹(New York: Oxford University Press, 1916, 1920), Hymn 398, The word “prevent” in the King James means “precede.” See I Thessalonians 4:14, KJV.

²To put it simply non-jurors would not swear loyalty to James II’s successors, William and Mary.

³Byron S. Stewart, *Church History* (June, 1969). Did Wesley’s Puritan heritage shape his view toward the execution of Charles I? His great grandfather John White was a member of the Westminster Assembly and his grandparents John Westley [sic] and Samuel Annesley were Puritans.

The remembrance of the royal martyr, the Revolution Settlement, and the continued political agitation including anti-Catholic emphases, made England a very uneasy land.

An appeal on behalf of civil and religious rights is made to both natural law and the biblical history of salvation in Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* written in 1774. Liberty is integral to the law of nature and nature's God. Slavery was the antithesis of human rights. Economic or political appeals in defense of slavery were inadmissible. Even "Ten thousand laws" of nations could never abrogate the divine gift of liberty.

Wesley, further, employed the biblical story of Cain and Abel to allegorize the slave's cry for deliverance. As Abel's voice cried from the ground (Genesis 4:10), so the cries of the brutalized slaves cried to heaven. If slave owners did not hear, let one thing be clear: God hears! Before Wilberforce came on the scene, Wesley was crying out for abolition. His last letter was to Wilberforce, a Member of Parliament, pleading for the end of this traffic in human souls. He called American slavery the worst, more execrable form of slavery known.

Not many, including the Quaker, Anthony Benezet, argued for an instant end to slavery. Wesley has been criticized for a failure to make this argument. I argue that he, like St. Paul, espoused a Gospel which undermined slavery, raised the status of demeaned woman, and crossed the cultural divide between Jew and Gentile (e.g., consider Ephesians 2). In post-bellum America Methodist leaders like Gilbert Haven and Jesse Peck, and the English evangelical William Arthur, proclaimed the liberating power of Wesley's Methodism. Haven, the most influential abolitionist in American Methodism wrote that "not a slave has been liberated, not a prisoner relieved, not a barbarian in warfare abolished, but that it can be traced to John Wesley."⁴ His laudatory exaggeration aside, we see an optimistic philosophy energizing his reforms. In 1854 Haven declared that using Scripture to support slavery (as did Thomas R. Dew of the College of William and Mary) "is a new argument for an old sin.... Scripture is stolen to deck a false idol."⁵

In the American Holiness Movement, "Pentecostal Preachers" like Seth Cook Rees and Martin Wells Knapp proclaimed the power of Pentecost evident in women preachers. "But just in proportion as the grace of God and the light of the Gospel are shed abroad, in that proportion woman is elevated, *until at Pentecost* she stands, a *second Eve*, by the side of her husband," wrote Rees.⁶ Knapp echoed this argument. Knapp, Rees, and others in 1900 ordained Charles and Lettie Cowman, and Ernest and Hazel Kilbourne,

⁴"John Wesley and Modern Philosophy," *Methodist Quarterly Review* (January, 1879), 6-7.

⁵*National Sermons*, "Caste, the Corner-Stone of American Slavery" (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1869) 123-25.

⁶*The Ideal Pentecostal Church* (Cincinnati: Revivalist Press, 1897), 40-41 my emphasis.

founders of the Oriental Missionary Society. Lettie became the author of the popular devotional *Streams in the Desert*. In the early years of the Pilgrim Holiness Church (c.1930), thirty percent of the ministers were women. They built their case on Joel's and Peter's Pentecostal promise (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:16-18).

Wesley's own expansion of the role of women in various ministries is evident. The scholarly work of Paul Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, has given this story its historical verification.⁷

Theodore Runyon observes that, "the traditional barriers against women assuming leadership roles in religion began to break down in Methodism."⁸ I see Runyon's assertions in concert with my thesis concerning the influences of Wesley, Haven, Rees, and Knapp. And St. Paul's!

I

William Higden (d. 1715) and John Wesley (1703-91) lived between two revolutions. Higden saw the Glorious Revolution (1688) and its consequences, initially rejecting the new monarchy but later reversing his assessments. From the position of a non-juror, refusing to swear allegiance to William III and Mary, he moved to the support of the Revolution and the limited monarchy. His case was argued in *A View of the English Constitution* first issued in 1709. A third edition followed in 1710. Higden was elected prebendary of Canterbury in 1713. A prebend was a pension given to a priest (now named a canon).

Wesley was born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley, their fifteenth child, and was raised in the non-juring environs of their Epworth home. To be more precise, his father sustained this position in contrast to his mother. In the Holy Club John was part of a non-juring society. It appears that John's views on monarchical authority were changed around 1734 largely due to Higden's influence.

The impact of the Glorious Revolution on Higden and Wesley was profound. For Wesley its power would extend to the uprisings of Georgian England, to the American Revolution, and up to the very edge of the French Revolution. By the time of the French terrors Wesley was a very old man, its bloody results yet to be realized. He was very aware of the American story and wrote about it extensively in his tracts of 1768-1783. Perhaps the most compelling expression of his anxiety over the Revolution was his *Calm Address*.

⁷Chilcote (Metuchen, NJ, Scarecrow Press, 1991). Also his *She Offered Them Christ* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993).

⁸*The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 195.

That both Higden and Wesley were greatly shaped by revolution is evident in their writings. The change from a non-juring persuasion to its alternative was not simple or without powerful political consequences. Higden lived long enough to feel some of its winds, but Wesley lived through the entire century (to 1791) with its political and social dissension where “every cobbler was a politician” and where the shadow of the young prince in France brought uncertainty to the developing system in England. When James II “abdicated” the throne on December 11, 1688, an historic breach in the “theory of divine hereditary right” (Taswell-Langmead) occurred. The gulf was filled by the “Convention Parliament.” On February 13, 1689, the new monarchs were welcomed and began their reign. The confusion engendered by this “revolution” may not be minimized, including the interregnum from December 1688 to February 13, 1689 when England had no monarch.

In his book, Higden came to the conclusion that the supreme authority of the English government rests in the king “for the time being,” that is, the regnant monarch. To this king the people owed allegiance, by requirement of both common and statute law, whether he was king *de jure* and/or *de facto*. By king *de jure*, Higden meant a king by hereditary title. To kings *de jure* or *de facto*, there were repeated precedents for taking oaths of fidelity. Higden insisted that thirteen kings, from the Conquest (1066) to Henry VII, had reigned as kings *de facto*, or without hereditary right.

There had of course been revolts, “from what Kings have there not been revolts?” Yet, when a king *de jure* had ascended the throne after the reign of a king *de facto* only, the new king had not disavowed the laws passed in the prior reign. He had supported those laws. If the new king gave such backing to those kings, how could subjects deny the authority of a king *de facto*?

I begin with the ... Kings *de jure*, who cut out their way to the throne with their swords, and the Destruction of the Rival Kings *de facto*, and therefore the most unlikely of any to acknowledge them; and yet we find their Authority as much acknowledged by these Kings *de jure*, as that of any of their ancestors of the clearest Title.⁹

If subjects acknowledged the king *de jure* as holding supreme authority and judgment, how could they deny the validity of the king’s recognition of laws passed by kings *de facto*? This obviously is a relatively conservative argument.

From common law, and statute law Higden cited many different laws of the realm which had been given parliamentary approval.¹⁰ These laws supported the notion that the laws of kings *de facto* were as significant as laws of kings *de jure*. Subjects were obligated to obey the king in possession.

⁹Higden, *A View of the English Constitution with Respect to the Sovereign Authority of the Prince and the Allegiance of the Subject*, 3rd ed. (London: S. Keble, 1710).

¹⁰Higden, 22 ff.

“The distinction is very obvious,” wrote Higden, “betwixt our advancing one that is not the next Heir to the Throne, and submitting to such a one when he is advanced and possess’d of it.”¹¹

The laws of the realm do not conflict with the Scriptures or the teaching of the church, Higden insisted. When Jesus was asked about the lawfulness of paying tribute to Caesar, he responded by pointing to the image of Caesar. Jesus did not “resolve the Lawfulness of their Subjection to Caesar, into his Right to the Government of Judea, but into his Possession of it...”¹²

Finally, Higden insisted that if government was instituted for the sake of all the people and if, after having given their king full support, he is removed from power and cannot provide them with the “Benefits of Government,” then,

It is not reasonable that they, for whom Government was instituted, should lose all the Benefits of it, and live Outlaws at home, or Exiles abroad, for the Sake of him, for whom it was not instituted, at least, not primarily instituted.

The consequence is ... that Government was made for Mán, and not Man for Government ...¹³

That after they have done what they can to preserve their Prince, they are at Liberty to preserve themselves, under a new Government, when the Prince can neither defend himself, them, nor his Government over them.¹⁴

This represents a conservative view of the right of revolution.

Apparently Wesley adopted Higden’s position here. He accepted the benefits of the Glorious Revolution especially its support for liberty. Like Higden he recognized the authority of the monarch in possession, a limited monarchy. Wesley also without doubt believed that someone must fill the breach when a government fails to support its people. James II’s intentions in his brief reign could be interpreted as creating the conditions which required the subjects to step in for their self-defense and government, to prevent the rule of a Roman Catholic monarchy.

Nevertheless, Wesley continued to resist democracy and to support the limited monarchy. He appealed to the original contract under which the colonies were still living. The Americans founded their colonies under a charter granted by the King and Parliament¹⁵ and were therefore bound by the original contract. Wesley distinguished between the state of nature and the rule of the established state. Man in the original state of nature agrees to a contract which thereafter binds him and his descendants. Everyone born into that state agrees passively to the laws passed before his birth.

¹¹Higden, 64-73.

¹²Higden, 91.

¹³Higden, 99.

¹⁴Higden, 112.

¹⁵Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, reprint, 1959), XI:82-85.

Our consent to these, nay, and to the laws now made even in England, is purely passive. And in every place, as all men are born the subjects of some state or other, so they are born, passively, as it were, consenting to the laws of that state. Any other than this kind of consent, the condition of civil life does not allow.¹⁶

When does the state of nature exist? Wesley allowed that men had a right to be self-governed and independent,

... before any civil societies were formed. But when was that time, when no civil societies were formed? I doubt hardly since the flood; and, wherever such societies exist, no man is independent. Whoever is born in any civilized country, is, so long as he continues therein, whether he chooses it or no, subject to the laws . . . of that country.¹⁷

This comment echoes Filmer's *Patriarcha*.

As long as he resisted the American Revolution, Wesley decried the appeals for liberty made by Richard Price and the American friends. He wrote:

The greater share the people have in the Government the less liberty, either civil or religious, does the nation in general enjoy. Accordingly, there is most liberty of all, civil and religious, under a limited monarchy; there is usually less under an aristocracy, and least of all under a democracy. What sentences then are these [Price's]: ... 'To be guided by the will of another is slavery?' ... This is the very quintessence of republicanism; but it is a little too barefaced; for, if this is true, how free are all the devils in hell, seeing they are all guided by their own will.¹⁸

When the American Revolution was at an end he wrote to, "Our Brethren in America" (September 10, 1784), stressing the providence of God:

By a very uncommon train of providences many of the Provinces of North America are totally disjoined from their Mother Country and erected into independent States. The English Government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical... As our American brethren are not totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.¹⁹

However, as Cooper correctly indicates: "For Wesley the possession of governing power becomes the *prima facie* evidence of its moral justification. In practice, that was to cancel the moral element." (Knowledge of Higden sets this viewpoint in perspective.²⁰) Wesley seems to attempt a syn-

¹⁶Jackson, 73.

¹⁷Jackson, 96, Sec. 14.

¹⁸Jackson, 105.

¹⁹Jackson, VII:238.

²⁰Allen Lamar Cooper, "John Wesley: A Study in Theology and Social Ethics." Unpublished Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1962, 110.

thesis of the theological and moral with a pragmatic judgment. All authority is derived from God. God has now permitted a new beginning for America, a new state of nature making way for an “original” contract. Scripture and the Primitive Church are now to be their counsel, not English laws.

So here is the linkage of providence, Scripture, and the Primitive Church. The manner in which Wesley developed this triad required substantial inquiry. Observe that he neither appealed to the law of nature nor a secular standard.

We have insisted on the connection between William Higden and John Wesley. What is the evidence apart from the converging lines of political logic found in their work? There is a cryptic comment, *by itself tenuous*, where the principle of the “monarch in possession” is found. In a letter to William Brewster (February 22, 1750), a non-juror, Wesley claimed:

With regard to my political principles I have never had any doubt since I read Mr. Higden’s *View of the English Constitution* which I look upon as one of the best wrote books ... in the English tongue.²¹

This is high praise from Wesley whose love of the language and his repulsion of “cant” and “jargon” is well known. A man of plain speech, he, who despised oratorical froth.

We may summarize Wesley’s political arguments as follows. In his political perspectives, Wesley moves from:

- a. A divine right, hereditary monarchy, to
- b. A divine source of authority, resting in a limited monarchy with parliamentary balance, and a corollary view of
- c. Authority by possession, to
- d. A providentially given republicanism (or democracy),
- e. While rejecting the universal franchise; and any belief in the popular origin of powers. Wherever authority is operative it is from God, even if lodged in democracy.
- f. That whatever form of government may exist, liberty is founded upon the highest authority, the Sovereign God, and may not be revoked. It is an indestructible fact of natural law (for Wesley, prevenient grace). Wesley held to the restriction of the franchise for many, even most, particularly Catholics.

II

In response to Higden’s arguments, a criticism has been offered that he “resolved everything into possession.” The evidence is more subtle, but not without cogency. In the event of a ruler’s failure, the people, having labored to sustain him, are free to establish a new government.

²¹Jackson, III:32-33.

Wesley was more conservative, finally, than Higden but his attitude to the *fait accompli* experience of the Glorious Revolution and the American Revolution, reveals a political pragmatism. He was less explicit than Higden on the right of revolution, but he was by no means the Tory conservative of "divine, indefeasible, hereditary right."

In his view, Wesley had seen providence at work in the American Revolution. He would not have argued thus in every revolutionary situation. A Catholic revolution would be entirely unacceptable. If we extend the logic of Higden's arguments regarding "possession" we may complain that he opened the way for some perverse forms of revolt. Less troublesome are Wesley's arguments which were grounded on natural law and social stability, as well as biblical appeals such as St. Paul's in Romans 13:1-7. Wesley's pragmatic and theological judgments do not make for a sound synthesis. If we excise the theological from the balance, approving only the pragmatic, we lack the restraining merit of a biblical sense of community and the providential Kingship of the Lord Christ. That is precisely what the logic of autonomy misses.

Wesley's "blind spot," like most of his contemporaries, could be considered his mistrust of Roman Catholics. Yet, to criticize him for this is anachronistic. It fails to review the social and political history of England and the conflicts between a Reformed England and a Catholic France, for example. Consider the Anglican Articles with their anti-Catholic interpretations. Compared with this, note Wesley's pietist toleration of much that was called heresy and his appeal to love in relationships between believers of varying communities. Observe also how much he turned to the ancient Fathers of the Church for theological grounding. Roman Catholic influence in politics was his great fear.

III

Higden's and Wesley's views on "authority by possession" are clearly revolutionary. The writer noted earlier concluded that Higden,"resolves all into Possession and makes all usurpers have a title to allegiance, not excepting Oliver [Cromwell] himself."²²

In the face of the uncertainties of revolution, that criticism has merit. The difficulty associated with "possession" is that it lacks the proper boundaries for regulation, allowing a totalitarian regime to be installed, or an aristocratic order (disorder) like an activist judicial system to arise. Wesley supported a limited monarchy which held authority in concert with parliamentary influence. In one essay Wesley insisted that the King had no power to make a grant which Parliament did not confirm.²³ Like the so-called "bal-

²²Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, reprint, 1950),IX:817.

²³Jackson, XI:82-96f.

ance of powers” in Montesquieu and the American system, Wesley’s view erects some barriers to abuse. However, in the exercise of power one branch of government may gain ascendancy over another. That is happening in the western world where supremacy in the courts is gaining increasing power over democratic forms.²⁴ Since “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Lord Acton) the balance must return to representative government. As Higden put it, “Government is made for man, not man for government.” Democracy is imperfect but is many leagues ahead of imperialism whatever its form.

Wesley’s appeal to Providence is to be seen through the lens of God’s sovereignty. It is true that sovereignty is not simply comprehensible to human understanding. Yet we are not left in dark mystery. What we know of God through revelation, both natural and special, provides insight into the workings of the sovereign God, thus of providence. God’s character, preeminently love, justice, holiness, truth, gives depth to our knowledge of God. God does what He wills! That is acknowledged. Love, holiness, justice, truth are defined in Scripture. Particular events like the Revolutions may be providential in ways beyond our ken. Nevertheless, for those who love God, who are His chosen, He is at work for good in these life situations.

How do the Scriptures and the Primitive Church guide us? Wesley’s appeal to Scripture is to be interpreted through reason, tradition, and Christian experience. The Primitive Church may be the “original contract” for the American community, a new compact (as Filmer had taught) or fresh beginning for them.

Does all of this lead Wesley back to “possession” as authenticating governmental rule? That isn’t evident, but, if not, what then?

What is Wesley’s conserving principle against any or all revolutionary movements? He has enthusiastically accepted the Glorious Revolution and the American as the providential will of God. He would approve revolution under the guiding principle of liberty of conscience or religious liberty, and civil liberty. This would be his “conserving principle” of statecraft. Where these God-bestowed liberties are discoverable, he could see Providence at work in the creation of such states. It is perilous to transplant the faith into often bloody liberation movements. Peter Hebblethwaite has warned against acclaiming the Holy Spirit’s imprimatur of political liberation.²⁵

IV

To recognize Wesley as a political theorist may appear remote from his leadership in the Evangelical Revival. Evangelical interests like those of the

²⁴Robert Bork, “Coercing Virtue: The Worldwide Rule of Judges.” See Richard John Neuhaus, “The Public Square,” *First Things* (January, 2004), 76-77.

²⁵See Peter Hebblethwaite, “The Politics of the Holy Spirit” *Frontier*, (Autumn, 1975), 143-45.

Wesleys, Whitefield, Howard, Wilberforce, and Hannah More, may seem necessarily separable from the political currents of their era. That is to miss the issue entirely. Their work was intertwined with the social, political, and economic influence which shaped their thinking and action. Consider Howard's work on prison reform, Wilberforce on anti-slavery legislation, John Wesley on economic enablement of the poor, or Whitefield in education as co-founder with Franklin of the University of Pennsylvania.

The argument of St. Paul in Romans 13 for political obedience to Rome is to be seen as support for the *Pax Romana* with its vast network of roads (perhaps 53,000 miles), the highways followed by Christian evangelists to spread the news of Jesus the Christ. Paul's own missionary journeys around the Mediterranean basin and his Roman citizenship illustrate the merit of this thesis.

I argue that the structure, laws, rights, and privileges in English government are integral to Wesley's ministry in the Revival. Stability in government, its guarantees and benefits, are imperatives in his efforts "To Reform the Nation and especially the Church," a church reformed which leads the way to reformation of society and culture. A more Protestant Christian and evangelical voice today is crucial to that reform. A continued and more aggressive Roman Catholic political effort is also imperative. Moral abuses in the Christian community must be corrected, i.e., reformed. *We must never, never* allow a secular mentality to drive our political and social energies. Neither may we be cowed by our moral deprivations in church life. Rather, an energetic pattern of *Christian* discipline, shaped by "in-principled love" (Paul Ramsey) must create repentance and renewal. The "secular mentality" will lead to a "moral enervation."

Protestant Christians, *especially evangelicals* have lagged well behind Roman Catholics in concern for social change, i.e., revolution grounded in biblical principles. However, Catholics have stumbled in adequate political counsel. Without doubt, the voices of Vatican II and of John Paul II have led to much Christian social change, especially in eastern Europe. Western societies in Europe and America have been resistant, to say the least, but still must reckon with Catholic and Evangelical forces crying in the moral wilderness. "Prepare the way of the Lord." We must cry! We are the watchmen on the walls!

The Wesleyan Revival has long been credited with the renewing of English society. The "Halevy Thesis" claims that the revival built in society a revolutionary *spirit* which prevented the kind of bloody terror found in France. While Marxist thinkers have treated this view with loud disapproval, many in the Christian community and some others, have praised it. What is the essential reality of the Wesleyan Revival? This, that Wesley's universal parish made possible an incredible ministry to the deprived, rich and poor. Driven from their small plots of ground by the Enclosure Movements of landowners and the more affluent classes, the poor moved to the city to the

bitter poverty portrayed by Hogarth in his "Gin Lane" paintings. The picture revealed is of dissolute, hopeless masses of poor. Wesley went to the poor in the countryside, to the pathetic miners of Cornwall, to the whole land. His "plain speech for a plain people" gave hope and life, eternal life, to thousands. That in time led to medical clinics, schools, charitable organizations, contributing to prison reform, and the abolition of slavery.

It was a revolution of the Spirit which changed the moral and spiritual, material and legal landscape of England.

Are there in fact social and political ties between the Revolutions and the Wesleyan Revival? I posit that the Revival would not have emerged in the repressive context of the Restoration (1660-85), a moot point, of course, since Wesley wasn't born until 1703. Still, a revival was underway in England as the many religious societies attest. In London alone in 1700 there were forty societies. The Fetter Lane Society at Aldersgate Street was the midwife to Wesley's own spiritual re-birth.

The Glorious Revolution and the Settlement removed much of the paternal hand of the Anglican Church, allowing Non-conformists to establish their own churches. In due time these believers would establish colleges and schools for their company. To matriculate at Cambridge or Oxford, one must affirm faith of the Thirty-nine Articles. The reforming societies, however, were committed to remain in the Established Church. Wesley would not minister the eucharist in his societies. That sacrament was to be offered in the church. Wesley communicated faithfully. He always wished to "reform the Church," not divide it. In the relatively open atmosphere of post-Revolution England, the Methodists were able to carry out their mission with noble success.

The American Revolution might be seen as an expansion of the Glorious Revolution. A more expansive social and political climate was parallel to the religious liberty the Americans knew and expressed. The colonies were autonomous (before 1789) and felt their freedoms into the future. Preachers like Francis Asbury and Peter Cartwright traveled between Maryland and New York, and westward into Ohio and Kentucky. In his later years Wesley reluctantly registered his chapels as churches and ordained Whatcoat and Vasey for the American church. In their freedom from political and ecclesiastical restrictions, the Methodists would carry the message far and wide, under primitive conditions, without stipend. Asbury would awaken after a night in the forest covered with frost. The inimitable Cartwright followed the pioneer trails, stopping wherever he could. On one occasion he stopped at an inn, accepted a young lady's invitation to dance, fell to his knees praying for awakening. Some thirty-two souls were converted and a Methodist church was launched. He ridiculed the Baptists who thought, "Heaven is an island, and the only way to get there is by swimming or diving." The Baptists and the Presbyterians were there, too. The "Campbellites" who under Thomas and Alexander Campbell sought a reprise of the Primitive Church, became part of the mix.

We are reminded again of the significance of Wesley's assertion that the Americans were free to follow the "Scripture and the Primitive Church." The appeal to Scripture and the Primitive Church is an assertion of the authority of Scripture, probably to the priesthood of the believer, particularly liberty of conscience, and certainly to a renewed Christian order for the American Church. Surely he stood on the Reformation principles of Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), and the priesthood of the believer. I conclude that the Revolution in America was congenial to the emerging church in a diverse Christian society. This argument is made consistent by Asbury and others launching an American church which occurred in 1784 at Lovely Lane in Baltimore.

I assert the following theses:

1. The Glorious Revolution provided a political, social and ecclesiastical order congenial to the rise of the Wesleys and the Revival associated with them;

2. The American Revolution further enlarged the arena in which the Spirit would energize the messengers of the Gospel. The liberties of the Revolution were a happy, "providential" conjunction with the Christian liberties and hope contained in Wesley's preaching. The Arminian theology lifted the hopes of the people to life eternal and real life here and now. The Wesleyan Revival and its corollary, the Evangelical Revival, had much stony ground on which to toil. The church was moribund, the preaching safe and comforting, the clergy too eager to climb the ecclesiastical ladder.²⁶ Church (canon) law (not well-enforced) constrained the evangelical reformers. Sermons were polished and precise, aimed at the elite. Of course, there were exceptions but not enough to reform the nation.

This revolution of the spirit (Spirit) brought a remoralization of English society. It offended some elites who were dismayed to hear that they too were sinners needing a Savior; sick requiring a Physician. As Bernard Semmel has pointed out, the Arminian message proclaimed by Wesley gave the multitude a sense of worth before God. With this transcendent power at work in them they could and did become new, following the pathway of Jesus in love for God and for their neighbor.

²⁶See Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the XVIII Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).