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A HISTORICAL STUDY
OF THE INFLUENCE OF MONASTIC PIETY
ON JOHN WESLEY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Asbury Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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A THESIS

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Accepted by the faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION.	1
The Purpose	2
Definition of mysticism	2
Organization of remainder of the thesis	3
I. MONASTICISM	4
Its ante-movements	4
Rise of monastics	7
Major movements	12
Message of monasticism	17
Comparison and contrast with Wesley	23
II. MYSTICISM AND WESLEY	27
Mysticism and Christianity	27
Prophetism	30
Mysticism before conversion	32
Wesley, the evangelical mystic	36
III. THE INFLUENCE OF KEMPIS AND TAYLOR	46
Thomas a'Kempis	46
Jeremy Taylor	51
IV. JOHN WESLEY THE ASCETIC	57
V. AFTER ALDERSGATE	67
VI. CONCLUSION.	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY	84

INTRODUCTION

Methodism is unique in many ways, but probably its most unique characteristic is the source of its origin. Historically, it had its source in one man, but actually, Methodism stems from many movements and the ideas of numerous men in the history of the Church. John Wesley demonstrates the genius of a brilliant mind with an inherent sense of spiritual values and an unusual acumen for organization. In fact, Macaulay, a historian and critic, estimated Wesley as "a man whose eloquence and logical acuteness might have made him eminent in literature, whose genius for government was not inferior to that of Richelieu. . ."¹

Wesley was one of the best read men of his century, and his life proved to have been one of the most disciplined of all time. In founding today's greatest Protestant world movement, he shows insight into a multitude of historical organizations and spiritual influences of the Church. This organizational genius took the right ingredients from many sources, and when they were integrated into a heterogenous unit, he had a structure that stood the tempests of the ages.

Wesley searched through the bushels of historical and ecclesiastical chaff of the Church, and chose the few kernels

¹ P. L. Parker, The Heart Of John Wesley's Journal (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1925), p. vii.

of wheat for his doctrine. He sifted the gold for his organization, casting aside the gravel, and distilled the quintessence of Christian doctrine from all types of beliefs and practices. In so doing, he extracted the best of the past, and formed a unique society that was blessed of God for the future. From history's well, he drew the sparkling invigorating doctrine of Paul, the discipline of the Church Fathers, the piety of the monastics, the social reform of the Franciscans, the rule of St. Benedict, the perfection of William Law, and the Christian assurance of the Quakers. Where in history is there a more influential organization from such a broad source of backgrounds?

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore the influences of one of Methodism's many sources, namely, the piety of the monastic movement which has cast its ray upon John Wesley and Methodism. These rays include Wesley's many irregularities, mystical tendencies, and ascetic practices. He finally found an amazing median between the rigid practice of Papism and the Roman Church and the gloomy doctrine and looser standards of Calvinism.

Perhaps one term is worthy of definition, and that is mysticism. Scriptural mysticism refers to the union of the soul with God in intercommunion and fellowship. It is not the pantheistic and Platonic type embraced by many extremists and heathen faiths, but a close fellowship with God in

Christian assurance. This was the type of mysticism that Wesley embraced after his conversion. Before Aldersgate it was a weak, humanistic effort to unite his soul and thought to God.

In order to present a broad investigation into the influence of monastic piety upon Wesley, the analysis and findings are presented in six divisions: first, a historic survey of Monasticism and its relationship to Wesley; second, an analysis of Mysticism in the life of Wesley; third, the influence of Thomas a' Kempis and Jeremy Taylor on Wesley; fourth, the asceticisms in Wesley's life before Aldersgate; fifth, his irregularities after Aldersgate; and sixth, a brief evaluation and analysis of Wesley's strict standards.

CHAPTER I

MONASTICISM

Its Ante-Movements. The first and second centuries constituted an age of extreme persecution of the Christians within the Roman Empire. The heathen aristocrats of Rome were entertained by the fascinating sport of watching imported lions tear Christians to shreds and eat their bleeding flesh. The Appian Way was often lighted at night with the tar covered bodies of martyred Christians. Why was this inhumane slaughter? This cruel barbarous practice was carried out in thousands of cases at the simple command of the pagan emperors, for they recognized that Christians "die well."

But this could not last forever, for the more Christians they killed off, the more rose up to fill the places of the martyred ones. Thus was seen the decline of the gross murders of the faithful, and during the second century, Christianity became a popular religion. As it has appeared throughout the history of the Church, whenever persecution stops there comes within the Church a spirit of laxness and ease. Thus, the Church began to grow popular, and as this took place, secularization possessed the clergy, and the vital Christian religion became a lukewarm affair. Priestly functions of sacerdotalism took the place of the simple worship of the early church, and formalism characterized the services.

The free expression and preaching of the prophet became a subject of suppression. As a protest against the quieting of the prophet, a new sect called Montanism arose. This movement despised secularism in the church.

As a sect they embodied all the ascetic and rigoristic elements of the Church of the second century. The montanist came forward to declare a continuance of the miraculous gifts of the apostolic church, and proclaimed the age of the Holy Ghost and the Millenium as already established. Encouraging such ideas as celibacy, they went into extremes of fanaticism and "fell from evangelical freedom into Jewish Legalism."¹ They had three main points of emphasis: They exalted martyrdom; courted blood baptism; and condemned flight from persecution and martyrdom.

They expelled from the Church all that were guilty of notorious crimes, imposed rigid fasts, advocated celibacy, encouraged martyrdom, allowed for divorce, and held it unlawful to fly in time of persecution.²

The Passion of St. Perpetua called it:

. . . only a weak and pusillanimous faith that supposes that the grace of God worked only of old either unto constancy in suffering or unto wonder of revelation; whereas He worketh always as He promised.³

¹ McClintock and Strong, Cyclopedia of Biblical Theological Literature (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888), p. 528.

2. Ibid., p. 526.

3. Herbert B. Workman, The Place of Methodism in the Catholic Church (London: Epworth Press, 1909), p. 59.

With all its extravagance and crudity, Montanism emphasized the perennial truth of the free life of the Holy Spirit and operated by other means than ritualism. Although Montanism was an imperfect type of the Spirit; yet, Workman compares it in some respects to Methodism.

. . . Methodism, though unflinching in its faithfulness to historic revelation, was the Montanism of the eighteenth century; a protest against an age which had killed the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by frozen rationalism and deadly secularism. ⁴

Like Methodism, Montanism wanted to force back the apostolic simplicity and purity, free of episcopal innovations that were fast invading and permeating the Church. It did not wish to bring forward a new doctrine, but to emphasize the doctrine of the Paraclete, as Tertullian described it, ". . . all 'advance to better things' must be 'by that Vicar of the Lord, the Holy Ghost.'" ⁵ The ideal of both movements was spirituality, and to gain this characteristic of the primitive church, ". . . both were prepared to turn the Church into 'societies,' however few and insignificant. . ." ⁶ They shut themselves out from the world by rigorous discipline and abstaining from worldly cares and desires. Consequently, both were led into a certain antagonism to culture, from which

⁴ loc. cit.

⁵ Ibid., p. 60.

⁶ Loc. Cit.

Methodism, unlike Montanism, fully recovered, perhaps too much so.

Both movements suffered persecution from their respective contemporary Church, but Montanism suffered fatal effects. Both movements had unusual and unique manifestations of nervous excitement, however, Montanism was by far the most fanatic. Due to its extremes Montanism soon became extinct; nevertheless, it had some reviving re-occurrences among the Friends. The Friends lacked the ultra radical asceticism that was practiced among the Montanists, and which, no doubt, was largely the cause of Montanism's early fatality.

Rise of Monastics. With the passing of the Montanists came an increasing spirit of "ease in Zion" and a materialistic clergy. Spirituality decreased in proportion to the increase of ritualism and a humanization of worship. As persecution was eliminated, the Church became more pompous and popular, and the simplicity of worship in vital, close relationship with God was soon a past characteristic. Consequently, many men protested the secularization of the clergy by departing into the wilderness of the desert or mountains and living alone with God. This was the beginning of Monasticism, which was a protest against union of politics and the Church, resulting in simony. They wanted a return to the simplicity and purity of the early Church, and to the penalties of its martyrs. The hermit fled the worldliness within the Church producing:

. . . a veritable stampede from the Catholic Church. . . Thus from the first Monasticism lay over against the Catholic Church, with an ideal, life, and institution of her own that claimed to be independent of, nay superior to, the institutions, life, and ideal of the Catholic Church. ⁷

The monastics were challenged by a higher life. They interpreted the challenge, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," ⁸ to mean the print of the nails, the crown, and the wound in His side. These symbols came to be the features of the monastic movement. For a thousand years, Monasticism spread the gospel of renunciation of self in a humanistic manner, crucifying the flesh. Throughout the Dark and Middle Ages, Monasticism was the expression of piety. The monk was considered the only religious person, and if a priest was not a monk, he was classed in the secular world. Also, conversion had little of its original significance, but was synonymous with Renunciation. This was a subjective and humanistic effort, an inhumane act of the troubled in heart seeking peace of soul. It was "the discipline of the physical for the sake of the spiritual." ⁹ It developed three sets of rules and carried them out to the most extensive extremes: poverty, chastity, and obedience.

⁷ Herbert B. Workman, The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal. (London: The Epworth Press, 1927), p. 11.

⁸ Matthew 16:24.

⁹ James D. Murch, Christian Education and the Local Church. (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1943), p. 56.

Poverty was the rejection of material interests; chastity was the subversion of natural physical desire, maintaining virginity; and obedience was the surrender of the will to a higher human authority.

O happy in their souls' high solitude
Who commune thus with God and not with earth! 10

Gibbon quite aptly called this movement "the unhappy exiles from social life, impelled by the dark and implacable genius of superstition."¹¹

Few movements have triumphed faster than Monasticism. One of the reasons for its astounding growth was the fact that it was allied with orthodoxy. By a strange accident, a movement which in its early days had been at times identified with Marcionism and Origenism, became allied with orthodoxy. These opposed the heresies of Arius and Apollinaris. The Arians set about to persecute the Monastics; thus, the belief in Monasticism became supported by the orthodox groups. In the East, particularly in Egypt, the movement had its beginning. In these parts, the monks were fiercely fanatical in the most severe practices. The finest shades of meaning of theological terms would bring together thousands of enthusiasts hoping to vanquish the enemies of truth. Some disgraceful episodes occurred at the hands of these fanatics, such as the

¹⁰ Workman, The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal.
op. cit. p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

murder of Flavian. But every movement has its extremists. As adherents of orthodoxy, Monasticism was strongly supported by the orthodox leaders of the Church. These men included Basil, Jerome, Chrysostom, Athanasius, Augustine, and many others. However, in its early stages, Monasticism was opposed by the Church. There was opposition between the cleric and monk, especially in the East, for the Monastics arose outside the Church. Many left the Church and never took communion within its pales. As a result Monasticism received considerable opposition. Many bishops were hostile to the monks of the fourth and fifth centuries. But when the bishops saw the strength of the monastic orders, they attempted to get the leaders of the monks into the Church by making them officers. Consequently, many monks were ordained against their wills, including Martin and Jerome. The Capti monk, Ammon, refused to be made a bishop by cutting off his ear, thus disqualifying himself. He even threatened to cut out his tongue to prevent the curse of fame and achievement to crown his life. John Wesley similarly did not desire high office in the Church, and disciplined Asbury in a severe rebuke for allowing himself to be called "Bishop" of the Methodist Episcopal Church of America. In a letter to Asbury in 1788, Wesley wrote:

How can you, how dare you suffer yourself to be called Bishop? I shudder, I start, at the very thought! Men may call me a knave or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content: but they shall never by my consent

call me Bishop! For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake put a full end to this!¹²

Many popular monks fled the episcopal office and the honors of the Church by fleeing into the desert, mountains and caves, where they could be alone with God.

These monks were laymen who were led and stimulated by a lofty ideal higher than the ideals of the Church. They protested the collectivism so eminent in the Church and state, and emphasized the principle of individualism. They believed that "the Kingdom of God is within you," and must be realized in the present life by self-surrender or renunciation. However, in surrendering some of the vital principles of an individual person, they lost some of the goals of preserving the qualities of the individual, such as the will, which characterizes the personality. They thought that by losing themselves in escape from desires, they might find themselves.

The root principle of Monasticism lay in the intense desire for self-surrender. . . This desire for self-surrender became at the time a yearning for isolation.¹³

We cannot view the times of the rise of Monasticism without noting some recognizable comparisons with the times of John Wesley and the perverse conditions of eighteenth century England. The vivid description of the moral and

¹² William Warren Sweet, Methodism in American History (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 116.

¹³ Workman, The Evolution of the Monastic Ideal. op. cit. p. 25.

economic evil of the fourth and fifth centuries are very apt in picturing England at the rise of Methodism.

On that hard pagan world
 Disgust and secret loathing fell.
 Deep weariness and sated lust
 Made human life a hell.¹⁴

Major Movements. Monasticism first appeared in Egypt. Its first stage was that of the hermit or the eremite life. The solitary life was emphasized, and men began to follow Anthony of Koma in central Egypt into the desert to live a life to themselves and God. Anthony was born in 250, a native of Coptic stock. He was a son of a rich family, but took Christ's words to the rich young man literally, and sold what he had and gave it to the poor. At twenty years of age he became an ascetic, and at thirty-five, he became a hermit. He soon had many followers and imitators, who practiced the strictest self-denial of praying, fasting, and overcoming the flesh. These self afflictions were mainly of their own devices, and whether in groups, or as individuals, they practiced the eremite or hermit-like life. Athanasius wrote a book on The Life of St. Anthony, which captured the minds of the West, and established monastic ideals in Gaul and the surrounding parts. However, the practices of ascetism did not reach the peak of fanaticism in the West that they reached in the East.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

Pachomius was also an Egypt Copt, and a contemporary of Anthony. Forty-two years Anthony's junior, he improved upon the eremite ideal by introducing the cenobite organization. This was less extreme than the practices of the hermits and thus, a more healthful type of Monasticism. Pachomas established the first Christian monastery in Tabennisi, Egypt, where

. . . all the inmates were knit into a single body, having assigned work, regular hours of worship, similar dress, and cells close to one another--in a work, a life in common under an abbot. ¹⁵

Pachomas established a convent for women, and ten monasteries in Egypt. Monasticism continued in Asia Minor in his tradition, but was led by Basil. Basil labored for its adoption and spread, and gave impetus to a rule which bears his name. Common to the life of Pachomas, it emphasized work, prayer, Bible reading, helping the poor, and discouraged extreme forms of ascetism.

As was already mentioned, the earliest monastics were laymen. But Eusebius, bishop of Vercelli, recognized its values and required the clergy of his cathedral to live the monastic life. Through the outgrowth of this custom, it gradually became common for monks to receive priestly ordination.

There came to be a wide variety of monastic rules and practices. They varied from the most extreme ascetic disci-

¹⁵ Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church. (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 137.

plines of the East to laxness and riches of Western monasteries. Benedict of Nursia realized its dangers, and after becoming a monk, he drew many disciples about him and established his world famous monastery on the hill of Monte Cassino in Italy. There he established his famous Benedictine Rule, in which he emphasized worship, work, and obedience. He said that "Idleness is the enemy of the soul."¹⁶ His Rule gradually spread to England and Germany, and represents the best of early Western monasticism. Other early famous monks were St. Martin of Tours, Hilarion, and Jerome. They all recognized the need of regulation in the lives of monks.

"By the tenth century, Pope, Church, and monastery¹⁷ alike seemed to have reached the last stage of decrepitude." To meet the need in the Church, the Cluniac reform arose in the tenth century. The misery of the times had the effect of turning men's minds from the world and emphasizing the ascetic ideal. The movement started in France and aimed at a restoration of the old discipline, and of true renunciation and piety in the monasteries themselves. Its first illustration was in the founding of the monastery of Cluny in Eastern France by Duke William the Pious, of Aquitaine. At the death of its first abbot, five or six monasteries were under the

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁷ Adolf Harnack, Monasticism and the Confessions of St. Augustine, (Oxford: Williams and Norgate, 1901), p. 81.

control of Cluny's abbot. But under the fifth abbot in 994, Cluny had become the head of a congregation with all monasteries (reformed by Cluny) under its control. Thus, a far-reaching ecclesiastical, political plan developed. An affiliation between the communities was adopted which standardized the practices and ideals. Within the Church they considered only one morality and one ideal to which all Christians must pledge. This, of course, won the support of the clergy. The success of the Cluny led to luxury and riches in the monasteries. New religious associations were rising; the most important of which was that of the Cistercians, also French in origin. Its rule was that of Benedict, but far exceeded his rule in self-denial. Its early success was largely due to the far-reaching influence of Bernard of Clairvaux, who was one of the greatest preachers of all times. Bernard helped to lead the politics of the world from the pulpit and his monastery cell. This was the first of all orders to establish papal dependence and Roman authority.

There came another period of decay and death, and the fires of monastics were burning out. The need was met in the thirteenth century by a son of a rich merchant of Assisi. This saint defied his father and forsook all wealth, becoming married to "Mother Poverty." He went from community to community winning converts and helping the poor. Soon he had a great following which later became known as the Franciscans.

Francis of Assisi introduced a change in the philosophy of monks from shunning men to seeking them out and winning them to the ideals of celibacy, poverty, and obedience. In doing so, they preserved these ideals of early monasticism, but carried on a social gospel of helping the needy. The Franciscans were essentially social laborers, and ". . . their mountain-tops of contemplation in the haunts of plague and fever"¹⁸ were the bases of their ministry. In his commentary upon the Dominican Rule, Humbert de Romanis, 1277, wrote:

Our order has been founded for preaching and for the salvation of our neighbors. Our studies should tend principally, ardently, above everything, to make us useful for souls.¹⁹

Wesley would have agreed to the same emphasis for his preachers. Francis agreed with St. Dominic, "Live as if you only existed for the sake of others."²⁰ Again we cannot help but note the spirit of John Wesley.

A final major movement in Monasticism was that of the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits of the sixteenth century. This produced a revival of missionary zeal in the Catholic Church. In the time of the Protestant Reformation, the Jesuits stood as the antithesis to the Protestant movement. Their leader, Ignatius Loyola, was an invalid soldier who studied

¹⁸ Workman, op. cit., p. 272.

¹⁹ Loc. cit.

²⁰ Loc. cit.

the lives of Jesus, St. Francis, and Dominic. Stimulated by chivalrous ideals of dreams and visions, he educated himself and gathered some like-minded followers with whom he practiced his spiritual exercises. His movement was approved by the pontif of Rome, which strengthened the constitution of the organization as drawn up by Loyola. At its head was a "general," Loyola, and beneath him in each district was the "provincial"²¹ appointed by the general. It was a powerful organization, combining the:

. . . individualism of the Renaissance--each man assigned to and trained for his peculiar work--with the sacrifice of the will, and complete obedience to the spirit and aims of the whole.²²

Its purpose was to strengthen the dominion of the Church, seeking its power within the Church. It constantly pursued its own purpose, never becoming a tool of the Church, but bringing the Church under its dominion. Developing into a diplomacy of sensuous mysticism, it took the place of a simple piety and moral discipline of early Monasticism.

Message of Monasticism. One cannot study the overall picture of Monasticism without noting its major ideals and message. Herbert Workman presents eleven principles of the message of Monasticism in his Evolution of the Monastic Ideal,

²¹ Walker, op. cit., p. 426.

²² Loc. cit.

which summarize the thrusts of its movements.²³ The following is a brief discussion of nine of these principles.

The first idea and perhaps the major emphasis of the early fanatics of the East was the crucifixion of the flesh; extinguishing the lure of the senses. The hermit almost hated the creative world as a medium of temptation, thus, considering matter evil. There was much stoicism among early monks, for they used every possible means to deaden their natural desires of the senses, such as hunger, sex, sleep, feeling, and comfort. Death was considered the highest expression of the ideal, exemplified by Telemachus, a monk who stopped a gladiator fighting by sacrificing his life.

"Chastity was the chiefest virtue; to this abstinence and poverty were but auxiliaries."²⁴ Jerome crudely called

"virginity--wheat, marriage--barley, and fornication--cowdung."²⁵ Melania lost her husband and two sons the same

week. She smiled and prayed, "More easily can I serve Thee,²⁶ O Lord, in that Thou hast relieved me of so great a burden."

Thus, multiplied illustrations of broken homes, thwarted desires, and wretched lives resulting from these fanatics can be found.

²³ Workman, op. cit., pp. 325-340.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

Secondly, Monasticism failed to see Paul's view of the body as the temple of God, and tried to ruin it. They neglected the truth of human nature, and put the body through pain and physical abuse in order to become holy. They carried on extreme fasts for spiritual purposes. Arsenius, a teacher of the emperor's court, forsook luxury, sailed to Egypt, and became a hermit of Scete. There he obtained some satisfaction in his extreme fasts. Marcarius fasted forty days and only nibbled at leaves. He ate nothing cooked by fire for seven years, placing himself against a dangerous protruding crag of rock each night except Saturday, and then he prayed all night. At Constantinople there was a group of "Sleepless Ones"²⁷ who never slept, and day and night the work of prayer and praise never ceased.

Next, the daily death of the individual's will was a necessity. This idea was introduced by Pachomas, and was sometimes called obedience and humility. To the monastics, the two became inseparable. "The first degree of humility,"²⁸ said St. Benedict, "is ready obedience." Thomas a' Kempis wrote: "It is a great matter to live in obedience, to be under a superior and not to be at our own disposing. It is much safer to obey than to govern."²⁹ This was the emphasis of

²⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

²⁹ Loc. cit.

the cenobite more than the hermit. The system of obedience was not for utilitarian purposes, but for the sake of humility only. A certain Paul the Simple was tested by Anthony by asking him to stand in prayer until he returned. All that hot day and damp night the monk stood until Anthony returned the next day. Not only was this a principle of early monasteries, but even the Benedictines were not allowed much individual discretion in obeying; and the Jesuity Order "was founded upon the perfect exploitation of the renunciation of the will."³⁰ This blind obedience destroyed the individuality that Monasticism in its rise had attempted to establish.

They also attempted to minimize the importance of environment in worship. In eliminating the formalism and symbolism of the Church, they went in the other extreme and sought out the most crude surroundings to bring them closest to God. Some lived in small dark cells too low for standing room and too small to stretch out and rest. Thalelaeus spent ten years in a tub suspended in mid-air from two poles. His body was too corpulent to sit up, so he had to live with his head between his knees. Symeon Stylites was so filthy that when he walked, vermin dropped from his body. Many kings and

³⁰ Ibid., p. 74.

nobles knelt at the bottom of his pillar,

. . . cherishing as if they were precious pearls, 'the worms that dropped from his body,' gazing with awe as Symeon touched his feet with his forehead 124+ times. . . or stood all night with his hands stretched to heaven.³¹

Consequently, in attempting an escape from formalism, many monks sought as their goal to create a subjective atmosphere of worship, which was exceedingly human.

Another characterization of the monastic evolution, is that the standard varied with the different ages and reforms. The first reform was extremely fanatical, then the Benedictine Rule was a much saner and modified standard, and finally the Jesuits were linked with the Church in contrast to the non-sacerdotalism of the early monks. Wesley changed his mind several times during his life as to the practices of Methodism in consideration of the needs of the day. Methodism has since altered its practices many times to meet contemporary demands.

A sixth notable lesson is that the great reformers of the world have first conquered themselves.

. . . they best will help to subjugate the world who have first obtained the victory in their own souls, that they are best fitted for work in the world who have succeeded in freeing themselves from its clasp. Not by coming down to lower levels, but in living on the mountain tops, will men influence their fellows most powerfully.³²

³¹ Ibid., p. 43.

³² Ibid., p. 336.

If any man in history conquered himself in a positive and beneficial way, it was John Wesley. He thoroughly believed and practiced a renunciation of the world and selfish desires. This was one of the secrets to his effectiveness.

Seventh, Monasticism presented a great conflict for virtue. But the weakness of this lay in the opinion that virtue was the inhumane solitary life. Kempis disagrees with this, as well as Martin Luther. The latter said, "It is a dangerous thing for a man to be alone. . . it is a device for the devil himself. . ." ³³

Eighth, the ideal monk was the one who had learned to live his life in silence. Asceticism was an end in itself, not a means to an end. It was the desire to withdraw from man in order to draw nigh to the Presence of the Almighty. A good lesson can be learned from this principle, and Wesley learned it. He seldom conversed long with anybody, and shunned communion with ungodly people, except to point them to God. He preached much on "unprofitable conversation," advising a friend to talk "no more than is necessary with men that are without God. . ." ³⁴

And finally, Monasticism repudiated a cheap, spiritual vocation that was easily secured and maintained. It placed a

³³ Ibid., p. 338.

³⁴ Mary Alice Tenney, Blueprint for a Christian World (Winona Lake, Indiana; Light and Life Press, 1953), p. 145.

premium upon an arduous means of Christlikeness. It has been the tendency of the more modern movements to advance easy and humanistic means of gaining an inheritance to eternal life. Wesley also frowned upon profession of grace without ample fruits to prove it. These are some of the major principles of the emphases of Monasticism through its fourteen centuries of growth. They existed in all extremes; however, it is quite noticeable that some of them can be directly compared with Wesleyan Methodism.

Comparison and Contrast with Wesley. Of all the monastics, Wesley probably had the most in common with St. Francis of Assisi. He resembles the Franciscans in his organization, system, and rules of the Society. Wesley is, in fact, the St. Francis of the eighteenth century. The following are some of the reasons for this deduction:

Both felt called in a spiritual experience to a complete surrender of self.

Both found in the love of God the central truth that inspired their lives and wills.

Both tried to live the life of Jesus--Wesley imitating His holiness, and St. Francis imitating His poverty.

Both achieved a revival of personal religion in a profligate age.

Each took the world as his parish, working among the needy and poor, outcast masses in deeds as well as words.

Their sermons were similar in simplicity, in reiteration of all-important truths, renunciation of pomp and worldliness. They also used music and hymns.

Both used similar methods in propagating the Gospel by laymen.

Both encountered similar difficulties, facing angry mobs in persecution.

Each leader disparaged the self-sufficiency of the members of his society; the worldly, extremely formal, and the fanatical.³⁵

But the followers of St. Francis remained in the Church, while the sons of John Wesley, contrary to his design, found their sphere of ministry outside the Church. Another contrast between the two was that Wesley was far more intellectual than Francis. Wesley was of a strong will and Francis was weaker, for Francis let himself come under the power of Cardinal Ugolini.

We also might compare Methodism with the Jesuit movement in the realm of obedience and surrender of the will. Both Wesley and Loyola demanded strict obedience from their followers. Wesley's demand for obedience was personal; Loyola's was obedience to a system. Up to a certain point "in this doctrine of the subjection of the will, modern Methodism and Jesuitism are one. . ."³⁶ Wesleyanism declares the will to be the cause of depravity and sin, since man is endowed with free will; hence, the will must be surrendered to Christ.

At first sight, Methodism and Monasticism appear to have comparatively little in common; for their differences

³⁵ Workman, The Place of Methodism in the Catholic Church, op. cit., pp. 65, 66.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

are numerous and significant. Monasticism usually considered Calvary as the main structure, and lacked a vital triumphant union of the risen Lord with the distress of His death. Nevertheless, there are some points of contact between the two world movements. In the light of the previous discussion, the following six comparisons are drawn:

First, there was a common emphasis of the importance of the conquest of self. This was a renunciation; the one condition of effective work for God.

Secondly, Monasticism as worked out by St. Benedict and Francis was a social religion. Wesley agreed in emphasizing the fact that men were to help each other to the spiritual life under leadership and a rule.

Thirdly, both Monasticism and Methodism were the witness to a sacerdotal age that holiness is a fact of character rather than an imputed act. Instead of communion with God through priests and sacraments, the monk upheld direct intercourse with God at any place.

Next, both movements emphasized the priesthood of the laity. The early monks were laymen, and even in the order of St. Benedict, the monk made confession to the abbot or whole brotherhood and not to the priest.

Fifth, the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. This was similar to the class meetings of early Methodism. Also, in every monastery the service of God was the supreme

duty of the monks. Worship was carried on in relays without cessation so that when the Master of the House came, He would find them waiting. This non-liturgical service was known as the "sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving."³⁷

And finally, there are some similarities between the Annual Conference of Methodism and the organization of the Friars and Cistercians. The Benedictine monasteries were of a Congregational type; each house an isolated and dependent cell. But every abbot of a Cistercian house was bound to attend the Chapter-General held annually at the mother-house at Citeaux, and was obligated to render account to the central authority; much after the same manner of the Methodist superintendents to their respective conferences. Also, the Friars were divided into Provinces (districts) and over each one was a Provincial Minister, elected for four years only. This could be compared with the Methodist Districts and District Superintendents. Each Province was again divided into Custodies, under the Custodians. Perhaps a correlation could be made with the Methodist circuit, cared for by the traveling preacher. "Both Friars and Methodists found that this common government by a central court united the whole body into a compact effective instrument."³⁸ Therefore, Monasticism had some discernable principles of influence upon John Wesley and Methodism.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

CHAPTER II

MYSTICISM AND WESLEY

Mysticism in Christianity. While Monasticism was "the discipline of the physical for the sake of the spiritual,"¹ Mysticism was "the discipline of the mental for the sake of the spiritual."² Therefore, it was consequential that in putting their bodies through inhumane treatments, the ascetics engaged their minds in mental gymnastics as well. Their minds were purified by a crucifixion of the body. So Mysticism was logically inherent within Monasticism.

There are many conceptions of mysticism which vary considerably. One secular encyclopedia broadly defined it as the "practice of uniting one-self with the Deity or other unifying principle of life, linked with religion; in a more popular sense any sort of non-rational belief."³ Harnack, the noted historian, says: "Mysticism is Catholic piety in general, so far as this piety is not merely ecclesiastical obedience, that is fides implicita. . ."⁴ Lehmann described

¹ James De Forrest Murch, Christian Education and The Local Church (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Co., 1943), p. 56.

² Ibid., p. 57.

³ William Bridgwater, The Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia (New York: Viking Press, 1953), p. 669.

⁴ James Hastings, Dictionary of the Apostolic Church (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons). p. 62.

this implicit faith as exemplified in the thoughts and life of Santa Teresa, the greatest mystic soul. Her life was not confined entirely to Catholic thought, for Lehmann says that she was "almost Protestant."⁵

Many writers have considered anyone participating in any sort of Mysticism as tainted with fanaticism and heresy. But many movements have become known by the extremists and distorters of the true picture. This has always been true in Mysticism, but Mysticism does have genuine Christian elements.

Union with God did not mean union in a pantheistic sense, but rather a transformation of soul through love, leading up to a condition of perfect acquiescence to the will of God.⁶

There have been as many varieties of mystics as there are religions. Harnack claims that there have always been "spurious" mystics in the Church and always will be. "It was always the Ultra's, who, by making an appeal to them, brought discredit upon the 'Church' mystics."⁷ There is a mystical element in Christianity, but Christianity does not rest upon a mystical basis. The experience of the Christian "is mystical in proportion as the soul has direct personal

⁵ Loc. cit.

⁶ Loc. cit.

⁷ Loc. cit.

intercourse with God through Christ." If this view is accepted, no evil stigmatism should be placed upon any mystic soul who does not delve into the "extremes" of holy living, but practices the presence of God on a Scriptural basis. The Apostolic Christianity cannot be divorced from Mysticism, which has been defined as "the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relation with God. . ." ⁹ Thus, Rufus Jones says, "It is religion in its most acute, intense and living stage." ¹⁰

Though there were many extremists and heretics among the mystics of the Church, the numerous and varied "corruptions" ¹¹ ought not to be identified with its essence." Christian mysticism differs widely from the Platonic mysteriosophy with its pantheistic view and emphasizes upon the negative. Divine revelation cannot possibly be separated from true Mysticism, for ". . .not only in John, but also in Paul, there are plentiful traces of Mysticism." ¹² Inge felt that the mystical elements of Paul's theology have been under-estimated; and that "all the essentials of mysticism are to be found in the epistles. . ." ¹³ The most vital elements of Paul's

⁸ Loc. cit.

⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Loc. cit.

¹² Loc. cit.

¹³ Loc. cit.

Mysticism are derived from his vital intimate fellowship with the living Christ.

Both St. John and Paul agree:

. . .to the mystic idea of the believer's oneness with Christ, to the pre-eminence of Love, and to the Holy Spirit as the Source of knowledge of the things of God, the Giver and Sustainer of spiritual life, and the witness to the Divine sonship of believers.¹⁴

True mysticism was epitomized in the Scriptures.

The Christianity which is content to remain non-mystical is impoverished at the very center of its being. . . .Had all Christians understood, and lived up to, their belief, they would all have been mystics.¹⁵

Prophetism. Mysticism was inherent within Monasticism and, no doubt, was stimulated by the monastic ideals, however, it did not originate within the monastic movement. All men are created with a capacity to desire and contemplate God in reverence and worship; hence, elements of Mysticism have always existed in the hearts of men and women. But some of the more distinguishing ideals of the mystical movement were more fully represented by the prophetism of the Old Testament, as well as the early centuries of the Church. The prophet was known for his outward manifestations of an inward

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

¹⁵ Loc. cit. (Quote from Moberly).

communion with God.

. . . the characteristic of the 'prophet' was his extempore, some claimed his inspired, utterance. He was 'gifted' to speak the word of God in free spontaneous discourse, oftentimes in ecstatic forms.¹⁶

Prophets even existed in the days of the Apostle Paul, but the movement was suppressed by the growing sacerdotalism (priestly office and liturgy) of the Roman Church.

"The prophet was thus essentially a preacher, generally a traveling preacher, though, unlike the apostle, he was not deprived of the liberty of settling down in one place."¹⁷ Not being a teacher, "the emphasis was laid upon intuition and not assimilation."¹⁸ He did not instruct, but warned; was not a pastor, but an ante-evangelist; and as such, his supreme function was the proclamation to backsliders of the forgiveness of their sins.

Upon a closer examination of early Prophetism, a fundamental agreement is found between it and primitive Methodism.

The two movements, in fact, stand for the same liberty of prophesying. The enemies of the two were the same--occasional inner extravagance, the opposition from without of those with whom order is paramount. The duties of the two were much the same, even to the

¹⁶ Herbert B. Workman, The Place of Methodism in the Catholic Church (London: Epworth Press, 1909), p. 57.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁸ Loc. cit.

matter of wandering, and the manner of payment of those who rested for the while on their 'circuits.' But most important of all is the witness borne by both movements to the free utterance of the Holy Spirit as one of the elemental facts of a living faith. This utterance neither the growth of sacerdotalism, nor the claims of decorum, nor even the 'foolishness of preaching' itself is able to destroy. That 'Prophetism' is an essential part of Methodism is not only demonstrated by her early history, but also by one curious fact. When at times Methodism has 'feasts' and 'band-meetings,' in the ministrations of her local preachers, or otherwise, she has always seen the rise, commonly by a secession from her own ranks, of a movement reviving the 'prophet'.¹⁹

Thus, there are some noteworthy parallels between Methodism and Prophetism characterizing both movements: outward antagonists being formalists; internal enemies being fanatics; itinerate preaching; and a strong belief in the free utterance of the Holy Spirit.

Mysticism before Conversion. Until he was twenty-two years of age, Wesley was satisfied with the formalism of the Anglican Church. His early home training under the Church of England, his parents once Puritan, demonstrated to him the outward signs of the Christian life. However, in his public school days, he became indifferent to his Puritanic training, and excused himself for backsliding into habitual sins. Thus, he began "taking refuge in the defense that he was not 'so bad as other people.'²⁰ This attitude of

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 58, 59.

²⁰ Mary Alice Tenney, Blueprint for a Christian World (Winona Lake: Light and Life Press, 1953), p. 65.

spiritual complacency continued until he received his B.A. degree from Oxford in 1724; and then, upon counseling with his father concerning choosing his vocation for life, he decided upon the ministry. For three years he sought to improve his spiritual status by various reforms, devotions, introspection, continual counsel from his virtuous and pious mother, and an extremely self-disciplined life.

In 1727 Wesley contacted a book that was to change his thinking and bear influence upon him for the rest of his life. Upon reading William Law's Treatise on Christian Perfection, he was "seized with an idea that never after let him go."²¹ There were men in past history of the church who influenced Wesley, although their touch was not direct. Boehm was one of the great mystics who influenced William Law. He influenced Arndt, Spener, Francke, and Fox, all of whom produced works which Law read previously to preparing his Christian Perfection. Thus, there were quite a few mystics who assisted in swaying Wesley's mind to the thinking of that gigantic intellect of the eighteenth century, William Law. John Wesley was deeply moved by the life of Madame Guyon and her books, and even after his conversion and repudiation of mysticism, he wrote very favorably of her.

Law and Wesley had much in common. Both claimed strict religious backgrounds; were deeply intellectual;

²¹ Ibid., p. 73. (Quoted from cell.)

disparaged public opinion for the sake of their convictions; and were intent upon disciplined living. After reading Law's book, Wesley desired to meet him personally and consult his opinion upon such a life as he was propagating. So he walked to his home at Putney, outside London (in order to save money for the poor he refused to hire a ride), and visited with the man who was to play a great part in his life. At first Wesley was prepared to object to Law's views as too high for any human to attain, but Law replied, "We shall do well to aim at the highest degrees of perfection, if we may thereby at least attain to mediocrity."²² Therefore, Wesley set about to try to imitate the ideals of William Law; some of which never left him.

Law said that God, in relation to man, is "an all-speaking, all-working, all-illuminating Essence that becomes the true light of our Minds here."²³ This he accepted from the Friends, but denounced both the cold formalism and the wild "enthusiasm" of the two prevalent, opposite extremes within the Friends' movement. Between these two ultra views he felt a mean should be established; then true form and

²² Robert Southey, The Life of John Wesley (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1903), p. 47.

²³ Richard Green, John Wesley, Evangelist (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1905), p. 75.

inward enthusiasm would take their proper places.

. . . it is the running away from this Enthusiasm that has made so many great Scholars as useless to the Church as tinkling cymbals, and all Christendom a meer Babel of learned Confusion.²⁴

After digesting both Law's devotional books, A Treatise on Christian Perfection, and The Serious Call, Wesley wrote:

. . . although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the Law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help, and resolved not to prolong the time of obeying Him as I had never done before.²⁵

Another strong mystical influence upon Wesley was the reading of Rules and Exercises of Holy Living in 1725, upon the invitation of a deeply pious friend, Betty Kirkham. More will be said in relation to his ascetic practices as derived from Jeremy Taylor, but this saint of the Church directly influenced Wesley in his mystical views. The following are some of the rules that Jeremy Taylor advised for deep contemplation upon God.

Think often of God's omnipresence.
Let everything you see represent the excellency and power of God.
In retirement, speak frequently with God.
Offer acts of love and fear to God.

²⁴ Loc. cit.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 19. (Quoted from George Bayrs' Letters of John Wesley).

Walk as in God's presence--contemplate Him.
Remember God is in thy brethren--treat them as such.²⁶

Wesley began to arduously follow these rules, and throughout his life, they characterized his actions and ideals.

Wesley, The Evangelical Mystic. John Wesley reached a climax in his life upon his return from his painful and unsuccessful trip to Georgia. He came home a failure--a new experience for this brilliant young clergyman, for he had always been at the top of his class and a leader among his colleagues. John accused himself of unbelief, pride, gross fears, levity and luxuriandy of spirit; and of many words in his speech which were unedifying. This extremely self-disciplined man was extremely liberal in the condemnation of himself. He feared he was unsaved, and then he wasn't sure, writing:

I think verily if the gospel be true, I am safe; for I not only have given and do give all my goods to feed the poor; I not only give my body to be burnt, drowned, . . . but I follow after charity (though not as I ought, yet as I can), if haply I may attain it. . . I show my faith by my works, by staking my all upon it.²⁷

Not only was he uncertain about his salvation, but his doctrinal beliefs and opinions were sadly confused. Over ten years had passed since he had received his Master's

²⁶ Jeremy Taylor, Rules and Exercises of Holy Living (Cambridge: Little Brown and Co., 1864), pp. 30f.

²⁷ Southey, op. cit., p. 94.

Degree from Oxford and yet his faith was seemingly grounded in sand. Ten years before, he had taken his mother's suggestion and undertook a serious self-examination, "to find whether he had 'a reasonable hope of salvation,'" ²⁸ Her advice to him at the time was that assurance was through human attainment rather than a divine gift. Now after a decade, he was searching again in introspection, and was not satisfied with what he found. As to his doctrinal beliefs, he sadly admitted, "For many years I have been tossed about by various winds of doctrine. I asked long ago, 'What must I do to be saved?'" ²⁹ He had been advised to not lay too much emphasis upon faith without works, and attempted to follow this by his many outward works. He was also warned against too many works, thus, falling into the pit of the Roman Catholics, and here he also failed, for he was wholly depending upon human endeavors for his salvation. He disparaged Calvinistic doctrine in writing: ". . .I fell among some Lutheran and Calvinist authors, who magnified faith to such an amazing size, that it hid all the rest of the commandments." ³⁰ He considered the Lutherans and Calvinists

²⁸ Tenney, op. cit., p. 65.

²⁹ Southey, op. cit., p. 95.

³⁰ Ioc. cit.

plunged into the other extreme denying the value of works,³¹ and called them "these well-meaning wrong-headed Germans." And so Wesley went too far in the other extreme, failing for thirteen years to find the golden mean between Calvinism and Papism. Soon Wesley, by "extending antiquity too far;. . . believing more practices to have been universal in the ancient Church than ever were so;"³² was falling into the tenets of monastic Mysticism.

Wesley wrote of his gradual withdrawal into the extremes of Mysticism. This description was written after his conversion, when he realized the precarious position of his former beliefs.

These considerations insensibly stole upon me as I grew acquainted with the mystic writers, whose noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid. But in truth they made good works appear so too: yea, and faith itself, and what not? They gave me an entire new view of religion, like any I had before. But alas! it was nothing like that religion which Christ and His apostles loved and taught. . . I had no heart, no vigour, no zeal in obeying, continually doubting whether I was right or wrong, and never out of perplexities and entanglements.³³

After forsaking Mysticism, Wesley considered it his worst enemy, and in doing so, took an extreme attitude toward it.

³¹ Loc. cit.

³² Ibid., p. 96.

³³ Loc. cit.

He expressed this attitude in writing:

. . . Nor can I at this hour give a distinct account how or when I came a little back toward the right way; only my present sense is this, all the other enemies of Christianity are triflers, the mystics are the most dangerous; they stab it in the vitals, and its most serious professors are most likely to fall by them. ³⁴

Although Wesley repudiated the appellation of Mysticism, as a trichotomist, he viewed the spirit as the highest principle of man. This immortal spirit was the channel uniting man with God in faith. He believed God might send His Spirit directly and immediately into the soul of man. This is Scriptural Mysticism, therefore, it was the extremes of the radical mystics whom Wesley criticized in severe denouncement.

If a Mystic is one who denied justification by faith, . . . who taught that God was insusceptible of anger and that the work of God in the soul was best promoted by anguish and by spiritual martyrdoms by occasional absences of God; that joy in the Spirit was not to be indulged in nor God to be selfishly loved; who was guided solely by inward impressions and not by the written Word; who advised retirement and entire seclusion from men; who strove to fulfill the law by passivity. . . ; . . . then Wesley's assertion that he was not to be numbered among them must be accepted. ³⁵

Even though Wesley discredits Mysticism completely as a "snake in the grass" of Christian doctrine that will poison the seeker, his conversion was a wonderful experience in

³⁴ John Wesley, The Journal of John Wesley, Standard Edition, (ed. N. Curnock. London: Charles Kelley, 1779). I, p. 420.

³⁵ Arthur Wilford Nagler, Pietism and Methodism (Nashville: Methodist Church Publishing House, 1918), p. 94.

which he sensed the Scriptural witness of salvation by faith. It was the inner mystical experience of the heart for which he expressed his desire ". . .of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved."³⁶ Being strongly influenced by the German, Peter Boehler, Wesley asked him if it would not be wise to quit preaching, since he felt that he did not possess the assurance that he felt was Scripturally accessible. Boehler advised him, "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."³⁷ Consequently, even though he did not possess this mysterious experience, and did not know how faith could be obtained instantly, he began to preach salvation by faith. Finally, on May 24, 1738, Wesley discarded the extremes of Mysticism in the Scriptural epitome of the finest expression of mystical thought in Christian assurance. He met with a small group at Aldersgate Street, and was listening to the reading of Luther's preface to the Romans. He wrote in his diary the glorious account of the fruition of his new found faith.

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed; I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.³⁸

³⁶ Wesley, op. cit., p. 14.

³⁷ Loc. cit.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 475.

He did not experience an exuberant ecstasy of joy in his conversion, as many of his converts manifested, but "His response was more intellectual than emotional.",³⁹ in accordance with his personality. Far more important than a jumping spree or a tickling of his emotions, ". . . was the profound and abiding consciousness of the reality of God and spiritual values, which now possessed him and supplied the dynamic that had been missing."⁴⁰

It is evident that "Wesley was more influenced by Mysticism than he was aware, for mystical ideas had filtered⁴¹ into the better religious life of his age from many sources." Mysticism has in all ages been a reaction against superstitious dependence upon humanistic grounds of Christian certitude. Thus, both Mysticism and Methodism build upon the foundation of conscious spiritual experience and its certitude within the heart. It is the doctrine of assurance, and is not far removed from that of the "inner light" of the Quakers. It is universally sound.

The faculty and action of the soul by which we have an immediate experience of objective reality, of the infinite and abiding, of a spirit not all unlike, yet distinct from our own, which penetrates and works within these our finite spirits and in the world at large,

³⁹ Tenney, op. cit., p. 95.

⁴⁰ Loc. cit.

⁴¹ Workman, op. cit., p. 79.

especially in human history. . . is met by the mystical and the directly operative element of religion.⁴²

The Methodist insistence upon conversion is based in evangelical argument upon the existence of a faculty different from, and superior to reason. This quality superior to reason is the intuitive faculty, and in both Mysticism and Methodism it reigns supreme. The great mystic, Ruysbroeck, says, "Above all things, if we desire to enjoy God, or to experience eternal life within us, we must rise far above human reason, and enter God through Faith."⁴³ God works through this intuitive faculty in the conveyance of spiritual knowledge. In this, Methodism locks step with Mysticism. Wesley has always tried to steer clear of the danger of this, which is the disparagement of learning.

In the Christian's view of peace of soul, both Methodism and Mysticism touch the basic fact of spiritual consciousness, never more finely expressed than by the great mystic, St. Augustine, who in the opening page of his Confessions, wrote: "Thou hast created us unto Thyself O God, and our heart finds no rest until it rests in Thee."⁴⁴ There is

⁴² Ibid., p. 80. (Quoted from von Hugel, The Mystical Element of Religion, Vol. II, p. 390.)

⁴³ Ibid., p. 81.

⁴⁴ St. Augustine, The Confessions of St. Augustine (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), p. 1.

little difference between the follower of Wesley and that of sincere Christian Mysticism. There is little difference in the words of the noted mystic writer, von Hugel, and a heart warming hymn of Wesley in their essence.

. . . He it is who, however dimly yet directly, touches our souls and awakens them to that noblest, incurable discontent with our own petty self and to that sense of thirst for the Infinite and Abiding, which articulates man's deepest requirement and characteristic: this is the first experience. . . , without which all life, and life's centre, religion, are flat and dreary, vain and philistine. ⁴⁵

Wesley also pens the beauty of his thought in deep contemplation and devotion to God.

Thou hidden love of God, whose height,
Whose depth unfathomed no man knows,
I see from far Thy beauteous light,
Only I sigh for Thy repose;
My heart is pained, nor can it be
At rest, till it finds rest in Thee. ⁴⁶

There are, however, some differences as well as likenesses between the essential qualities of Methodism and the mystical groups of the more popular varieties. The following are two qualities of the mystical which ^{is} basic to Methodism. First is ineffability, which is the state of feeling directly experienced and non-impartible to others. The experience of salvation and the daily walk with God are unique to each individual. The second is the poetic quality. This includes states of insight into depth of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. These demonstrate the doctrine of Assurance.

⁴⁵ Workman, op. cit., p. 82f.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

There are also two more characteristics of Mysticism which are unique to that group, but have little place in Methodism. The first is transiency which is a more abnormal state, which Paul probably referred to as the third heaven. Methodism is not opposed to this, but little transiency occurs in its movement. Finally, where Methodism and Mysticism part company entirely is in the passivity of the Friends. Wesley abhorred this practice among the Quakers and excluded it from his practice among his societies. It is the doctrine of "Stillness," which is a do-nothing negative attitude. However, Wesley did encourage the tranquil tarrying before the Lord and the spiritual quiet, which was a contribution of the Friends of God and later the Quakers, but Wesley took a mean between the extremes of this "quietism" and the radical expression of the non-intellectual Ranters. Another difference might be considered--the verbal testimony of God's grace imparted in the life of believers. Tauler thought that the experience of close worship with God was indescribable and non-tellable. No one was allowed to witness in words to what he felt in his heart. But Wesley took issue in the admonition of these lines:

What we have felt and seen
 With confidence we tell;
 And publish to the sons of men
 The signs infallible.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 84.

Wesley also opposed the anti-nomian views of the Friends, as has already been mentioned, and their emphases upon seclusion, solitude, and unsocial forms of religious expression. Although Wesley thought Mysticism was bound up with obscurity and irrationality, his doctrine had the following mystical elements in it: 1. Immediacy of first hand religious experience; 2. Man has a sense other than reason by which he comes into relation with the Infinite; 3. Conversion re-establishes a vital union of the soul with God which sin had dissolved; 4. Illumination comes after purgation; 5. The "Inner Light" universal and preventing grace; and finally, 6. The scriptural doctrine of Hebrews that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Hebrews 12:4.

Both of these movements have been sneered at as philosophical empiricism and a sentimental religion. Wesley despised this last accusation the worst, for he was anything but a sentimentalistic enthusiast. Mysticism has in the past and will be in the future:

. . . the ferment of faith, the forerunner of spiritual liberty, the inaccessible refuge of the nobler heretics, the teacher of the despairing, the comforter of those who are weary of finitude. ⁴⁸

Thus, the truths of genuine Mysticism neither grow old or die. In her unity with a sane and sensible Mysticism, Methodism will always have a most powerful weapon in the fight against the increasing materialism of thought and life.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 87 (Quoted from J. Royce, The World and the Individual, 1901, pp. 81-5).

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF KEMPIS AND TAYLOR

Thomas a' Kempis. In 1725 after Wesley had begun his preparation for the ministry, the question as to what Christianity really means arose. De Imitatione Christi (The Imitation of Christ) was recommended to him by a friend, probably Betty Kirkham, a daughter of a rector at Stanton near Oxford. He was in a crucial period of his life, for he was contemplating ordination. His mother advised him to be ordained, even at the early age of twenty-two; but she also asked him to take a serious inventory of his life in writing the following letter.

I heartily wish you would now enter upon a strict examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. If you have, the satisfaction of knowing it will abundantly reward your pains; if you have not, you will find a more reasonable occasion for tears than can be met with in a tragedy. ¹

Consequently, this classic of the soul was a means of stimulating his self-examination.

Kempis belonged to the monastic organization called the "New Devotion of the Brethren of the Common Life," first as a pupil, and then as a monk. At the close of his studies, he chose to remain in the monastery at St. Agnes. There he

¹ Robert Southey, The Life of John Wesley (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1903), p. 26.

lived for seventy more years, instructing, copying holy books, and writing. He died at ninety-one years of age. At the time he wrote The Imitation of Christ, the world was in chaos; threatened by the ruthless Turks. Many wars were constantly taking place causing universal unrest and fear. This book is the deposit of a long life set in those times of turmoil and disaster for the Church and State.

Kempis' book has had unique popularity, with the greatest "circulation of any book written outside the Bible."² It "came forward as an answer to the sighing of Christian Europe for light from Heaven."³ Its value lies in its content and spiritual vision, and it has had as many editions and reprints as there are months since it was written. Cell calls The Imitation of Christ:

. . .the most loved and widely read classic of mystical and monastic piety. . . The Christian's Pattern is universally regarded as the fairest flower plucked from the garden of monastic mysticism. . . No other classic of the Christian faith stands closer to Wesley's conception of religion in his pre-evangelical period or gives us so clear an insight in the workings of his mind.⁴

Wesley believed that The Imitation of Christ comprehends all that is related to Christian perfection, and in it

² R. E. Welsh, Classics of the Soul's Quest (New York: George H. Coran Co., 1923), p. 147.

³ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴ George Craft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935), p. 112.

. . . rightly say . . . an earnest apprehension and an excellent exposition in monastic terms of the idea of Christian holiness or evangelical perfection as the innermost kernel of the Gospel and the Christian ethic of life.⁵

However, Wesley did not readily swallow the whole book without disagreements. He wrote, "I was angry at Kempis for being too strict. . . yet I had frequently much sensible comfort in reading him, such as I was an utter stranger to before. . ."6 As a result, he began to alter the whole form of his "conversation and to set in earnest upon a new life."⁷ Thirteen years later, Wesley recorded the influence that the book had upon him and his disagreements.

. . . the providence of God directing me to Kempis's Christian's Pattern, I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions.⁸

Wesley had three main objections to opinions of Kempis. They were the necessity of a dull life with no joy; the uselessness and sin of pleasure; and the pessimistic doctrine of Predestination. Green records his comments upon each of these views respectively.

⁵ Loc. cit.

⁶ John Wesley, The Journal of John Wesley. Standard Edition, (ed. N. Curnock. London: Charles Kelley, 1779). I, pp. 466, 467.

⁷ Loc. cit.

⁸ Richard Green, John Wesley Evangelist (London: Religious Tract Society, 1905), p. 49. (Quoted from Journal, May 24, 1738).

1. I cannot think that when God sent us into the world he had irreversibly decreed that we should be perpetually miserable in it. . . .
2. Another of his tenets is; that all mirth or pleasure is useless, if not sinful, and that nothing is an affliction to a good man
3. How is this consistent with either the Divine Justice of Mercy? Is it merciful to ordain a creature to everlasting misery? 9

Deeply perplexed John wrote his mother regarding these problems, particularly the disagreement with Kempis on pleasure and sin. His wise and Godly mother answered him with this classic definition of sin.

Would you judge the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure? . . . take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes the relish of spiritual things;--in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself. 10

Wesley called this book of Kempis his "great and old
 11
 companion," declaring "that it was almost impossible to peruse it seriously without admiring, and in some measure imitating its heroic strains of humility, piety, and devotion." 12
 Thus, it is evident that Kempis exerted strong influence

9 Ibid., pp. 49-51.

10 Southey, op. cit., p. 26.

11 Ibid., p. 27.

12 Loc. cit.

over his admirer, who even encouraged his Methodist preachers to study it.

The Imitation of Christ is an attempt to revive a religion of the heart and peace of soul. Kempis was "a semi-mystic. . . practical and moral in personal relation with God through Christ and His cross."¹³ In his book, the Bible is the chief source of inspiration and language, for he quoted from nearly every book of the Bible. He also quoted from such earlier monks and mystics as Augustine and Bernard. Its message can be surmed up in five principles: 1. The self is the root of all evil. ". . . be not a lover of thyself. . ."¹⁴ "My son, thou canst not possess perfect liberty unless thou wholly renounce thyself."¹⁵ 2. The Christian must escape worldly desires. "All riches, dignities, honours, friends, and kinsfolk they renounced, they desired to have nothing which appertained to the world; . . ."¹⁶ 3. God's kingdom is within man. "The Kingdom of God is within you, . . . All His glory and beauty is from within, and there He delighteth Himself. The inward man he often visiteth; . . ."¹⁷ 4. Two requirements for enjoying spiritual intimacy with God are simplicity

¹³ Welsh, op. cit., p. 155.

¹⁴ Thomas a' Kempis, The Imitation of Christ (New York: Grosset & Dunlap), p. 146.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 81, 82.

and purity. "By two wings, a man is lifted up from things earthly, namely, by Simplicity and Purity. Simplicity ought to be in our intention; Purity in our affection."¹⁸ 5. And finally, Kempis' conception of the holy life is an ascetic life, detached from mundane concerns.

. . . change of manners, and perfect mortification of passions, make a true religious man.

O how strict and self-renouncing a life did those holy Fathers lead in the wilderness. . . What rigorous abstinences did they fulfill!

They were given for an example to all religious men; . . .¹⁹

In studying the life and practices of John Wesley, one cannot help but notice what a strong influence the message of Kempis was upon his life. These will be brought out more in the following chapters. It is impossible to read such a warm devotional book without being gripped by its sincere effort to win the reader to a closer imitation of the Master in vital Christian living and piety.

Jeremy Taylor. Another book which was brought to Wesley's attention by Betty Kirkham was Jeremy Taylor's Rules and Exercises of Holy Living. Its lofty ideals strongly affected Miss Kirkham, and "almost put her out of her senses when she was fifteen or sixteen years old."²⁰ Wesley agreed

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 44-47.

²⁰ John Wesley, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (ed. Thomas Jackson. London: John Mason, 1829), I., p. 19.

that parts of it were too strict and others illogical, but that its message was aimed in stimulating a deep desire to become a whole Christian. Taylor was influenced in his writing by Kempis, and his chapter on "Purity of Intention" insists (like Kempis) that all activities of life must be brought under the power and influence of Christ, then the most common incidences of life take on spiritual significance. Wesley read this book in 1725 before his ordination in September of the same year, which helped him come to a decision.

This was a more fervent and intellectual work than that of Kempis. The chapter mentioned above brought a ready reaction as soon as Wesley read it.

That part in particular of this splendid work which relates to purity of intention, affected him exceedingly. 'Instantly,' he says, 'I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts and words and actions,--being thoroughly convinced that there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself--that is in effect to the Devil.'" 21

This helped to soften his repulsive attitude toward The Imitation of Christ. He believed and declared that humility is necessary to salvation. But still he abhorred the terrible Calvinistic doctrine of Predestination as presented by Kempis and Taylor, and Wesley continued to hold to free grace for all men.

21 Southey, op. cit., p. 28.

Taylor gives twelve signs of grace whereby one may know whether he belongs to God.

1. Believe and be baptized into all Articles of Faith.
2. Study to improve your knowledge of God.
3. Be faithful in public and private worship.
4. Practice and maintain chastity.
5. Be merciful to others.
6. Practice justice and diligence in business.
7. Be contented.
8. Obey those who have rule over you.
9. Be not worldly minded.
10. Continue warm devotion to God.
11. Do not fear suffering persecution.
12. Make virtue and religion habitual. 22

In order to become a complete Christian, Wesley eagerly began to put these rules into practice, and completely adopted them.

Later he said of this period of his life, that in ". . . doing so much and living so good a life, I doubted not that I was a good Christian." ²³ All his works gave him a false

sense of assurance. Nevertheless, Taylor gave Wesley an uncertainty and a consciousness of unpreparedness for death.

"Every man is to work out his salvation with fear and trembling. . . A true penitent must all the days of his life pray for pardon, and never think the work completed till he dies.. ." ²⁴

This raised many doubts and fears in Wesley's faith, and perhaps was an influencing factor in Wesley's search for

²² Mary Alice Tenney, Blueprint for a Christian World (Winona Lake: Light & Life Press, 1953), p. 297.

²³ Wesley, op. cit., (Journal I.) p. 467.

²⁴ Jeremy Taylor, The Rule & Exercises of Holy Living (Cambridge: Little Brown & Co., 1864), p. 70..

assurance, which lasted nearly sixteen years.

Taylor's classic was a continuation of the earlier monastic piety as advocated by Kempis. In fact, the early monastics produced a strong influence upon Taylor's rules. The following five of his rules influenced Wesley the most, however, there are others which paralleled Wesley's practices throughout his life. First, Wesley took much from Taylor's chapter dealing with time. Taylor wrote, "Upon man's short time eternity depends . . . Idleness is the greatest prodigality in the world: . . ." ²⁵ Therefore, he advised all Christians to "spend every spare minute in prayer." ²⁶ Second, he devoted a chapter to "Practicing the Presence of God," and set forth some rules to maintain this ideal. Among his rules he advised walking as in the presence of God and continually contemplating His presence. Everything one does should represent the excellency and the power of God. Third, moderate indulgence of all things was advised in his chapter "Of Modesty." "Modesty is the appendage of sobriety, and is to chastity, to temperance, and to humility as the fringes are to the garment." ²⁷ This included simplicity of dress also. "Be grave, decent, and modest in thy clothing and ornament." ²⁸ Fourth, his

²⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

chapter entitled, "Of Obedience," was a standard which Wesley held for all members and leaders of his society, Taylor continued the spirit of obedience from the earlier monastics in a moderate sense in advising submission to lawful authority, spiritual guides, and respect to all rulers. Finally, in his chapters entitled "Of Charity," and "Of Alms," he emphasized helping the poor and needy, writing, "Love gives away all things, that so he may advance the interest of the beloved person."²⁹ Wesley agreed with him in his rule to give to all the needy, keeping only what you need. Anything superfluous in your possession you should give away and never expect anything in return. Thus, "Learn of the frugal man."³⁰

Through the course of studying these two books, a great change was brought about in Wesley's mind. He communicated weekly, and began to pray for that inward holiness; the necessity of which Bishop Taylor had convinced him. He set about to secure it by the most extreme endeavors. Adopting many stringent standards, his strictness of life made him the subject of much ridicule and laughter. Thus, he and his followers became known as the "Methodists."

²⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 340.

Taylor and Kempis banished forever Wesley's moral complacency, setting before him the goal of Christian perfection and inducting him into a tireless self-discipline and arduous conquest of the flesh. Success in this ascetic effort he believed would make him acceptable with God. Taylor's dedication epistle reveals unmistakably the High Church adoption of the ascetic theory of works as an answer to the dissenters' theory of 'assurance.'³¹ His readers were instructed to identify assurance with consciousness of virtuous conduct.³¹

The following chapter deals with some of Wesley's strict practices that he began to follow as a result of reading these two books.

³¹ Southey, op. cit., p. 31.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN WESLEY THE ASCETIC

Inasmuch as Wesley thoroughly adopted Jeremy Taylor's rule and pattern of living, it was only natural that he fell into the doldrums of humanistic asceticism which equaled the severe irregularities of many a monastery. His life took on a negative philosophy which sought through abstinence and self-denial to conquer his bodily impulses, and thus arrive at the holiness ideal in cultivating Christian virtues. Soon he was fasting once or twice a week, communicating as often as possible, observing hourly periods of prayer and uttering frequent prayerful ejaculations. He observed the twenty-two regulations of Taylor for the frugal employment of time. He started a diary, and recorded the manner in which he spent every hour of the day; continuing this practice until he embarked for Georgia ten years later. Idleness was the main sin to avoid, for it left room for temptation. In attempting to follow these rules and ideals, he was encouraged by his parents to not fear the ridicule of his school mates, "condemning as 'a weak virtue' that which 'cannot bear to be laughed at.'" ¹ He was severely criticized by his classmates that the rector, Dr. Morley, made inquiry into his conduct;

¹ Mary Alice Tenney, Blueprint for a Christian World (Winona Lake: Light & Life Press, 1953), p. 73.

only to decide that his intense program was an asset to the academic reform at Lincoln.

Prepared in outward standards of study and partially in heart, he was ordained in 1725 by Dr. Potter, Bishop of Oxford. After receiving a fellowship at Lincoln College, he adopted a rule to not visit anyone who would not help or edify him spiritually, and it was not long until he ceased having visitors. He continued this non-sociable practice all his life, and was able to steer clear of: those who might contaminate his thought; harmful conversation; and wasted time.

In 1727, he established a schedule for study, which he followed for several years.

Mondays and Tuesdays were allotted for the classics; Wednesdays, to logic and ethics; Thursdays, to Hebrew and Arabic; Fridays, to metaphysics and natural philosophy; Saturdays, to oratory and poetry, but chiefly to composition in those arts; and the Sabbath to divinity. ²

If carried out as Wesley did, such a program as this would give many a modern student a nervous breakdown. But he seemed to be a scholar of limitless energies and unceasing drive, and fitted quite well into such a demanding schedule.

John tried to press Charles, his brother, into the tight mold of his own austere habits and a more active

² Robert Southey, The Life of John Wesley (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1903), p. 34.

devotion. But Charles protested against becoming a saint too suddenly, and refused to abide by his admonitions. Charles did, however, meet with two or three other serious and spiritual-minded undergraduates at Oxford in a daily meeting. Here they read the Word of God together and other devotional books, and called themselves the Holy Club. When John returned to Oxford, they placed themselves under his supervision. Since infidelity was high and morals ranked low, these men placed themselves in a precarious position as far as popular opinion was concerned. They were called in derision the Sacramentarians, Bible-bigots, Bible-moths, the Godly Club, and the new sect of Methodists (a name from an ancient school of physicians.)³

These men who were called Methodists lived by rule, and learned to pick up the fragments of their time in order to not lose an hour or minute. They grew in number to fifteen men, whose sole business was religion. They regularly visited the sick and prisoners, took communion weekly, and fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. They also drew up a plan of self-examination whereby they might check themselves lest they backslide into worldliness. This plan of introspection had its faults, three of which were: it took too much time; its habits of life were burdensome--like a monastic order; and being a humanistic device, it tended to make artificial

³ Ibid., p. 39.

saints. These men later saw the darkness of their hearts; however, at the time, they were deeply sincere.

As was previously noted, when Wesley read William Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call, his ascetic tendencies increased. The author at first seemed to embrace too high a standard, but upon encouragement from Law, Wesley soon acquiesced to his ideals. Yet in spite of his humanistic attempts to gain holiness and the Christian way, there remained darkness in his soul.

. . . the system of the ascetic is dark and cheerless; but mysticism lives in a sunshine of its own, and dreams of the light of heaven, while the visions of the ascetic are such as the fear of the devil produces, rather than the love of God. ⁴

Wesley was an ascetic, and as such attempted to embrace mysticism, but he failed to gain the witness of the Spirit. As an ascetic he did not "bring forth fruits meet for repentance," and as a mystic, he fell short of the true scriptural mystic's ideal, which is communion with God through inter-fellowship. Wesley lacked the witness of God; hence, any communion was one-sided. He did all the acting and God had little chance to do anything with him.

The intentions of Wesley and his associates were good, but soon led them into fanaticism. The Seniors of the college met in Christ Church to see how and if they could be checked, but were unable to stop them. John's older brother, Samuel,

⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

accused him of carrying his principles to excess, and thus exciting injurious prejudices against himself. But John defended himself by asserting that the most unpopular of his habits were early rising and keeping little company.

John saved his money by every means possible, so that he might have more to give to the poor. He walked much instead of hiring a carriage; even to trudging four or five miles each way. He refused to pay to have his hair dressed, so wore it loose upon his shoulders. His mother urged him to have it cut off, but he refused to do this also, because of the unnecessary expense. Finally he compromised and had it cut to half length.

Samuel thought that John was disregarding his health, as if he were eager for death. He had ample reason to think this, for:

Hard study, exercise carried sometimes in his journeys beyond his strength, the exertion of frequent preaching and earnest discourse, fasting upon all the appointed days of the ancient church, and--most abstemious diet at all times, had reduced him to an alarming condition. ⁵

He spit blood frequently and once was awakened at midnight by a blood vessel breaking. This led him to seek medical care, after which he thoroughly recovered.

At first he was basically quite selfish in his search of a holy life, for he wanted his religion for himself, and nothing should deter him from gaining and continuing a sense

⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

of holiness by his solitary religion. He failed to carry out the advice given him by a "serious man," who had said,

Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember, you cannot serve Him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion.⁶

This selfishness of Wesley was evidenced by his refusal to help his father in his parish at Epworth. His aged father urged him to take up the work at Epworth where there were 2,000 souls in need of spiritual nurture. John refused and declared that he could not stand his ground for a month against such intemperance in sleeping, eating, and drinking, and that the spirit of the world would come back upon him. He dreaded the company of merely good men, lukewarm Christians who have a concern for religion but feel no real sense of it. He felt that he needed men of the same mind and convictions for advice, reproof, and exhortation, and this was a blessing which he could enjoy nowhere but his recluse at Oxford. His father was greatly indignant with John's austere selfish views. He wrote a stinging letter of rebuke in return for John's attitude of ease and complacency.

I cannot allow austerity or fasting, considered by themselves to be proper acts of holiness, nor am I for a solitary life. God made us for a social life. We are to let our light shine before men, and not barely

⁶ George Bayrs, Letters of John Wesley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 19.

through the chinks of a bushel for fear the wind would blow it out: . . . And to this academical studies are only preparatory.⁷

When the spirit of fanaticism comes upon one's mind, there seems to be no retreat, but a continued and increased exertion of energy in that direction. "It was, indeed, his growing attachment to ascetic principles and habits which made him desirous of removing from the temptations of the world."⁸

Wesley further revealed his selfish motives in religion when he declared his purpose of going to Georgia. His goal was not a lofty one, as it might have been, for his chief purpose should have been to convert the Indians and minister to the needy ones in the new world. He said,

Our end in leaving our native country was not to avoid want, nor to gain the dung and dross of riches and honour; but singly this, to save our souls; and to live wholly to the glory of God.⁹

Thus, the chief interest in the life of John Wesley was himself. He was the focal center of all his endeavors and activities. In spite of his giving to the poor and preaching to the prisoners, his aim was directed toward his own glory and self-satisfaction. Here lay the main stumbling block that separated him from vital contact with God. This

⁷ Southey, op. cit., p. 55.

⁸ Ibid., p. 62.

⁹ Ibid., p. 63.

was the fault of many of the monks who sought to glorify God in the solitude of their cells, fearing contamination by those whom they failed to win by their selfish lives.

While residing at Oxford, John had always felt some restraint, perhaps unconsciously because of his appearance and the influence of others. But on ship enroute to Georgia, there was no more restraint felt, and he with his companions put their ascetic principles to full practice. They believed that denying themselves even in the smallest instances was helpful to their receiving the blessing of God and contributed to their holiness. They soon ceased eating meat and drinking wine, and ate mostly vegetables. They decided that their meals were too frequent, and thus eliminated supper. Sleeping in the comfort of a bed seemed to be an unnecessary luxury, therefore, they slept on the floor. Wesley tried eating only bread instead of a variety. "At this time, his official biographers say 'he had only attained to the spirit of bondage unto fear. . .'"¹⁰ John wrote his brother, Samuel, asking him to destroy the classics and introduce only books of Christian authors to the pupils. He first depreciated the value of learning, and then would have destroyed much of it altogether, thus taking the general course of many fanatics. Southey commented upon their ascetism on the ship:

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

"The course of life which they adopted on board was. . .
 as severe as the rule of a monastic order."¹¹ But in spite
 of all his rigid practices, he felt afraid and unprepared to
 die during the tempest of the storm at sea. He was not sure
 of his salvation, and finally admitted his need of assurance.

His work at Georgia began well, and at first he
 preached to great crowds. But after he preached on dress,
 and infuriated the people with his extreme disciplines, he
 became less popular. He forced child immersion, and brought
 Episcopal and high church practices upon the people. He was
 impractical, and even departed from the standards of the
 Church in adopting some rules of his own. The people were not
 enthusiastic over rising for prayer at five o'clock in the
 morning, or dressing in drab colors. They wondered at times
 if this young cleric was not a Roman. In attempting to
 minimize the faith of the Calvinists, he over-emphasized works,
 and failed in his efforts to save his own soul or those of
 the Indians. Returning home, he wrote this pitiful testimony
 of his failure.

I went to America to convert the Indians; but
 oh! who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will
 deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? ¹²

¹¹ Loc. cit.

¹² Ibid., p. 93.

Gradually Wesley came to the realization of the fut-
 ility of his works, for he recognized sin within his life of
 unbelief, pride, fears, and a non-edifying spirit. He con-
 fessed, "In the hands of the great God, I was clearly con-
 vinced of unbelief,—of the want of that faith whereby alone
 we are saved."¹³ Not until he recognized sin within his
 heart and his total dependence upon God, did God inspire the
 faith that reached out and claimed salvation from sin. It
 was then that Wesley realized that his works were as dross,
 for he had learned to depend upon God and not upon his own
 ascetic disciplines. Then and then alone could faith trans-
 cend works.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

CHAPTER V

AFTER ALDERSGATE

A great change came into John Wesley's life on May 24, 1738. It was a change from doubt to belief, from stress and fear to peace of soul, from trust in works to a complete dependence upon the love of God. For the first time his spirit rose up and was united in holy union with God, and he was embraced in the everlasting arms of the Saviour. No more did he feel concerned for himself, but thought of others. As soon as he felt the divine assurance, his heart was turned to concern for his enemies. "I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used and persecuted me."¹ Immediately temptation pervaded his soul and robbed him of the expected joy. But instead of fighting temptations with crucifixions of the flesh, he trusted in God to deliver him. On Saturday, three days after his conversion, he victoriously testified: "I was more than conqueror, gaining more power thereby to trust and to rejoice in God my Saviour."² For seven more days he had a constant battle with temptation, but came out victorious on Sunday,

¹ John Wesley, The Works of the Rev. John Wesley. (ed. Thomas Jackson. London: John Mason, 1829), I. p. 103.

² Ibid., p. 104.

June 4, which "was indeed a feast-day."³ Two days later he witnessed ". . . still more comfort, and peace, and joy;. . ." ⁴

However, this radical change within did not produce such an alteration in his habits; for many of his friends thought all along that he had been a most devout Christian, and could not understand how this pious young clergyman, more disciplined in holy things than them all, could be anything but a Christian. It was no wonder that when he testified to his first realized salvation that his friends thought him erratic and fanatical. It was only natural that he should continue his practices of holy living, early rising, wise use of every minute, modesty of dress, temperance in all things, and his many other disciplines that had become a part of his nature and the basis of his activities for the past fourteen years. These disciplines, that he learned from the monk, Kempis, and the follower of Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, were to prove a great boon to his contribution to the world and particularly to the ideals of Methodism. The change was within, in his attitude, in his perspective. No longer was his ministry for self, but for God. His disciplines were re-channelled to best serve his Saviour and the needy souls. In losing himself, he would surely find his life in God.

³ Ibid., p. 105.

⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

Then he was in bondage to the Law, but now under the glorious freedom of grace.

And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the Law, as well as under grace. But then I was sometimes, if not often conquered; now, I was always conqueror. ⁵

There were many disciplines in the life of Wesley which he required for the members of his Methodist societies. If they were enforced today, Methodism would shrink to a small fraction of its present constituency. It is the purpose of this chapter to objectively present some of Wesley's irregularities, if they be irregularities of practice, and note their importance to the world movement which he uniquely organized and established. Many of these irregularities were adopted into his life before his conversion during his search for salvation. They were contracted through the influence of the early Church fathers and the books of Kempis, Taylor, and Law. Nevertheless, they proved to make a vital contribution to the strength and ideals of Methodism. It would be impossible to make a thorough investigation in the few remaining pages of Wesley's many disciplines, but a few of the more important ones will be noticed.

Soon after his conversion, Wesley left England for Germany to the colony of Count Zinzendorf. It was there

⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

that a home and refuge for the Moravians had been established which included a community of a hundred houses where the people, without taking a vow, ". . . had submitted to a rule of life as formal as that of a monastic order." ⁶ Wesley, with his stringent patterns of life fell in love with the organization there.

And here, says Wesley, I continually met with what I sought for,--living proofs of the power of faith; persons saved from inward as well as outward sin, by the love of God shed abroad in their hearts; and from all doubt and fear, by the abiding witness of the Holy Ghost given to them. ⁷

Wesley was deeply impressed with the schedule of the school for orphans. Such a program would be frowned upon, even in the universities today, and how these poor children could continue is a mystery to modern educational methods.

In the Orphan-house, the larger children rise at five. (The smaller, between five and six.) After a little private prayer they work till seven. Then they are at school till eight, the hour of prayer; at nine, those who are capable of it learn Latin; at ten, French; at eleven, they all walk; at twelve, they dine all together, and walk till one; at one, they work or learn writing; at three, arithmetic; at four, history; at five, they work; at six, sup and work; at seven, after a time spent in prayer, walk; at eight the smaller children go to bed, the larger to the public service. When this is ended, they work again till at ten they go to bed. ⁸

⁶ Robert Southey, The Life of John Wesley (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1903), p. 132.

⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

⁸ Wesley, op. cit., I. P. 141.

Wesley felt the need of a spiritual school when he realized the defects of the English schools. Soon he established an academy at Kingswood which proved to be a failure. The reason for this was the strict rules which Wesley subjugated all children who entered. It was even more difficult than Harnhuth, for the children rose from bed at four o'clock in the morning and were not allowed to play. They also were refused any holidays or relaxation. Wesley took the old German proverb literally, "He that plays when he is a child, will play when he is a man." As a result, many of the pupils were uncontrollable, and had to be dismissed. "In ninety nine cases out of a hundred," Wesley would ". . . either disgust them with religion or make hypocrites out of them."¹⁰

His extreme views of education also influenced the early academies of the Methodist Church in America. Cokesbury College, established in 1787,

. . . had the strictest of regulations. Rising time for students was five o'clock, summer and winter; at six they assembled for prayer; breakfast came at seven, and from eight to twelve they 'were closely kept' to their respective studies.¹¹

In his Works, Wesley gives an extensive treatment on the subject of a single life, and in his discourse, he

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹ William W. Sweet, Methodism in American History (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 209.

takes the position of the Apostle Paul. Marriage is not sinful in itself, but one is better fitted to serve the Lord in a single state than cumbered about with the many cares of married life. Some of the advantages of a single life are given, among which are the following:

You are under no necessity of "caring for the things of the world." You have only to "care for the things of the Lord, how you may please the Lord."

.....
Above all, you are at liberty from the greatest of all entanglements, the loving one creature above all others . . . But how inconceivably difficult! to give God our whole heart, while a creature has so large a share of it!

.....
You may employ every hour in what you judge to be the most excellent way.

.....
You may give all your worldly substance to God; nothing need hinder. You have no increasing family, you have no wife or children to provide for, . . . ¹²

To the love-lorn person who contemplates marriage, Wesley asks many deflating questions and ends by advising the love-lorn to seek happiness where it is first obtained--in God instead of in the creature of the opposite sex.

Methodism was organized with an itinerate program for preachers, thus making marriage quite a hindrance. For many years in American Methodism, a married preacher was considered unuseful, and was located. None of the early founders of American Methodism were married; therefore, perhaps Wesley's views had a strong influence upon them.

¹² Wesley, op. cit., (Works XI), pp. 458, 459.

Another stringent discipline that Wesley practiced was the frugal budgeting of every hour. In his later diaries, he wrote a brief set of regulations by which he lived. Those of volume six which reflect his habit of praying every hour are:

- I resolve Deo juvante
1. To (a line of shorthand)
 2. To dedicate an hour, morning and evening; No excuse, Reason, or Pretences.
 3. To converse . . . No anger,
 4. To pray every hour, seriously, deliberately, fervently.¹³

His day began long before day break and lasted until ten or eleven at night. He accounted for every hour or half hour as profitably used. Early in life he made a statement to his mother which he never forgot: "Leisure and I have taken leave of one another."¹⁴ In a sermon on "Redeeming the Time," he said that sixty years previously, he had made an experiment on how much time he wasted in the morning. Each night he awoke about mid-night and lay awake for some time. He kept rising earlier and earlier until he no longer awoke at night; supposing that his need of sleep was supplied. Thus, for the rest of his life he made the practice of rising at four o'clock each morning.

¹³ John Wesley, The Journal of John Wesley (Standard Edition, ed. Nehemiah Curnock. London: Charles Kelley, 1779) Vol. VI, p. 379.

¹⁴ George Bayrs, Letters of John Wesley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915), p. 7.

One of the pathways to evil was worldliness, and Wesley erected every safeguard possible in his organization to guard Christians from its lure. One of these safeguards was his rule against worldly fashions and adornment in dress. He was well impressed with the plainness of dress of the Quakers, and copied their custom. He paid tribute to them in saying:

Many years ago I observed several parts of Christian practice among the people called Quakers. Two things I particularly remarked among them--plainness of speech and plainness of dress. I willingly adopted both, with some restrictions, particularly plainness of dress. . .¹⁵

The Methodists imitated the cheapness of the material and also the simplicity of style. In his sermon "On Dress," Wesley declared his most pointed view on the subject.

. . . the more you lay out on your own apparel, the less you have left to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to lodge the strangers, to relieve those that are sick and in prison, and to lessen the numberless afflictions to which we are exposed.¹⁶

He proclaimed that money spent on expensive clothes was robbing God. "Every shilling which you needlessly spend on your apparel is, in effect, stolen from God and the poor! . . . As a steward you are 'tearing from the back of the naked' what you put on yourself."¹⁷ Thus, self-denying devotion to the needs

¹⁵ Wesley, op. cit., (Works, Vol. XI), p. 466.

¹⁶ Wesley, op. cit., (Works, Vol. VII), p. 20.

¹⁷ Loc. cit.

of mankind was the root of his insistence upon plain dress; the same as it was basis for many of his imposed disciplines. Although a bachelor most of his life, he was never untidy, but always neatly dressed in plain black clothes becoming to his profession. He demanded that his helpers be plainly and simply dressed, but neat and well groomed. He considered wedding rings unnecessary and a sign of the world. One occasion he specifically commanded:

Wear no gold . . . no pearls, or precious stones; use no curling of the hair, or costly apparel, how grave soever . . . no velvets, no silks, no fine linen, no superfluities, no mere ornaments, though ever so much in fashion. 18

He would not allow ruffles, lace, showy color, necklaces, glittering buttons, shining stockings, or expensive cloth regardless of how plain. He criticized the rich Quakers for buying expensive but drab colored clothes.

Another barrier against worldliness was his declaration against worldly amusements. He preached much against the evils of the theater, dancing, card-playing, drinking, horse-racing, gambling, and any entertainment that drew one's interest away from God and that which was non-edifying. Using the language of the world, looking like the world, attending the amusements of the world, and copying the fashions of the world were anathematized.

18 Wesley, *op. cit.*, (Works, Vol. XI), p. 468.

A final conviction of Wesley, worthy of mention, was his frugal use of money. He thought that wise expenditure of pecuniary resources was the most vital criterion of practical Christianity. He based his thought upon the teachings of the New Testament and the reiteration of this teaching by the Church Fathers. He felt that excessive wealth and money wean men away from God and make them selfish lovers of things rather than lovers of God. He practiced and advocated temperance in all things and moderate spending of money. By buying only the basic necessities of life, one could save all his surplus money to give to the poor. Thus, Wesley condemned the love of expensive houses and furniture as the love of dress. He asked that nothing be spent:

. . . in curiously adorning . . . houses; in superfluous or expensive furniture; in costly pictures; painting, gilding, books; in elegant rather than useful gardens. ¹⁹

Just how would the Reverend John Wesley succeed in the typical Methodist pulpit today? No doubt he would preach against the mad frenzy of competition or "keeping up with the Joneses" of the average "good Methodist" as far as the styles of cars, homes, fashionable dress, and general worldly mindedness are concerned. For just as the cares of the world dominated the people in his day who abounded in sin, they rule the life of the average American. There is a general

¹⁹ John Wesley, Wesley's Standard Sermons (ed. Sugden. London: Epworth Press, 1921), Vol. II., p. 232.

anti-nomianism in most churches because too many people do not like to be told the more excellent way, but choose the more easy way. Wesley faced this same problem. He met this with his General Rules, which were applied in a unique manner in the class meetings. As a result, many members who would not repent were expelled until they gave further sign of a desire to lead a new life and walk in the ordinances of the Methodist rules.

There was a strong tendency in his day to divorce works from faith, particularly among the Friends movement. It was a gigantic task for an evangelist to live up to the rules of a mystic, such as Law, or the advice of the monastery dweller, Kempis; but Wesley did a marvelous job, in spite of the criticisms of the semi-pagans about him. Love continually was the core of his message. He suspected all testimonies not accompanied by positive Christian example in life, and he had no patience with religious sentimentalism, because so many "enthusiasts" did not live up to their rantings. He declared in a sermon, "Walking by Sight and Faith," that good and evil should be judged in the light of their hindrance or promotion to the doer, not in this life, but throughout eternity. This reasonable standard regulated all tempers, passions, desires, joys, fears, thoughts, designs, words, and actions in preparation for the world to come.

Many biographers are hard on Wesley for the stringent discipline and enforcement of his rules upon his followers. Perhaps he was dogmatic in dealing with ministers, lay preachers, and members of his society. But for every rule, he had a reason. He was a man of his times who used methods, which for the most part, succeeded. Southey compares Wesley to a Roman Pope:

Could his rules have been enforced like those of his kindred spirits in the days of papal dominion, he also would have had his followers regular as clock-work, and as obedient, as uniform, and as artificial as they could have been made by the institutions of the Chinese empire, or the monastery of La Trappe. 20

Even if Wesley did practice the authority of an abbot of a Jesuit monastery in demanding unquestioning obedience, this seemed to be the method of awakening a profane, defiled generation to spiritual values that England badly needed.

Wesley worked mostly with unlearned men, and he towered above them in education and principled and holy living; therefore, if anyone should have directed them in an autocratic manner, he was that man.

20 Southey, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that John Wesley gleaned from monastic piety that which promoted spirituality in his life and in his Methodist societies, he cannot be called a monk of the eighteenth century. He positively renounced the world as much as any of the monastics and lived only with eternal values in mind. But he far surpassed the early spirit of monasticism by living a social religion; not a selfish solitary life, but a life poured out for others. He was an apostolic evangelist in the true sense of the term. He lived in the shadow of the Law at all times, but was not in bondage to the Law (after his conversion). Freedom characterized his life: freedom from fears, doubts, worry, self-pity and self-centeredness, and all the evils of a carnal heart. He partook of the grace of God, and in bondage to God through love, he found the glorious freedom in release from sin. Many monks gave their lives to solitude and never really found them; John Wesley poured out his life to the needs of an apostate and wicked generation, and found it again.

In the process of this investigation, three conclusions are noticeable. First, Wesley took many values from early Monasticism and applied them to his life and to Methodism. Second, as a repudiator of Mysticism in its extremes,

he exemplifies the essence of Pauline Mysticism. And third, he bridged the gap between the anti-nomian tendencies of Calvinism, and the bondage of Romanism.

In brief reiteration of the similarities between Methodism and Monasticism, six of them are worthy of mention. There was an emphasis upon the conquest of self in a complete renunciation of the world in a desire for spiritual values. Both Methodism and the later Monastic practices of St. Benedict and St. Francis (unlike most monastics) were social religions; aiming at social reform. Both Monasticism and Methodism recoiled against the formalism of a secularizing Church and priesthood. Each made wide use of laymen as priests of God. Both carried on the spirit of praise and thanksgiving in their services. And finally, the organization of the Methodist conference is similar to Benedictine government.

Wesley also copied many of the exercises and admonitions of Thomas a' Kempis and Jeremy Taylor in his self-examination, class meetings, and General Rules of the Methodist Societies. All his rules and practices were based upon temperance and moderation in all things, and were geared to eternal values. Things of this world were to mean nothing to the Christian in light of preparing for eternity and spiritual values.

He at first embraced the mystical doctrines of William Law, but gradually realized that he needed something more to be a real Christian. Peter Boehler and the Moravians appeared to be true examples of the faith, and through their influence, he came to realize the necessity of the assurance of salvation. Finally, after a long struggle amid doubts and fears, he had the assurance that his sins were forgiven. Thus, he gave to the world the testimony of Christian assurance in a day when the Catholic doctrine of Kempis and Taylor was so prominent. This was the scriptural expression of Christian mysticism. He divorced the many extremes of mystical fanatics, and embraced the reality of the witness of the Holy Spirit to the soul of man. Consequently, he took the best from Mysticism and discarded the evils of antinomianism and pantheism. Eliminating Taylor's doctrine of predestination, he accepted his rule of "Practicing the Presence of God." In doing this, he thought often of God, offered acts of love to God, and walked as in the presence of Christ.

For thirteen years Wesley leaned too far from the Calvinist position in favor of the Roman doctrine of works. Being perplexed by the two opposing doctrines, he wrote:

I was early warned against laying, as the Papists do, too much stress on outward works, or on a faith without works, which as it does not include, so it will never lead to true hope or charity . . . But I fell

among some Lutheran and Calvinist authors, who magnified faith to such an amazing size, that it hid all the rest of the commandments. ¹

Considering the Lutherans and Calvinists in the opposite extreme from his own thought, he accused them of being on the wrong track altogether. Consequently, he held to the unity of the Anglican Church. It was not long before he went too far in his papist beliefs, for he accepted many doubtful writings as inspired scripture, and placed tradition and the Church Fathers as co-ordinate with the teachings of Holy Scripture.

Finally, after a great struggle, he came to the realization of the futility of his works and the need to trust in the love of God.

But does all this (be it more or less, it matters not) make me acceptable to God? . . . my own works, my own sufferings, my own righteousness, are so far from reconciling me to an offended God, so far from making any atonement for the least of those sins, which are more in number than the hairs of my head, that the most specious of them need an atonement in themselves: . . . I have no hope but that being justified freely through the redemption that is in Jesus.²

It is no wonder that at thirty-five years of age, Wesley remarked that he was "for ten years fundamentally a Papist and knew it not."³ George Call explains the change back toward the Reform

¹ Robert Southey, The Life of John Wesley (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1903), p. 95.

² Ibid., pp. 97, 98.

³ George Croft Call, The Rediscovery of John Wesley (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1935), p. 114.

theology of Luther.

The Wesleyan Reformation began with 'the return to the old paths of salvation by faith alone, after wandering many years in the new paths of salvation by faith and works.' The breach then with a semi-humanistic faith and the return to the Luther-Calvin idea of a God-given faith as the sovereign principle of all Christian experience defines the epoch of Wesleyanism.⁴

Wesley never went the whole way with the Calvinists; but he did accept the tenet that man is wholly dependent upon the grace of God for salvation by faith. He disparaged works as a sole means to salvation, but did not eliminate good works altogether as did so many Reformers. Good works were a vital part of every Christian's life, and even more important than church attendance. He soundly rebuked the aristocratic, complacent church members for attending church as a sole means of salvation, yet their lives showed "neither justice nor mercy."⁵ Thus, Wesley uniquely bridged the chasm between the Reformers and the Papists by taking the best from each, and uniting scriptural principles into the tenets of Methodism.

⁴ ibid., p. 115.

⁵ John Wesley, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (ed. John Telford. London: The Epworth Press, 1931) II, p. 59.

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