

WHY DID JOHN WESLEY 'FAIL'? A REAPPRAISAL OF WESLEY'S EVANGELICAL ECONOMICS

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This essay¹ examines the implementation and subsequent loss of what Theodore Jennings termed John Wesley's "evangelical economics," which he described as,

the set of notions that Wesley developed on the basis of his reading of the Bible to illuminate and to govern the activity of Christians in the world of economics. It thus, refers to the interrelationship [of] . . . the criticism of wealth, the forms of solidarity with the poor, the notion of stewardship, and the vision of an economic practice based on the example of the Pentecostal community [Acts 2:42-45].²

The Methodists became less identified with the poor and increasingly aligned with the *status quo* as the 18th century wore on. Through an examination of the social forces and ecclesiastical adjustments that shaped early Methodism it seems possible to ascertain how the movement's earlier advocacy for the poor was transformed into an alignment with the middle class. This assessment offers trajectories for implementation of the earlier ethical vision, and a basis for discussion of how Methodist movements should meet the challenges of growth, wealth, and social change.

The early 18th century was a prosperous time for some. Population was growing slowly, while commerce grew rapidly. Those who owned land, or who had a skill and the means of production had opportunity for economic growth. But this favorable economic picture fades when one considers the large number of people who were not landholders or skilled artisans. Statistics produced by Gregory King (1668) and Joseph Massie (1760) suggest that more than half of the workers of England were becoming increasingly poorer during this period of economic expansion.³

The economic situation of the lower classes was further exacerbated by legislation that was designed to maintain the income and interests of the upper classes. Laws passed in 1720, for example, severely restricted the domestic use of cotton fabric. Since the parliamentarians and their sponsors had eco-

¹My thanks to the Wesley Studies Working Group of the 9th Oxford Institute on Methodist Theology, and Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore, School of Theology at Claremont, for their insightful interaction with an earlier draft of this paper.

²Theodore Jennings, *Good News to the Poor* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 23-24.

³Dorothy George, *England in Transition* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1953, revised), 14; Peter Mathias, "The Social Structure of the Eighteenth Century: A Calculation by Joseph Massie," *Economic History Review* (second series), X, (1958), 30-45.

conomic interest in land, in sheep and therefore in wool, the cotton restrictions were designed to sustain domestic production of those products. Cotton garments sold in England were to be dyed deep blue in color. By fining both the producer (£20) and the wearer (£5) of cotton garments of another color, their availability was significantly curtailed. The law had a demeaning aspect since wearing an inexpensive blue cotton garment immediately marked a person as a member of the lower class. Restrictions stood against cotton garments until 1774. A poor person couldn't afford to be "caught dead" in cotton because even burial clothes were subject to restrictions. The relatives of the Wesleys' friend John Byrom, for example, were fined £5 because they had not buried him in a "shirt, shift, sheet, or shroud made of sheep's wool."⁴

Several social and political forces coalesced to make the middle decades of the 18th century a period of tremendous change and adjustment. The population and economy began to grow steadily. In 1731, for example, the population of England stood at 5.3 million (the same as it had been since 1650). By 1751 it rose to 5.8 million and so on through the end of the century.⁵ This population growth was not spread evenly over the land. New industrial areas (like Liverpool, Birmingham, and Manchester) grew rapidly. Older manufacturing regions (like Worcestershire, Somerset, and Devonshire) grew less rapidly, while the agricultural south and southeast began to decline as people migrated north to the midlands in search of employment.⁶

As England stood on the brink of major demographic, social, and economic changes, the Church of England was not adequately deployed to meet those challenges. The parochial system of the pre-industrial Church of England was strongest in the south and south midlands, but people were steadily leaving those regions.⁷ Anglicanism's inability to serve England in an inclusive fashion was evidenced by the serious shortage of churches. Comparing parish rolls to the availability of seats, Lord Stanhope concluded that over 4,000,000 people in England "had not the means of attending Church."⁸ This shortage became more acute as population grew and shifted from the agrarian south to the industrial north.

By 1740 the Wesleys were operating almost exclusively outside the bounds of the Anglican parochial system. Their itinerancy, open-air evangelism, and willingness to work through various religious societies enabled them to fill some of the gaps in the parochial system and to take their message to

⁴John Whitely, *Wesley's England: A Survey of the Eighteenth Century Social and Cultural Conditions* (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 102.

⁵Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Penguin Books, revised edition, 1990), 205–06.

⁶Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change* (London: Longman, 1976), 110–112.

⁷Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 12, 76–77, 110–112.

⁸Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Working Class Movements of England 1800–1850* (London: Epworth Press, 1937), 18.

where the people were. Methodism became strongest in the emerging manufacturing and industrial centers like Staffordshire, Durham, Northumberland, Yorkshire, Middlesex, and Cornwall.⁹ In a similar way, the Wesleys were most effective in those places where the Established Church was weak and where they were able to consolidate societies that had already been raised up by others.¹⁰

The series of multiple social dislocations which had begun in the early industrial period accelerated during the war years (1754–63, 1775–83) and thereafter. Industrialization, which previously had not reached the level of a “revolution,” had certainly done so by 1780.¹¹ Technological advances that enhanced the adaptation of the steam engine to industrial applications spurred tremendous growth in England’s main industries and the regions that supported them.¹² Population growth, which exceeded fifty percent in the second half of the 18th century,¹³ combined with the growth of industry to engineer “the overthrow of the traditional agrarian economy in much of England” and caused a corresponding flight to industrial regions in the Midlands and elsewhere.¹⁴

In order accurately to assess the impact of Methodism upon its adherents in this period, inquiry must be made into the social standing of the people who attended Methodist societies. John Wesley’s famous remark that the Methodists were “a low, insignificant people” and “poor almost to man” cannot be taken as a definitive assessment.¹⁵ The societies, so far as we can ascertain from class lists, biographies, and memoirs, were predominated by *working* class people, but they drew adherents from all social strata and virtually every occupation imaginable.¹⁶ John Smith characterized the social location of the early Methodists by saying that they came from “the upper echelons of the lower classes and the lower income groups within the middle [class] ranks.”¹⁷ But research by Clive Field suggests that the early Methodism had a few (.02%) more wealthy people and fewer poor people than might be expected from a representative group of their size.¹⁸

⁹Anthony Armstrong, *The Church of England, the Methodists, and Society, 1700–1850* (London: University of London Press, 1973), 68.

¹⁰Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1989), 216–237.

¹¹Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 111.

¹²George, *England in Transition*, 99–101.

¹³Kathleen W. Mac Arthur, *The Economic Ethics of John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1936), 40.

¹⁴Mac Arthur, *Economic Ethics*, 77.

¹⁵Thomas Jackson, ed. *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 Vol. (London: Wesleyan Conference, 1872, various reprints), VI, 410.

¹⁶See Appendix A.

¹⁷John Q. Smith, “Occupational Groups Among the Early Methodists Keightley Circuit,” *Church History*, 57 (June 1988), 187–196.

¹⁸Clive Field, “The Social Structure of English Methodism,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 28 (June 1977), 199–225.

Methodist Society lists often indicated the member's occupation, and even a cursory examination of these lists demonstrates early Methodism's working class orientation.¹⁹ Comparing three of these class lists, which are separated from each other by approximately twenty years (1745, 1769, 1783), suggests that more skilled (as opposed to unskilled) workers were to be found among the Methodists as the century wore on.²⁰ The list of trustees for the Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London, from the latter and more affluent years of the movement (1779), also indicates a working class predominance.²¹ A close study of the sixty-three biographies of early Methodist preachers, which Wesley published in his *Arminian Magazine*, offers similar results: "practically all of the regular preachers . . . during this period of more than fifty years, were drawn from a single social stratum, between 'unskilled labour,' and the 'middle class.'"²² There were exceptions, such as John Doncaster (b. 1767) who was of "middling circumstances," but the pattern Wellman Warner identified holds true.²³ Membership lists also indicate that more women than men were members of early Methodist societies. Often these were single women whose economic situation was precarious. Methodist societies accorded 18th century women equality, opportunities for personal development—such as the leadership of a band—and economic support which were generally unavailable to them in society at large.²⁴

The genius of early Methodism, given the socio-political context of the 1740's, lay in the liberating and empowering structures of its societies. Several features made the society structure particularly appealing in this context. The fact that they were lay-led fit well the individualism of the emerging working class. The fact that Methodism stood outside the spheres which undergirded the older, repressive social order made it an attractive alternative

¹⁹Three of these lists are summarized in "Appendix A." They are "Class Register, Newlands, Apparently in John Wesley's Handwriting," in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, XII (Dec. 1919), 75–77; a facsimile of the members of the Dublin Society (July 20, 1769), from Nehemiah Curnock, ed. *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 Vol. (London: Robert Culley, n.d.) V, 309 and facsimile of Class Roll of the Bristol Society (1783), from Curnock, *JW Journal*, VI, 441.

²⁰This generalization is somewhat muted by the fact that these three lists come from three different regions, and obviously local economies have significant bearing upon employment opportunities.

²¹In addition to John and Charles Wesley, "clerks" or clerics, five weavers, three merchants, and one cabinet maker, brazier, sailcloth maker, banker, brick maker, knitter, butcher, currier, scale maker, grocer, carrier, and dyer were listed.

²²Wellman J. Warner, *The Wesleyan Movement in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Longmans and Green, 1930), 249–54.

²³*The Methodist Magazine*, 26 (1803), 499.

²⁴Leslie Church, *The Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 168–69.

to those whose interests did not coincide with those of the clergy or land owners. Finally, Methodism (at least at the outset) styled itself as a reforming movement in an era that was beginning to agitate for social reform.²⁵ To these aspects must also be added the society's role in providing a sense of belonging to a cohesive social group, emotional support, as well as the society's attempts to provide a degree of economic protection and security for the Methodists.²⁶

The Methodist societies were the chief vehicle for implementing Wesley's "evangelical economics." His concern for the poor was written into several aspects of the Methodist infrastructure, perhaps most notably, the classes' weekly subscription of "what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor."²⁷ The practice was in place by 1744, and for more than forty years it funded local Methodist philanthropy. Towards the end of the century, however, the weekly subscription was redirected to the growing costs of ministerial support.²⁸ During that same period Methodist humanitarian services were gradually taken over by the rise of various independent societies. The Stranger's Friend Society, begun in Bristol in 1787, was the logical and theological outgrowth of Wesley's "Rules for the Societies." It extended the Methodist's desire to "do good for the bodies and souls" of people beyond the pale of the Methodist classes and societies.²⁹ The "poor fund" of the local societies was administered on a local level. By 1805, however, the Wesleyan Conference had a full array of benevolent societies which operated more or less on a national basis. The gradual consolidation of Methodist benevolent efforts into the benevolent institutions tended to distance lay workers and their funds from the charitable work itself. It had the effect of undercutting the individual Methodist's direct identification and solidarity with the poor through the benevolent work of local classes.

Many particulars from the "General Rules of the United Societies" had direct economic impact. The "General Rules" enjoined the Methodists to "do good" for all people's "bodies" according to ". . . the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison."³⁰ The Methodists were committed to the mutual improvement of fellow class and band members. Members of the societies were enjoined to do good "especially to them that are of the house-

²⁵Henry Rack, "Religious Societies and the Origins of Methodism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (October 1987), 590.

²⁶Warner, *Wesleyan Movement*, 191-92.

²⁷The Wesleyan Conference, *Publications of the Wesley Historical Society, No. 1. John Bennet's Copy of the Minutes of the Conferences of 1744, 1745, 1747, and 1748; with Wesley's Copy of Those for 1746* (London: Kelly, 1896), 16. Jackson, *JW Works*, XIV, 70.

²⁸Eric McCoy North, *Philanthropy* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1914), 31-32.

²⁹Curnock, *JW Journal*, VIII, 49.

³⁰Frank Baker, editor in chief, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975ff.), IX, 72.

hold of faith, . . . employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business—and that so much the more because the world will love its own.”³¹ This Methodist network of employers, buyers, and sellers, was an attempt to support the Christian community in the highly competitive market place of industrializing England. Although some of the societies, like those in Whitehaven, or Newcastle, remained painfully poor late into the 1750's,³² it was also clear to Charles Wesley (in 1746) that other societies—especially those in the new industrial regions—“were growing rich” and hence must “know their own mind, whether they will serve God or Mammon.”³³

Several particular pressures coalesced to divert Methodism from the “evangelical economics” of the early years. Among these were: 1) rapid growth of the movement, 2) the socio-economic rise of the Methodists, and 3) separation from the Church of England and the steps taken to preserve the movement in consequence of the separation.

For reasons of population, piety, and practicality, Methodism became, as Maldwyn Edwards described it, “the church of the Industrial Revolution.”³⁴ In this climate Methodism continued to grow. Although the exact figures are disputed, a rough estimate suggests that it claimed 24,000 members by 1767 and 77,000 by 1796.³⁵ This rapid growth was a mixed blessing. It would soon begin to strain Methodist resources. A shortage of ministers would raise questions about the viability of itinerancy, about the sacramental ministry of the lay preachers, and about financing ministerial salaries. The pressing need for additional chapels raised urgent questions about how the preaching houses should be funded and governed. The resolution of these issues proved to be crucial for the future course of the movement, but underlying all these questions was the more determinative matter of Methodism's ambivalent relationship with the Church of England.

John Wesley's threefold dictum, “Gain all you can, Save all you can, Give all you can,” was to be set in context of Christian service and self-denial. The “Gain” and “Save” aspects of the program found their motivation in the third element, “Give all you can.”³⁶ During this period Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) had appeared, along with English industrialization and greater economic opportunities. While most Methodists did not become

³¹Baker, *Bicentennial Edition*, IX, 73.

³²Baker, *Bicentennial Edition*, XX, 451.

³³Thomas Jackson, *The Journal of Charles Wesley A.M.* 2 Vol. (London: John Mason, 1849), I, 419–420.

³⁴Maldwyn Edwards, *After Wesley: A Study of the Social and Political Influences of Methodism in the Middle Period (1791–1849)* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), 86.

³⁵Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People*, 164–88, reports significantly higher figures, suggesting that the movement added more than 50,000 members in the last twenty years of Wesley's life.

³⁶Baker, *Bicentennial Edition*, II, “On the Use of Money,” Sermon #50, 274, 277.

factory owners, many did rise out of worker's poverty to become craftsmen, masters, clerks, and managers. Supported by Wesley's emphasis upon thrift, hard work, and stewardship, as well as by the practical services of the Methodist societies (such as alms, and a lending agency operated by the stewards), Methodists gradually climbed the economic ladder. The prospering of these Methodists seemed to be an "inevitable consequence" of Wesley's teaching.³⁷ This situation reveals the tension at the heart of Wesley's economics—a tension between his recognition of the evils that flow from a preoccupation with worldly goods and his desire to embrace an economic ethic which would enable the working poor to improve their plight (and thereby run the risk of the destructive aspects of affluence).³⁸

As early as 1760 John Wesley began warning that riches would sap the righteousness and vitality of the movement. He was still taking up collections for the "poor weavers who are out of employment."³⁹ But his regular visits to the societies, such as those in February 1783, evidenced a conspicuous improvement in the Methodists' financial situation: "This week I visited the society and found a surprising difference in their worldly circumstances. Five or six years ago, one in three among the lower ranks of the people was out of employment. . . . I did not now . . . find one in ten out of business; nay, scarce one in twenty, even in Spitalfields."⁴⁰ At Macclesfield, in the heart of industrialization, Wesley met an affluence that held foreboding for him: "I . . . found a people still alive to God, in spite of swiftly increasing riches. If they continue so, it will be the only instance I have known, in above a half a century."⁴¹ The tension between the financial success of the Methodists and the Wesleys' original vision was exacerbated by John's persistent willingness to define "riches" in a minimalist fashion. According to Wesley "Whoever has sufficient food to eat and raiment to put on, with a place to lay his head, and something over, is rich."⁴² His definition indicted virtually all of the emerging Methodist middle class. It was so radical that it must have seemed impracticable to those who had with great difficulty recently climbed a few rungs up the social ladder.

In the 1780's economic issues became red-hot themes in John Wesley's preaching. His 1781 sermon, "The Dangers of Riches," mounted a strong denunciation of the desire to acquire wealth because Wesley noted "a near connection between riches [and] . . . every temper that is earthly, sensual or devilish. . . ."⁴³ In 1784, his sermon, "The Wisdom of God's Councils," warned

³⁷Edwards, *After Wesley*, 89.

³⁸Jennings, *Good News*, 157–164.

³⁹Baker, *Bicentennial Edition*, XXI, 500.

⁴⁰Curnock, *JW Journal*, VI, 180.

⁴¹Curnock, *JW Journal*, VII, 256.

⁴²Baker, *Bicentennial Edition*, III, Sermon #87, "The Danger of Riches," 230.

⁴³Baker, *Bicentennial Works*, III, 236.

“of all temptations, none so struck at the whole work of God as ‘the deceitfulness of riches.’”⁴⁴ Reflecting upon the text, “O Beware of ‘laying up treasures upon earth!’” he observed, “By not taking this warning, it is certain many of the Methodists are already fallen, many are falling at this very time; and there is great reason to apprehend, that many more will fall, most of whom will rise no more!”⁴⁵ Again, in 1788, John Wesley was preaching against what must have seemed like an oxymoron to him—“rich Methodists.”⁴⁶ His sermon, “The Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” connected declining spirituality with the Methodist’s rising wealth. Wesley estimated that fewer than 500 of the 50,000 Methodists “give all they can.”⁴⁷

The social and economic rise of Methodism became apparent in the same decade that saw the first concerted steps toward separation from the Church of England. Remaining in the Church as leaven and as a witness to the power of God was one of John Wesley’s often stated goals.⁴⁸ Yet, he took practical steps that virtually guaranteed a separation would eventually come. The *Model Deed* (1763) was one of the official documents where Methodist course corrections began to become apparent. The *Model Deed* established ownership and governance of the Wesleys’ chapels (London, Bristol, Leeds) through a board of trustees, who would oversee them after the Wesleys passed from the scene. The *Deed* stipulated that the chapels would not revert to the parochial control of the Church of England, and formalized the separatism that was already latent in the Methodist movement. The *Model Deed* guaranteed that the ideals of Methodism would be linked to the identity and aims of the trustees.

An example of the danger of this situation emerged in 1783. John Wesley lamented the large amount of authority which the deed of the Methodist House in Birstall (Dewsbury) placed in the hands of its local trustees. In his view this authority threatened to undermine the whole Methodist enterprise by creating too much independence. It undermined connectionalism as well as the itinerary. Wesley’s defense, and the rationale upon which he eventually had the Birstall deed redrawn, was based on the example of the ancient church:

In order to state the case I must fully look back to ancient times. As soon as the heat of persecution was over, and Christians increased in goods, some built Preaching Houses, afterwards called churches. In the following times those that built them were termed *patrons* and appointed whom they pleased to preach in them.⁴⁹

⁴⁴Jackson, *JW Works*, VI, 331.

⁴⁵Jackson, *JW Works*, VI, 334.

⁴⁶Baker, *Bicentennial Works*, III, Sermon #108, “On Riches,” 527–28.

⁴⁷Jackson, *JW Works*, VII, 289–290, July 2, 1789.

⁴⁸See *Reasons Against A Separation from the Church of England* (1758), and *Farther Thoughts on Separation From the Church* (1789).

⁴⁹Jackson, *JW Works*, IX, 505.

The dangers of patronage were further illustrated in the "Large Minutes" where the Methodists were enjoined to, "let all preaching houses be built plain and decent; but not more expensive than is absolutely unavoidable. . . ."⁵⁰ The injunction had its inception in the connection between economics and control of the societies: "otherwise, the necessity of raising money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent upon them, yea, and governed by them. And then farewell to the Methodist discipline, if not doctrine too."⁵¹ But the rapid growth of the movement necessitated ambitious building plans, respectability required more elaborate structures than the founders envisioned, and wealthy Methodists became increasingly important to the movement. As Maldwyn Edwards observed, "The people of wealth and influence were no doubt in the minority, but their position gave them an importance out of all proportion to their numbers. The Methodist point of view [after Wesley] was that of its wealthy middle-class adherents."⁵²

The Deed of Declaration (1784) provided for the continuance of Methodism by empowering the Annual Conference as the governing body of the movement.⁵³ It established the offices of President and Secretary of the Conference, and identified one hundred preachers as constituting the membership of the Conference and body of ministers that should supply the Methodist chapels and preaching houses. Methodism faced many of its most serious challenges under the guidance of the "legal one hundred," the Conference, and its officials. Many of these challenges were associated with the rapid growth of the movement. Between the years 1789 and 1815 Methodism nearly tripled in size, during a period when other religious bodies remained almost constant.⁵⁴ This rapid growth necessitated an ambitious building program and an expanding network of traveling preachers at precisely the time when a serious (post-war) recession hit England. The finances of ministerial support offer a useful example of the interconnection of growth, consolidation of the movement, and a corresponding decline of "evangelical economics." In the first three decades of Methodism it was not unusual for Methodist preachers to supplement their income through secular employment.⁵⁵ The practice was frowned upon by John Wesley and his "Twelve Rules for Helpers" (1768) reminded the preachers: "You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. . . ."⁵⁶ The ninth rule, as printed in the first and subsequently revised edition, was forcefully direct, "Take no money of anyone. If they give you food when you are hungry, or

⁵⁰Jackson, *JW Works*, IX, 332.

⁵¹Jackson, *JW Works*, IX, 332.

⁵²Edwards, *After Wesley*, 90.

⁵³Cf. Curnock, *JW Journal*, VIII, 335–41 for the document.

⁵⁴Edwards, *After Wesley*, 141.

⁵⁵Richard M. Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), 42–44; Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 149–50.

⁵⁶Jackson, *JW Works*, VIII, 310.

clothes when you need them, it is good. But not silver or gold. Let there be no pretense to say we grow rich by the Gospel."⁵⁷ Barring the preachers from "outside" employment had the effect of creating a need for greater financial support. The solution to this problem can be traced through the evolving application of the "weekly subscription" which the classes made as a part of their discipleship. The practice originated in London (in 1744 or before) and was enshrined in the "General Rules" which specified that these *weekly* collections were "for the relief of the poor."⁵⁸ The expenses of the local societies were raised by a *quarterly* subscription. By 1783, however, the weekly subscription was being diverted to ministerial support.⁵⁹ This was a clear departure from the "evangelical economics" and local advocacy for the poor represented in the earlier pattern.

Pew rental was another financial adjustment gradually emerged in post-Wesley Methodism to undergird the financial standing of the chapels. Pew rental was common in the Church of England and through Methodism's close connection to the Church there came a tendency toward rented, private pews among the Methodists—even in Wesley's day. In 1787, the London chapel committee met in John Wesley's absence, on Friday, December 21, and recommended, ". . . that everyone who took a pew should have it as his own."⁶⁰ The effect of these steps in Wesley's mind was the ". . . overthrowing, at one blow, the discipline which I have been establishing for fifty years."⁶¹ Not thwarted by the committee process, Wesley summoned the group together again on following Monday. He recalled, ". . . after a calm and loving consultation, [we] judged it best . . . that none would claim any pew as his own."⁶² But when Wesley could no longer oppose the policy, either just before⁶³ or very soon after his death,⁶⁴ pew rental gradually became the norm for the urban chapels and then gradually spread throughout the movement. The London chapels, like the Foundery and West Street Chapel, had neither pews nor rented seats during the Wesleys' life time as a symbolic expression of classless Christian community. By 1798, however, the West Street congregation needed larger accommodations and purchased an Anglican chapel in nearby Great Queen Street. The new chapel had pews, and with relocation came pew rental. Congregational records indicate that the income from the first year's pew rent was £305.⁶⁵ By 1802 pew fees for the chapel in Macclesfield

⁵⁷John Bennet's *Minutes*, 16.

⁵⁸Jackson, *JW Works*, XIV, 70.

⁵⁹Curnock, *JW Journal*, III, 300.

⁶⁰Jackson, *JW Works*, VII, 349.

⁶¹Jackson, *JW Works*, VII, 349.

⁶²Jackson, *JW Works*, VII, 349–50. One wonders how "calm" the meeting actually was!

⁶³Edwards, *After Wesley*, 90–91.

⁶⁴Warner, *Wesleyan Movement*, 204.

⁶⁵John Telford, *Two West-End Chapels or Sketches of London Methodism From Wesley's Day* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1886), 77–78.

amounted to £148 for the year. By this time too, the interior of the Methodist chapels had begun to reflect the class distinctions implied by pew rental, as the "gallery" was reserved for more affluent members who were able to pay for special accommodations.⁶⁶ The poor, who had formerly mingled freely with their social "betters" in a practical expression of Christian community, were subsequently relegated to rows of benches in the rear.⁶⁷

Why did John Wesley "fail" to keep his evangelical economics alive in early Methodism? He failed, in part, because he succeeded. Wesley succeeded in giving the Methodists a theology of stewardship and simplicity, as well as an infrastructure of societies, classes, and bands—each with its own regulations and helps—that significantly improved the plight of working people and made them more able to adapt to the changes that came in the industrial revolution. In many instances the Methodists rode the crest of industrial growth, instead of being drowned beneath waves of social and economic change. But many of these "rich Methodists" were willing to forget their own humble beginnings and towards the end of the century the movement became more directly linked to the middle class. The failure of Wesley's economics also seems inextricably linked to his failure to keep Methodism within the Church of England. With separation came a myriad of logistical and economic problems which brought financial accommodations that sapped the vitality of the earlier vision.

There is at the heart of Methodism a theology *of* and *for* the poor. Our historical foundations suggest that an implementation of the early Wesleyan social posture with its "evangelical economics" will be possible and significant only if local "classes" are involved in spiritual, practical and economic disciplines that directly align them with the gospel and its concern for the poor and their struggles. Advocacy *for* the poor must grow out of the practical experiences of local Methodists—experiences *of* and *with* the poor. Our history impels us to consider whether the tasks of consolidating, and financing the Methodist movement continue to separate Methodists from Wesley's "evangelical economics." It urges us to consider whether our ecclesiastical structures and processes reflect too much concerns of consolidation and legitimacy and too little matters like spiritual and economic empowerment.

⁶⁶Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Maclesfield* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1875), 232.

⁶⁷Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 142–43.

APPENDIX A

OCCUPATIONS ON REPRESENTATIVE METHODIST CLASS LISTS

Occupations:	Newlands ⁶⁸ (1745)	Dublin ⁶⁹ (1769)	Bristol ⁷⁰ (1783)
Baker			1
Breecher			1
Brewer			1
Carver		1	
Cobbler		2	
Clerk		2	
Domestic	8	3	2
Farmer	7		
Founder			1
Gentleman			1
Glovier		1	
Harvester	1		
Hosier		1	
Ironmonger		1	
Laborer	1	1	1
Miller	1		1
Quilter	1		
Rope Maker			1
Seamstress		1	
Servant	1	1	
Schoolmaster		1	
Shearer			2
Smith	1		
Shopkeeper		1	2
Tailor			1
Washer			2
Weaver	2		

⁶⁸This class register (ca. 1745) was published in the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, XII (Dec. 1919), 75–77. Newlands is about 12 miles southeast of Newcastle.

⁶⁹This class list (ca. 1769) was published as a facsimile in Nehemiah Curnock, ed. *The Journal of John Wesley*, 8 Vol. (London: Charles Kelley, n.d.), V, 309.

⁷⁰The class list (1783) was published in Curnock, ed., *Journal of John Wesley*, VI, 447. The Ms. may be incomplete.