

My love his outpoured wine,  
 A cup o'erfilled, a table spread  
 Beneath his name and sign,  
 That other souls, refreshed and fed,  
 May share his life through mine.

My all is in the Master's hands  
 For him to bless and break;  
 Beyond the brook his winepress stands  
 And thence my way I take,  
 Resolved the whole of love's demands  
 To give, for his dear sake.

Lord, let me share that grace of thine  
 Wherewith thou didst sustain  
 The burden of the fruitful vine,  
 The gift of buried grain.  
 Who dies with thee, O Word divine,  
 Shall rise and live again.

It has always been important in any theology of the sacraments to uphold both the vertical and horizontal aspect of the sacraments. Sacraments as true fellowship—being one with Christ and each other. Both aspects are fully present in this affirmation of the believers' life as sacramental. It gives a deepened and broadened view on what sacraments are. And I certainly believe that there is and has always been a sacramental theology in The Salvation Army and that the Army therefore is not non-sacramental.

However the argument for the sacrament of serving cannot be the main or only part of a Salvationist sacramental theology. It runs the risk of placing too much attention on "our side"—the human agent. From a more traditional theological view of the sacraments they are first and foremost actions of God. God is the one at work. There has therefore in recent years been quite a development in theological thinking and formulation on this aspect of the Army's sacramental theology.

### Christ as the Primordial/Original Sacrament

There has been an interesting development in the areas of ecclesiology, sacramentology and Christology in post-Vatican II theology. *Lumen Gentium* from Vatican II talked about *Ecclēsia sit-in Christo veluti sacramentum*—the church, in Christ, is a kind of sacrament. It sparked off a discussion about the sacramental character of the Church. But talking about the Church as a kind of sacrament had a Christological basis. The reason for talking about the sacramental character of the Church is that it is seen as the continuation of the presence of Christ in the world. The sacramentality of the Church is based on Christ. Therefore it is not the Church that is the primordial/original sacrament—it is Christ!

The sacraments have to do with the grace of God. They are God's gracious acts towards us. They are the mysteries of salvation. The ultimate revelation of God's grace to the world is Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ is the "mystery of salvation"—God's sacrament to the world.

In many ways I think that The Salvation Army's theology is a "ur-sakrament" theology. It is a theology that underlines Jesus Christ as the one, true, original sacrament. We make a distinction between the sacrament in itself and the sacramental signs. It is a line of thought that is not entirely new in theology. It is for example a line of thought that can also be found in Luther's theology. Luther sometimes made a distinction between the sacrament in itself and the sacramental signs, Jesus Christ being the sacrament of God and baptism and the Lord's supper as the sacramental signs. Of course the "signs" for Luther were real. They included the "real-presence" of Christ. But going back to the distinction between the sacrament and the sacramental signs, it is a way to formulate The Salvation Army's position in more positive theological language.

The Salvation Army worships and celebrates the original sacrament of God—Jesus Christ. As the original sacrament, he conveys grace and salvation to the people in this world. In that sense the sacrament is first and foremost God's act. God is the one at work and we receive his grace. In this sense God's sacrament is necessary for salvation.

The Salvation Army's position is that at a point of time when discussions about the two sacramental signs—baptism and the Lord's supper—threatened to block the message of and the way to the one, true, and original sacrament, Jesus Christ, the Army ceased practising the two sacramental signs. But we have never

stopped proclaiming and giving witness in word and deed to God's one and true sacrament—Jesus Christ.

The Army has also wanted to bear witness to the fact that the grace of God in Christ can and does reach people 'outside' the two traditional sacramental signs.

This sacramental theology of seeing Jesus Christ as the 'original sacrament' is also one of the important new formulations and theological trends that were taken up by the new doctrine book—*Salvation Story*:

Jesus Christ is the centre of the Church which lives to be a sign of God's grace in the world. As the sacramental community, the Church feeds upon him who is the one and only, true and original Sacrament. Christ is the source of grace from whom all other sacraments derive and to whom they bear witness. He is what is signified in the sign of the sacraments.<sup>13</sup>

And later on it says:

We are a 'sacramental community' because our life, our work, and our celebrations centre on Christ, the one true Sacrament. Our life together is sacramental because we live by faith in him and our everyday lives keep stumbling onto unexpected grace, his undeserved gift, again and again.<sup>14</sup>

So our sacramental theology is based on the understanding of Jesus Christ as the one and true sacrament of God.

### The Non-Observance of the Traditional Sacramental Signs

It is no secret that the debate about our non-observance of the traditional sacramental signs has been intensified. There are strong convictions on both sides.

On the one side there is a very strong sense of the God-given freedom in the Holy Spirit that no observance of any particular ritual is necessary for salvation in Christ. There is a very strong sense that this is an important message to bring to the world. God's grace meets people in a number of ways and can be received also outside the traditional sacraments.

There is of course also a great concern for what kind of dissension and divi-

sion a reintroduction of observance of the sacraments would bring. There are also a number of theological and practical concerns—how many sacraments should be observed? Infant or adult baptism? What about all those who for years have not observed the sacraments?

On the other side a re-introduction of the observance of the sacraments would settle the question of The Salvation Army being disobedient or not to Scripture. The Salvation Army is not without rituals—why not use those rituals that have a clear biblical background and have proved a great help, comfort and nurturing of faith for countless believers. Sacraments combine the spiritual with the material world—the present Army position could be in danger of resulting in an unhealthy spiritualization. We now live in a time where rituals play a more important role in people's life—symbolic actions sometimes speak louder than words. In some cultures it is difficult for The Salvation Army to be recognized as a true people of God without some kind of sacramental practice.

It is certainly true that there is a whole lot of practical and theological concerns and challenges if The Salvation Army changed its position on the non-observance of the sacraments. But at the same time it is equally true that there is already a host of practical and theological concerns with our present position. Some corps and to some extent territories have introduced a sacramental practice. In other places of the world like the Nordic countries where I come from one can easily say that the sacraments are not a major issue in The Salvation Army. We have outsourced the administration of them to the Lutheran Church and the majority of our members received them there but outlive their daily church life and worship in The Salvation Army. So neither position is clear cut.

Where this discussion ends is difficult to predict. Recently an article was published by General John Larsson. It was an extract of his keynote speech to the International Conference of Leaders (2004). It reaffirmed the traditional position with the non-observance of the sacraments.<sup>15</sup> But discussions will no doubt continue.

### **Concluding Comment**

The churches live in exciting and challenging times where religion's place in society is under attack. Being a Church—a people of God, in a post-modern world brings new challenges. The Salvation Army has its share of these chal-

leagues like all other churches. But we have an extra internal challenge and that is coming to grips with the fact that the original mission's battle stations have turned into churches. We are in the midst of formulating our own ecclesiology and thereby also deepening and broadening our sacramentology. We are only at the beginning of this path and it is my hope that this paper has given a little insight into the present discussions and developments.

[The following text is extremely faint and illegible due to low contrast and scan quality. It appears to be a continuation of the author's reflections or a list of references, but the specific content cannot be discerned.]

## Notes

1. *Salvation Story: Salvationist Handbook of Doctrine* (London, England: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1998), p. 100
2. Ibid
3. *Salvation Story* p. 101
4. Ibid
5. *Salvation Story* p. 103
6. See the headings on pp. 103–105 in *Salvation Story*
7. *Salvation Story* p. 107
8. *Salvation Story* p. 110
9. *Salvation Story* pp. 105–106
10. *The War Cry*, p. 4, column 3, London, 17 January 1883
11. Robert Street, *Called to be God's People* (London, England: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1999), p.89
12. *Salvation Story* p. 113–114
13. *Salvation Story* p. 105
14. *Salvation Story* p. 114
15. John Larsson, *We Must Be True to Ourselves*

# The Church and the World

## Christianity and Culture from a Wesleyan Perspective

*Angela Shier-Jones*

Wesley's oft quoted phrase "I look upon the whole world as my parish" was more than a simple statement of his evangelistic clerical rights. It was a bold, albeit at the time, unwitting proclamation of a remarkable vision. It was a prophecy of the way in which the gospel of Christ should and would shape and transcend world culture and, in so doing, help to shape and transform individual nations. Despite his longevity Wesley did not live long enough to see his prophecy fulfilled. Through his theology and organizing genius however, Wesley bequeathed to those who followed him, not only his vision, but also his passionate desire for a new and reformed world, a place where every minister would claim the world as their parish, and every Christian know themselves to be included in it. Inspired by this passion, Christians all over the world who look to Wesley for their inspiration and theology have indeed played an active part in the shaping of national and international culture through their obedience to their calling to proclaim the gospel and spread Scriptural holiness. Whilst, on the whole, this has been both positive and constructive, there have been occasions throughout history when the inaccurate application of a distinctively Wesleyan perspective has had a negative if not damaging influence on world culture. Whenever this has been the case it can generally be traced back to a failure to maintain a balance between the two complementary yet highly distinctive doctrines of prov-

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idence and perfection which lie at the heart of Wesleyan theology.

Wesley taught a very strong doctrine of providence arising out of his understanding of God as both creator and governor. Accordingly he taught that God "hath determined the times for every nation to come into being, with the bounds of their habitation."<sup>1</sup> What was true of nations was also true for individuals. God determines the time, the place, the circumstances and conditions of birth for every person, including whether or not they are born to believing parents. Moreover, God also determines the physical as well as intellectual abilities of each individual.

He has given to each a body, as it pleased him, weak or strong, healthy or sickly. This implies that he gives them various degrees of understanding, and of knowledge, diversified by numberless circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

A strong belief in God's providence, coupled with a belief in God's care, led naturally to a conviction of God's providential care. God has ordered all things to the good. An over-emphasis on God's providence however can, as Wesley was all too aware, lead to a passivity of faith and action. A desire to demonstrate acceptance, trust and confidence in God's providence, for example, undoubtedly led some Methodists throughout history to miss the (providential) opportunity to lead in matters of reform. They have followed the teaching of St. Paul, and considered rulers and governments as God given.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good.<sup>3</sup>

As this paper will demonstrate, Methodists were justifiably accused of helping to maintain an imbalance of power in society at certain times in history. The equality that Wesley preached was equality before God. This equality did not



imply social or civic equality.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Methodists often inadvertently perpetuated what can only be referred to as scandalous abuses of the poorer classes by deliberately maintaining, and actively encouraging people to accept God's providential ordering of their "place" in society. Aspiring to higher social standing was often denounced as a sin of pride, if not of vanity.

An extension of an overly strong doctrine of providence can also engender conservative intolerance of change. God has providentially ordered all things—for all time. It is this idea that underpins the zealous condemnation by many Christians of so-called modern liberties and social structures. Both feminism and liberalism are accordingly deemed contrary to Scripture. Meanwhile, white western family values are trumpeted as being enshrined in the pages of Scripture rather than as the particular cultural application or interpretation of scripture by patriarchal authorities. A genuinely Wesleyan perspective on such issues counters intolerance with the knowledge and appreciation of God's perfecting grace. God, by grace, reforms and matures society through the on-going process of perfecting scriptural revelation. Scripture read in the light of reason, tradition and experience acts to curb the excesses of fundamentalism or Biblicism arising out of misplaced providentialism.

Not all Methodists however would recognise this reforming and liberating doctrine of cultural, as well as personal perfection. The church has at times over-emphasized a negative piety that presents Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection—of Holiness, as a list of "thou shalt nots" rather than an opportunity to grow in grace and love. Whenever this happened, it has led to an exclusivity at odds with the gospel and to justifiable accusations from outside of the Church of narrow-mindedness and cultural irrelevance. It is why Methodists, at least in the UK, are known more for their refusal to gamble and drink than for their desire to proclaim the gospel or seek to lead holy and meaningful lives.

Despite its periodic failures, however, Methodism's commitment to its calling before God has enabled it to be, on balance, a more positive than negative force in the world. This paper attempts to tease out just some of the main areas of interest and conflict where a distinctly Wesleyan perspective has helped to shape or influence word culture.<sup>5</sup> It will seek to demonstrate how a Wesleyan perspective on the interaction of Christianity and culture born out of Wesley's doctrines, has contributed to the stability of society as well as where necessary, radical change

and transformation.

It is based on the fundamental premise that Christians who view the world from this Wesleyan perspective will seek to embody the truth of the gospel in their life as well as in their words, in public as well as in private. They will judge culture according to its community value and social reform and responsible citizenship on the basis of the good that it will do for the future as well as the present. This perspective inspires Methodists world wide to continue to believe that they can and must work with God to shape and create a global culture of Christian love and grace for the sake of the coming kingdom.

Wesley taught that one of the clearest signs of God's grace is God's providential care for all of creation.<sup>6</sup> He insisted that:

as this all-wise, all-gracious Being created all things, so he sustains all things. He is the Preserver as well as the Creator of everything that exists. "He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;" that is, by his powerful word.<sup>7</sup>

It is God who is in control, not the politicians or the economists. Good government and the ordering of society are a gift of God's providence. Wesley thus had no difficulty in seeing the somewhat turbulent state of Great Britain in his time, as evidence of God's divine justice and providence at work. He wrote that all the quiet and even the "confusions and convulsions in the country were permitted by God's divine justice."<sup>8</sup>

There can be no doubt that Wesley's strong doctrine of general providence encouraged Methodists to develop a trust in, and learn to be content with, God's providential care for them. Wesley, for his part, seldom passed up any opportunity to impress on Methodists the necessity of "Christian obedience" and submission. Wesley was so successful at this that long after his death, members of the Wesleyan Church in England continued to reaffirm their "unfeigned loyalty to the King and sincere attachment to the Constitution."<sup>9</sup> The 1792 Conference declaration was explicit,

None of us shall either in writing or in conversation speak lightly or irreverently of the government.<sup>10</sup>

This stance is so firmly embedded in Wesleyan theology that over two hun-

dred years later Peter Grassow was to comment that, at first glance at least, the prospects for finding in Wesley a political theology which could add insight and direction to the struggle for wholeness in South Africa were "not promising."<sup>11</sup> The problem is that too strong a belief in God's providence can lead to a conservative reluctance to challenge the status quo even when it is evident that there is something fundamentally wrong with it. It can also lead, as Wesley was all too aware, to a form of antinomianism which asks "If God provides for my every need why need I bother do anything at all?"

The only answer to this is the doctrine that Wesley called the "Grand Depositum" of Methodism namely the doctrine of Christian perfection. This doctrine stresses the responsibility of Christians to "work out their own salvation" and to seek all means possible to grow in grace and holiness. Implicit in this doctrine is the knowledge that it is always possible to backslide. The grace needed for perfection cannot be grasped and held on to; neither can it be banked against the future by doing more good works. The grace needed to keep working towards perfection and prevent backsliding can only be maintained through attendance on the means of grace, and in particular through service, to God, to the Church and to all of God's creatures. Service to God enables the believer to grow in grace and holiness and such growth always results in transformation, the transformation of the individual, of society and of the world. The danger of course is that too great an emphasis on personal piety can lead to a denial of the Christian social conscience and to rampant individuality. Personal salvation and personal holiness become more important than the reform of the nation or of the world. The conviction that there is "no holiness but social holiness" as Wesley insisted, becomes lost in the individual's mistaken belief that they, and they alone, through their own hard work and service to God are responsible for their growth in grace and holiness.

Only when the two doctrines of providence and perfection are held together does Wesleyan theology and spirituality provide a worthy lens to view, and where necessary participate in the reform of, the cultures of the world. However, as examples from Methodism's own history show, it is all too easy for the lens to become unclear and for a false perspective of the values and worth of the culture of the time to be formed, often with appalling consequences.

Methodism's emphasis on providence, on good order, on discipline and good

behavior for example, was at its peak in Wesley's day. The willing submission to a higher authority that Wesley actively encouraged helped to shape a working class who were, in Thompson's opinion, tailor-made for toiling in the factories without complaint.<sup>12</sup> As a result, Methodists were recognised as exploited as the most efficient factory managers and stalwart workers. In his history of this period, E.P. Thompson<sup>13</sup> accuses Methodism of an abusive perspective of the culture surrounding the industrial revolution. This perspective helped to create "a class of mindless worker-drones, unable and unwilling to question the more repellent aspects of the factory system, even as they formed the very foundation of that system."<sup>14</sup> The basis for his accusations was located in the same spirituality and theology that is declared the world over in the words of the Methodist covenant prayer.

I am no longer my own, but Thine. Put me with whom thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee or brought low for thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing . . .<sup>15</sup>

The prayer emphasizes the Wesleyan conviction that a Christian's search for perfection begins with the willing acceptance of whatever place God assigns them in life and in the world. Holiness is measured in obedience to God in humility and grace. Working out salvation in Wesley's time meant being frugal, having methodical habits, paying attention to instructions, and fulfilling what were seen as God given (providential) obligations. The Wesleyan perspective saw work, even unjust, abusive factory work as needing to be undertaken "as a 'pure act of virtue' . . . inspired by the love of a transcendent Being, operating . . . on our will and affections."<sup>16</sup> In England, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries at least, the Methodist trust in providence and obedience to God translated directly into trust in the factory masters and obedience to the government.

As Hattersley was to note:

The importance of the Methodist social ethic was its acceptance by people who were not, or perhaps never had been, Methodists. Robert Peel, for example, the father of the Tory prime minister and resolute supporter of the Established

Church, would nonetheless employ only Methodists in his Lancashire cotton mills and calico printing factories because of their sobriety, honesty and responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

The Wesleyan perspective in this instance had both a negative and a positive influence on society. Negatively it appeared to maintain an unjust system of work, including that of child labour, on the grounds that holiness and obedience to authority belong together. On the positive side, it has been argued by Halevy<sup>18</sup>, that this same obedience coupled with controlled religious fervour actively prevented revolution in England.

It would be no exaggeration to say that this situation has been duplicated in hundreds of countries since then. The Wesleyan perspective on work and management has ensured that there are clear parallels for example, with the American Church's wrestling with slavery laws, with the South African Church's struggle with apartheid, and the Asian Church's battle for the emancipation of women. The cultural influence of this perspective is far more significant than its ability to enhance or to neutralize the revolutionary fervour of the populace whilst creating a self-motivating work force. The doctrine of providence may have inadvertently contributed to the continuation of abusive labour practices such as the excessive use of child labour, but the doctrine of perfection actively led to its eventual reform. Then, as now, what maintained the tension and restored the balance between the two doctrines of providence and perfection and enabled them to be used to create a clear and fresh biblical and Christian perspective on the issues at hand was the emphasis that both doctrines place on community. Wesley insisted that there is "no holiness but social holiness."<sup>19</sup> Grace is the gift of God to the people of God. Whether in providence or in perfection, the gift is given to build up the people of God not the individual. The individual cannot grow in holiness, only the people of God can.

Christians are called upon to build one another up in the faith. The structure of Methodism worked to maintain the all important balance between providence and perfection. Cultural injustices are easier to recognize when the culture is shared. Meeting together not only negated the individualistic tendencies of an over-enthusiastic doctrine of perfection, it reminded people that although God had allotted them their place they were jointly required to do something with it,

in it and about it! So successful was the small-group-circuit and Connexional structures at motivating, communicating and enabling Christian cultural growth and reform that the same structure has been adopted by almost all radical movements since Wesley's time. The Chartist movement for example was modelled on Methodist structures with 'Chartist chapels' duplicating the structures of Methodist Chapels, from the stewards to the layered membership requirements. To this day, in many countries, trade union leaders are still referred to as union stewards. Thus we have seen that a Wesleyan perspective based on providence and grace provides a means of critiquing the traditional Protestant work ethic, curbing some of its excesses. Work for work's sake is challenged by the need for growth to be more than economic. Perfection takes place in society not only in individuals and never in isolation. The call to build one another up prevents the Christians from standing outside of the culture they are called to reform, whether the reforms needed are spiritual, economic, moral or social as the following sub-sections will demonstrate.

### Moral Reform

Wesley placed a high priority on reforming the morals of the country. The aim of Methodism was to effect "reformation not of opinions ... but of men's tempers and lives; of vice in every kind."<sup>20</sup> As Telford was to note in his biography of Wesley:

Any one who studies Wesley's relation to his Societies will soon see how resolutely he set himself to grapple with the vices of his day. Wherever Methodism was planted it contributed in no small degree to a general reformation of manners.<sup>21</sup>

The task of saving souls, Wesley believed, could not be separated from the task of reforming the nation. In the mid 18th Century English morals were in dire need of reform. Public manners were a disgrace. "Drunkenness was hardly a matter of reproach, and profanity, loud and open, might often have been heard on the lips of fine ladies."<sup>22</sup> The main culprit was alcohol. Wesley spoke of drink as "fashionable poison."

It is amazing that the preparing or selling this poison should

be permitted (I will not say in any Christian country, but) in any civilized state. "O, it brings in a considerable sum of money to Government." True; but is it wise to barter men's lives for money? Surely, that gold is bought too dear, if it is the price of blood.<sup>23</sup>

He was well aware that the issue was not simply how often or how much poor people drank. Alcohol was an economic as well as moral concern. Social historians are agreed that alcohol was a major contributor to the poverty and poor health of the lower classes and not just because of how much was drunk: The availability of bread, for example, was reduced as grain that could have been used for baking was diverted to the stills. The poor drank themselves into even greater poverty and depravation whilst the rich made fortunes out of the sale and manufacture of alcohol. There were of course others who prospered from alcohol, such as the coffin-makers, glass-blowers and of course, the pawn-brokers.

Wesley's answer to the problem of alcohol abuse and its link with poverty and depravity was to insist on temperance. Methodists were called upon to live exemplary lives, to be beyond reproach and sober at all times. Wesley did not restrict his prohibitions to the consumption of alcohol either; he also recommended that tea should be avoided. Likewise, fiction should not be read unless it served a clear moral purpose. Preachers, in particular were never to take snuff or to drink spirits since they should set a good example to members who might easily become slaves to such vices. Wesley made frequent visits to the societies and ruthlessly expelled all those whose conduct did not live up to his standards. One journal record illustrates both the moral laxity of the times, and Wesley's response to it:

- ' The number of those who were expelled the society was sixty-four:
  - Two for cursing and swearing.
  - Two for habitual Sabbath-breaking.
  - Seventeen for drunkenness.
  - Two for retailing spirituous liquors:
  - Three for quarreling and brawling.
  - One for beating his wife.

Three for habitual, willful lying.  
 Four for railing and evil-speaking.  
 One for idleness and laziness. And,  
 Nine-and-twenty for lightness and carelessness.<sup>24</sup>

Wesley was equally emphatic about cleanliness and hygiene generally. He required far more of Methodists than obedience to the law and to the Ten Commandments. Members were expected to be considerate and attentive to all of God's creation. Hard riding, for example, was prohibited because of the harm that it was believed to do to God's creatures. The rules that Wesley wrote for the Methodist societies provided a radical framework for living up to a new vision of what life could be. Members were encouraged to educate their children and work for heaven on earth whilst setting their hopes on heaven above. Under Wesley's guidance they learned to allow their daily labours to be transfigured by adopting the spirit of work enshrined in the hymn "Forth in Thy name, O Lord, I go." As Wesley's expulsions showed, those who were not willing to live and to labour in this spirit were made to go forth more rudely.

There is sufficient evidence to claim that, in spite of what might seem to us today to be excesses of moral control, Wesley both pioneered reform and participated in the good causes of his day. Although he discouraged such actions in others, he himself campaigned voraciously for civil rights, for legal and prison reform and for the abolition of slavery. It is worth recording that one of Wesley's final letters, dictated six days prior to his death, was to William Wilberforce and concerned the anti-slavery legislation about to be set before parliament. In the letter Wesley tried to encourage Wilberforce in what he referred to as that:

glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England and of human nature ... O be not weary in well doing! Go on, in the name of God in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.<sup>25</sup>

Such was Wesley's commitment and success at social reform that one of the gentleman's magazine which had so maligned him in his life, was compelled to write that:



By the humane and active endeavours of him and his brother Charles, a sense of decency, morals, and religion was introduced into the lowest classes of mankind; the ignorant were instructed; the wretched relieved; and the abandoned reclaimed ... Though his taste was classic, and his manners elegant, he sacrificed that society in which he was particularly calculated to shine; gave up those preferments which his abilities must have obtained, and devoted a long life in practicing and enforcing the plainest duties.<sup>26</sup>

### Education

Undoubtedly one of the greatest impacts that Wesleyan Christianity has had on global culture has been in the field of education. Both indirectly and directly, as a result of its continual stress on the importance of education, Methodism forever altered the way in which children in Christian countries are considered part of the social order. Wesley was persuaded that the only thing that could "give a check to that immorality which hath overspread the land as a flood" was the doctrine of salvation by faith.<sup>27</sup> Improvement for the lower classes and true and lasting reform of their morals would only come about, he believed, through better education and through corresponding reforms in society. Only education would enable people to understand and appreciate the importance of the doctrine.

Wesley's attitudes towards children and education were inherited largely from his mother. Susannah Wesley insisted that her children were regular and disciplined in all aspects of their life. When only a year old they were taught to fear the rod, and to cry softly. Susannah stated that:

I insist upon conquering the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education; without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents, till its own understanding comes to maturity, and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind.<sup>28</sup>

Susannah trained her children to what she called "civil behaviour." Thus, each

child must be required to ask politely for whatever was wanted, even to the humblest servant. In keeping with the class distinction noted earlier however, children of the Epworth Manse were forbidden free conversation or association with the servants of the household. This was to ensure that there was no possibility of anything coarse or evil being projected into their lives.

His own upbringing taught Wesley that education, discipline and virtue went hand in hand. This was undoubtedly what led him ultimately to the conviction that child-labour taught the "virtues of labour and discipline" and prevented "youthful vice."<sup>29</sup> Methodism unfortunately inherited a mistaken belief that Wesley thought of children as inherently sinful, and that their sinfulness had to be broken, a belief based largely on such texts as:

Break their wills betimes. Begin this work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, perhaps before they can speak at all. Whatever pains it costs, break the will if you would not damn the child. Let a child from a year old be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly; from that age inake him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it ... Break his will now; and his soul shall live; and he will probably bless you to all eternity.<sup>30</sup>

The child's will was believed to be broken best by hard work which was why Wesley saw much good in child labor. It was however, ideas such as these that led Thompson and others to accuse Wesley, Bunting, and the early Methodists of giving "a deformity of the sensibility complimentary to the deformities of the factory children whose labour they condoned."<sup>31</sup>

Thompson, with his own particular perspective on the needs, rights and values of the working class and their children was utterly appalled that neither Bunting "nor his colleagues appear to have suffered a single qualm as to the consequences of industrialism."<sup>32</sup> Such condemnation is largely unjustified however. Wesley and the early Methodists were greatly concerned with the consequences of industrialism. They would not have agreed with Thompson, however, as to what the most important and pressing consequences were. The simple fact was that Wesley was far more concerned with the plight of the poor and their need for spiritual as well as physical salvation (as evidenced by the increasing lack of

morality) than he was for the hardships caused by labor.

As has already been intimated, Wesley's solution was to seek better education for the poor. This focus on education had several important consequences. It led to a real change in working class culture, and succeeded in transforming the church itself, through the agency of the Sunday School.<sup>33</sup> Thompson labelled the Sunday School system, and the Wesleyan philosophy behind many of the schools, a form of "religious terrorism"<sup>34</sup> but the fact remains that due to Wesley, thousands of factory children who otherwise would have had no education whatsoever, achieved at least some measure of literacy even as they worked during the week. The Sunday Schools served as a reproof to both the government and the factory owners and forced an acknowledgement of the disgraceful standards of education and literacy considered acceptable for the working classes. Wesley and early Methodism proved beyond doubt that better education led to a better, more productive, healthier and informed work force.

The idea that the lower classes could be educated to a realistic standard was a highly controversial one for its time. Wesley persevered with it because he firmly believed that good education was the real key to spiritual development. He invested heavily in the education of the Methodist people and their children believing that it would reap a real spiritual harvest for the kingdom at a later date. The school building program that he initiated has continued through the centuries.

Wesley's commitment to education is just one example of where he and his followers were prepared to be counter-cultural for the sake of the gospel. Whether approved of or not, Wesley's passion for education had a profound impact on the Western world. Students of Methodist boarding schools and Sunday Schools have gone on to become ministers, politicians, leaders of Trade Unions, lawyers and teachers. Wesley's theology of and commitment to educational reform not only equipped England with generation after generation of capable speakers and leaders through his educational program for class leaders and preachers but he forged a link between work, education and spirituality that still helps to shape the world today. Wherever Methodists have settled, schools have been built to provide good quality education for all, even the most impoverished students. In a complete rebuttal of Thompson, other social historians have commented that Wesley was "an apostle of the modern union of mental cul-

ture with Christian living."<sup>35</sup>

The importance of good "Christian" education highlights the need for the two doctrines of providence and perfection to be in balance if a Wesleyan perspective is to bear fruit. On the one hand, the doctrines led to Methodists apparently condoning what was considered by others to be abusive child labour. On the other hand, those same doctrines persuade Methodists to invest heavily of both time and money in education. A Wesleyan perspective taught that the opportunity for labour is providential; it enables the young to avoid temptation. To continue to grow in faith, however, a young person needs to be able to "search the Scriptures" and this in turn necessitates education. Hence, the active search for Christian perfection through the means of grace necessitates the development of mind and character which has the effect of elevating the young person above their expected social status. Such elevation leads, inexorably, to responsible citizenship and to the desire for greater participation in the governance of society.

### Political Reform

Wesley, as Runyon notes, "was no friend of democracy."<sup>36</sup> His belief in God's providential ordering of society led him to support the monarchy, and write scathingly of those who fought for "liberty" in America. Yet Wesley not only believed in, but also campaigned avidly, for liberty for the African slaves. He abhorred the slave trade and risked life and limb to proclaim his conviction that the trade was anti-Christian and should be abolished. This seeming contradiction over the question of liberty is easily explained by the emphasis that Wesley placed on providence as a work of God.

The Wesleyan perspective on government and law considers human laws that are contrary to divine law as not being a part of God's providential plan for humanity. Freedom of heart and mind are essential to the pursuit of Christian perfection. God does not compel. God's grace is free for all, and all must be free to respond to it. The freedoms sought by the war of independence for America was not, in Wesley's opinion however, a Godly liberty. He did not believe that freedom was being sought in order to do good or to further the work of God. The people desired this liberty from their rulers in order to choose for themselves what authority should rule over them. This, to Wesley, seemed like a rejection of God's authority.

Evidently therefore, Methodism could seem to be a politically regressive; or stabilizing influence on world culture, maintaining the status-quo of traditional authoritarian, patriarchal structures. It was also however, indirectly responsible for a growth in the self-confidence and capacity for organization of working people. In 1820, Southey wrote:

Perhaps the manner in which Methodism has familiarized the lower classes to the work of combining in associations, making rules for their own governance, raising funds, and communicating from one part of the kingdom to another, may be reckoned among the incidental evils which have resulted from it<sup>37</sup>,

Obedience to Wesley's Rules led inevitably to social reform. The unique combination of "acceptance" coupled with the desire for "perfection" which encouraged the working class to believe that God had as high a vision for them, as for the gentry was highly influential in the creation of the middle classes. The Duchess of Buckingham was quick to spot that this was bound to be the outcome of Methodist teaching and was reported to have said to the Methodist Countess of Huntingdon:

I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers; their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and to do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told you have a heart and sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth.<sup>38</sup>

The Duchess was more prophetic than she knew. Methodism gave courage and self-respect to a section of the population that had never before considered itself either to be either capable or worthy of acting politically. The fact was that in spite of Thompson's claims to the contrary, the structure, rules, fellowship, theology and practical piety of Methodism created a newly confident working class, one which was prepared to participate in leadership rather than simply accept it. Accountability before God was translated into a corresponding

accountability to society and to the community. This became a workable political ethic based on faith.

Weber has attempted to articulate this political ethic through a creative re-thinking of Wesley's theology.<sup>39</sup> In so doing, he has perhaps missed seeing what already existed. A Wesleyan political ethic, it can be argued, is a natural consequence of the practical outworking of Wesley's theology. It arises out of the structure and organization of a church determined to maintain a balance of both the doctrines of providence and of perfection. Such an ethic has a profound respect for the law and the ordering of society (providence). It also allows the individual the freedom and responsibility to act to order their life in accordance with God's laws in order to grow into the image of God (perfection). Weber described this balance by reference to Wesley's concept of the political image (*imago Dei*) and his understanding of the order of salvation.<sup>40</sup> Others have described it simply in terms of the community that the gospel creates. As Bloy has noted, "Methodism created a social structure for its members in Bible classes, sewing circles and money-raising activities."<sup>41</sup> It raised up leaders and speakers and trained them to the roles. Members educated themselves and each other and expected to put that education to good use in the service of their church and community.

A former minister of a British labour party government, for example, wrote a simple acknowledgement of how Methodism had shaped British political culture. "The Independent Labour party," he wrote, "was founded in what had been a Reform Methodist Chapel. We carried on the same tradition in the local co-op's old cobblers shop. I knew in my teens that Labour owed more to Methodism than Marxism."<sup>42</sup> Nor was Labour the only political party to benefit from Methodist principles and practices. Within the last fifty years several world leaders have arisen from the cradle of Wesleyan Methodism including Britain's Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Macedonia's President Boris Trajkovski and more recently America's President George Bush.

### **Social Reform.**

Methodist folklore surrounding Wesley has often tended to play down Wesley's acceptance of the cultural and class distinctions of his period. Wesley was, however, a man of his times as well as someone who shaped and changed

the times in which he lived. Wesley was as a member of the clergy, a member of the educated classes. He was a gentleman, in his later years, a rather wealthy gentleman. Macaulay's estimate of Wesley is worth recalling. Wesley, he said, was "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, and who, whatever his errors may have been, devoted all his powers in defiance of obloquy and derision, to what he sincerely considered as the highest good of his species."<sup>43</sup> Although Wesley's style of living was considered frugal for a gentleman of his standing, it was nonetheless not quite as austere as has often been portrayed. The image of Wesley, a dour puritanical cleric is simply not true to history.

Fox's book of martyrs, for example, describes Wesley in his early days as "A gay and manly youth, fond of games and particularly of dancing." Although evidently Wesley became more serious in his conduct and demeanour later on in life, he remained meticulous about his personal appearance and habits throughout his life. He was, for example, always cleanly and neatly dressed, usually in a narrow plaited stock, coat with a small upright collar, and three-cornered hat. Wesley is said to have claimed that "I dare no more write in a fine style than wear a fine coat," as Overton noted. However, Wesley was in fact "particular about his coats." Far from being simple in his dress, Wesley enjoyed wearing "silk stockings and gloves and, when the weather was cold, a floor length brocaded cloak."<sup>44</sup> At the same time, Wesley is known to have rebuked one his associates who had taken to wearing a "slouch hat," a style fashionable at the time.<sup>45</sup>

Rule 8 of his Rules for Helpers makes Wesley's position concerning those who were not of his class quite clear:

8. Do not affect the gentleman. A preacher of the Gospel is  
the servant of all<sup>46</sup>

Wesley's helpers were to keep to their class and not pretend to be other than they were! Pretence and aspiration, Methodists were taught, were not in keeping with the gospel and the understanding of God's providence as exemplified by the (now missing) verse of the hymn "All things Bright and Beautiful":

The rich man in his castle  
The poor man at his gate

„ God made them high and lowly;

„ And ordered their estate.<sup>47</sup>

The consequences of this attitude were eventually spelled out in the harsh critique of Methodism by Thompson. Thompson claims that Methodism was “a strongly anti-intellectual influence, from which British popular culture has never wholly recovered.”<sup>48</sup> It is true that at that time, Methodists discouraged the study of poetry, philosophy, biblical criticism, and political theory. Thompson summarised Methodism’s contribution to the “articulate culture” of the working class as having “added an earnestness to the pursuit of information”<sup>49</sup> at best. Intellectual enquiry he would maintain was not encouraged, practical knowledge was all that was deemed necessary.

Thompson’s critique is best dismissed by the evidence. Adherence to the Methodist rule of life, as has already been pointed out, leads inevitably to a better quality of life for all. Social history records that by the start of the nineteenth century more than 63 percent of Methodists were classified as artisans.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Methodists were no longer predominately the poorest of the working classes. It has been suggested that almost thirteen percent of Methodists were by that time unequivocally middle class. Methodists were merchants, manufacturers and factory owners. A significant number of Methodists were quite well off.<sup>51</sup> It was inevitable therefore that with such a high percentage of artisans and employers, Methodism not only reflected English culture but actively shaped it. It is evident that this pattern of social change, from poverty to relative financial security has been replicated in every country where a Wesleyan perspective had been adopted.

## Conclusion

From a Wesleyan perspective, Christianity cannot escape the challenge to shape the world. The Methodist calling to reform is still a fundamental part of its proclamation of the gospel. Just what it is that needs reforming is not always evident however. A Wesleyan perspective is a continually changing perspective, reform does not stand still and the task of perfection is not complete until the practice of Scriptural holiness has spread throughout the world. History has taught the church the danger of “only” saving souls, of doing little to correct the



issues that tempt the soul to sin. For this reason, the culture that arises from a Wesleyan engagement with the world should be one which is always characterized by the sort of Christian values that are not expressed by abstract theological propositions but in practical proposals for holy living. This makes Methodists look and work for reforms that enable others to connect with God and with others. The reforms should seek to minimize the temptations to sin and to fall from grace.

Methodists continue to practice their faith rather than to simply "have" or "hold" a faith. The practice of the faith is regulated by the doctrines of providence and perfection. Providence teaches the Christian to value the place and position that God has accorded them; perfection calls them to see that place as a starting place, not as an end in itself. This is true in all matters, spiritual, social, moral and political. The balance between the two doctrines is provided and maintained by the social gospel—the recognition that the Christian is called to be a part of the people of God, not an individual and is called to reform not merely themselves, but the church and the nation in which they reside, all for the sake of the kingdom.

## Notes

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2. J. Wesley. (1996): In *The Complete Works of John Wesley: 10.* , p. 431

3. Romans 13:1-4a

4. It is worth noting however that many of the gentry of Wesley's time found the idea of equality before God to be shocking.

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31. E. P. Thompson, p. 390
32. E. P. Thompson, p. 390
33. The nineteenth-century dominance and modern shape of the Sunday School owed much to such Methodist leaders as John Heyl Vincent.
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36. T. Runyon. (1998). *The New Creation. John Wesley's Theology for Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, p. 170
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# Little Churches Within a Church

## The Genius of Small Groups in Early Methodism and in the Korean Context

Wonjae Lee

**I. Little Churches Within a Church in Early Methodism** (based on the book *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, written by D. Watson)

### A. The Historical Background of the Small Group Movement of Early Methodism

The foremost biblical basis of the early Methodist small group movement is to be found in the household-based group fellowship of the primitive Christian community in which members "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Wesley firmly stood in the Christian tradition in which small household-based communities of believers were the basic cells of Christian revivalism.

His Anglican heritage (religious society movement, the authority of the visible church), the Puritan concept of the gathered community (the *coetus electorum*) and the movement of *ecclesiola in ecclesia* (the bands) of Moravian Pietism provided the background of Wesley's small group movement as well, although sometimes he showed a different approach from each of them. The three concepts must be held in tension in Wesley: He acknowledged the necessity and validity of small groups for an accountable fellowship nurturing Christian discipleship, but these must be firmly part of the larger church—*ecclesiola in eccle-*

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sia. It must be emphasized that Wesley himself had not the slightest intention of founding a new denomination. His purpose was to reform Anglicanism from within.

### B. The Shaping and Organizing of Small Groups in Early Methodism

The shaping of small groups within Methodism was directly related to the three "rises" of Methodism: "On Monday, May 1 (1738) our little society began in London. But the first rise of Methodism was in November, 1729, when four of us met together at Oxford (the Oxford Holy Club); the second was at Savannah, in April 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my house; the last was at London, on this day, when forty or fifty of us agreed to meet together every Wednesday evening, in order to have a free conversation, beginning and ending with singing and prayer."

As previously mentioned, the concept of disciplined churchmanship of the Religious Societies in the Anglican Church as well as that of spiritual nurturing of the Moravian Bands had a direct influence on the shaping of early Methodist polity. There were many aspects which Wesley learned from both: Admission procedures, the weekly meetings, mutual oversight and sharing in confession and accountability, the restriction in some societies to a limited number of members, the grouping of members according to age, sex and marital status, and the growing role of lay leadership. In spite of this direct connection, the differences between Methodism and its predecessors were Wesley's emphasis on the liberating dynamic of discipleship and the openness of the original small group fellowship to mutual accountability.

### C. Some Features of the Small Groups in Early Methodism

#### (1) *The United Society*

The *United Society* was a term applied to the Methodist societies as a whole. Wesley's major concern in forming the United Societies was to provide spiritual guidance and nurture for members, in order to build them up in the faith. There were no prerequisites other than commitment to obedience in the service of Jesus Christ. Each Society was divided into smaller companies, called classes.

#### (2) *The Class Meeting*

The weekly *Class Meeting*, "the basic structural unit of the movement," was

regarded by Wesley as the "sinews" of the movement. It had its genesis at a gathering of the Bristol society with the most mundane of agendas—the clearing of a building debt. But, what began as a financial expedient soon presented an opportunity for pastoral oversight and spiritual fellowship.

The class meeting consisted of about twelve members, mainly according to their residential areas. Its purpose was to sustain one another in their discipleship. Several characteristics and functions of the class meeting can be summarized as follows:

*Accountability:* The dynamic of the class was one of the members giving an account of what had taken place during the preceding week, a process of mutual response and support. Members were expected to share their "experiences" freely and spontaneously under the guidance of appointed leaders. ..

*Centrality of the Class Leader:* The classes were formed around appointed leaders to whom pastoral authority was delegated. What Wesley looked for in a leader was a combination of disciplinary and spiritual discernment, so that fellowship in the classes would be a means of growing discipleship. The class leader had two responsibilities. The leader had to see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort. The leader also met weekly the preacher appointed by Wesley, both to report on the members and to receive advice and instruction. This centrality of the class leader was a crucial element in a line of authority and communication extending from Wesley to the Methodist membership as a whole—the connectional system of Methodism. It was through this connection that Wesley maintained the direct pastoral oversight of his *episkopé*, and which made Methodism an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.

*Connectional Discipline:* In order to "watch over one another in love," to "help each other to work out their salvation," there was a system of constant supervision of membership, for example, class tickets, quarterly examination, trial membership, regular attendance and the General Rules.

The General Rules were the disciplinary framework within the spiritual growth of the early Methodists. The societies were open to all, regardless of their spiritual state. But to remain in membership there had to be evidence of the desire for salvation in the doing of outward and visible good works. Above all, three criteria were stressed: doing no harm, doing good, attending upon "all the

Ordinances of God," the "instituted means of grace."

*Spiritual Growth and Discernment:* Wesley insisted that the instituted means of grace should not be neglected. This was important in the context of the complementary function of the class meeting—the nurture of spiritual growth.

It is interesting to see the language of spiritual discernment used; which indicated the "state" of each member with an appropriate sign: "the letter (a) for one who was *awakened*; a question mark (?) for one whose state was *doubtful*; a period (.) for one who professed *justification*; and a colon (:) for one who professed *the perfect love of God*." By the same token, the quarterly renewal of class tickets became an occasion when all of the members, including the leaders, were questioned about their spiritual growth. This kind of process for spiritual growth and discernment in the class meeting was thought to be necessary because the spiritual state of each member was different, ranging from one who has only "some faint desires to be religious," to one who is "rejoicing in that perfect love." The class meeting had essentially an open structure. The condition of its membership was merely a desire to seek the accountability of Christian discipleship.

### (3) *The Bands*

In the bands, on the other hand, there was a restriction of membership to those who wanted and needed the more intimate form of fellowship. It was here that the spiritual quest for perfection was fostered and guided. Wesley described band members as those who, being justified by faith, had peace with God through Christ. Band members were "generally those who have either attained or are earnestly seeking, a state of perfection or complete sanctification." So its members were subjected to a more rigorous disciplinary oversight than the members of the classes. They were to abstain from evil *carefully*, to maintain good works *zealously*, and to attend all the ordinances of the church *consistently*. They received a special notation on the quarterly class ticket, and it distinguished those members within a society as those who were committed to the quest for Christian maturity.

The bands had been structured for mutual fellowship and spiritual oversight, with the leaders chosen from the members. The assistants and helpers were instructed to give the band leaders special oversight. Furthermore, they were to meet with all of the band members weekly. Known as the "public" meeting of the bands, or the "body band," these gatherings became an established part of the



Methodist connectional polity. At such meetings, people were not spoken to one by one, as at a class meeting, but every one speaks, or remains silent, as they are disposed.

The purpose of meeting together was to provide the mutual confession and encouragement conducive to advanced spiritual growth. Rather than a probing for hidden faults, the openness of fellowship was a means of mutual guidance toward a perfection of love. The earnest pursuit of the bands for Christian perfection led in turn to the adoption of further "prudential means of grace," such as the love-feast. Wesley regarded love-feasts as an extension of band fellowship, and as a means of stimulating it.

#### (4) *Select Societies*

This was an even more restricted grouping, in which the doctrine of Christian perfection was most demonstrably experienced and practiced. There were no rules for these groups, since they had "the best rule of all in their hearts." The select societies had a completely free agenda, each member able to speak openly, and with no leader appointed.

Among all the small groups in early Methodism mentioned above, the class meeting was the most important and central, because it was not only the basic unit of Methodist organizational structure, but also the most effective means of spiritual nurture for the members as a whole. All Methodists, whether they were meeting in band or even in a select society, had to meet once a week as members of their classes to give an account of their discipleship.

### **C. The Significance and Function of the Small Group Movement in Early Methodism**

The significance of the small group movement in early Methodism is first and foremost to be found in the complementary function of small groups in Wesley's understanding of the Church: Wesley affirmed the authority of the visible church as normative for Christian faith and practice. This concept of the Church, however, must be complemented through that of the church as small communities of believers, living together in their response to the indwelling Spirit of God. In this sense, the criterion of religious experience must be added to the theological method of scripture, tradition and reason.

Moreover, Wesley had an overwhelming concern for the overriding purpose

of the Church that lay in reaching out to people with the gospel in order to save souls. He was convinced that Methodists had been called to take the good news of salvation in Christ the length and breadth of the land, and that all other questions of order and doctrine were ultimately of secondary importance. Thus, the small group movement was ultimately oriented to this goal of the evangelical ministry of early Methodism.

The genius of Wesley's organization of the small groups lay in his recognition that Christian discipleship was first and foremost a response or obedience to God's grace and His indwelling Spirit. And the universal work of God's Grace, justifying and sanctifying grace, was needed to be grounded specifically in the instituted means of graces. In this way, the societies, classes and bands fulfilled their true purpose. Precisely because the *ecclesia* provided the doctrinal structure for the Christian faith, those in the *ecclesiola*e were free to respond to the inner promptings of the Spirit. The "little churches" were formed with the avowed purpose of remaining within the larger church in order to call it back to its own essentials.

The social function of the small groups also should be mentioned. Early Methodist societies met some basic social and personal needs of their members. For instance, the need for inclusion, the need for control, and the need for affection. Small groups provided a new awareness of personal change. Moreover, in the context of social deprivation of some people in the eighteenth century in England, Methodism brought to many a recognition and identity. There can be little doubt that those who joined the Methodist societies found, especially in their weekly class meetings, the human relationships that provided the means of achieving their identity.

Class meetings were also an extremely effective means of instruction as well as nurture, especially through their function as a means of communication among Wesley, his preachers, and the members of the societies.

In conclusion, it should be noted that personal growth and interpersonal dynamics were a feature of the weekly meetings, but not their purpose. It must always be asked to what extent the small groups of a church contribute to the essential task of discipleship in the world. The basic task is to receive a direct commission to go into the world, and to join the Risen Christ in the work of proclaiming God's salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The early Methodist small groups clearly served as a locus of evangelism and nurture only because of its prior purpose of sustaining the response to evangelistic outreach by fostering a faithful discipleship through mutual accountability.

While the evangelistic message of Wesley and his preachers extended an invitation to all, membership in the societies required a level of commitment that could be exacted by an *ecclesiola*, but not the *ecclesia*. And Wesley, by adopting the concept of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, acknowledged that the purpose of the Methodist societies was to reform the Church of England, not subvert it.

## II. *Ecclesiola in ecclesia* in Korean Context

The Korean church has grown very rapidly during the past three decades. One of the major reasons for such growth is to be found in the evangelism and commitment of believers who are trained and nurtured through the Word and prayer in the small groups of the church. The well-known Yoido Full Gospel Church, the senior pastor of which is the Rev. Yonggi Cho, is regarded as the most prominent example of the church that has grown through the vitality of the small group movement. On the other hand, many Methodist churches in Korea have experienced the spiritual nurture and fellowship of their members in the weekly class meetings, which also led to the growth of church membership.

However, since the Korean Church has mainly focused on its numeric growth for the past years, it has been facing the problems of spiritual and communal immaturity as well as the loss of social trust. As a result, its membership is now slightly declining in numbers. In this critical situation, a variety of small group movements is spreading like a kind of new trend in the Korean church recently. The "Band Ministry" is one of the most representing Methodist models.

This paper will examine the features and characteristics of the Korean small group movement, introducing the above mentioned two examples.

### A. Home Cell Group Movement of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul

The Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul is well known as the largest congregation in the world, which numbers over 700,000 members. But it is also famous for its Home Cell Group movement that is not only the means of intimate fellowship and involvement, but also a major dynamic power of the explosive growth of church membership. In this sense, the Rev. Yonggi Cho, senior pastor

of the Church, likes to say that his church is both the smallest and the largest in the world. Some principles and features of this home cell group movement can be found in the Rev. Cho's book entitled *Successful Home Cell Groups* (1997).

(1) *Necessity and Security of Cell Groups*

According to the Rev. Cho, home cell groups, consist of fifteen families or fewer and are primarily organized by geographical areas. They provide a real opportunity for church members to find meaningful involvement in the church life, which can become an important way to solve the problem of a very structured and traditional Sunday service. The life of the home cell (weekly) meetings shows a very dynamic feature of the Pentecostal churches: the members have an opportunity to pray together, to learn from the Word; to experience the working of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to see miracles and healings, to bring a word of prophecy and tongues, and to enjoy loving, communal relationships with their fellow Christians. There is much security for the members in the cell groups, because the members really take care of one another. The relationship here goes beyond counsel and prayer. (For instance, members of cell groups go to clean the houses of women in their group who have fallen ill.) And according to the Rev. Cho, this is modeled after the church of the apostolic age, where the members prayed and shared together.

(2) *Home Cell Groups as a Key to Evangelism*

The Yoido Full Gospel Church carries out evangelism primarily through the home cell groups. They have ways of helping people to become "caring evangelists." One way is through what they call "holy eavesdropping." That means that the members are instructed to overhear conversations in which someone is speaking about the problems in his or her life, so that they could use this for sharing problems and evangelizing. This is just "person-to-person" evangelism, mostly a "woman-to-woman evangelism." One enthusiastic woman cell leader used to spend a few hours riding up and down in the elevator of her apartment building to find opportunities to help people and to begin to "plant a home-cell group meeting secretly." In this way, "Evangelism is taking place out there."

This kind of evangelism through home cell groups is a dynamic principle of the growth of the church. And this is the case when the home cell groups are living cells and as such they continue to grow and divide like the cells in the human body. Of course, the well-trained and dedicated cell leaders have significant

roles and responsibilities. They are a kind of pastor to the cell members. The Rev. Cho. Said: "It is the cell leaders who perform the bulk of the ministry in our church." They are there to help oversee the spiritual growth of the members, and to encourage them in fellowship and evangelism.

### (3) *Home Cell Groups Within a Local Church*

The Rev. Cho emphasizes repeatedly that the system of home cell groups works *within* the local church and *within* the established denominations. Home cell groups should not be "minor cults." Their goal is unity. In this sense, home cell groups must be integrated into the whole program of the local church, and their influence should not expand beyond the boundaries of the local church. The local church is the strength of Christianity. Home cell groups should contribute to that strength.

There is a special emphasis for cell leaders to have a close relationship with the pastor. Cell meetings also should have programs that fit in with the overall program of the church. In home cell meetings there should always be worship, a time of open prayer, ministry to one another and works of evangelism. These are necessary, because they make cell meetings truly a gathering of God's people, little churches within a church.

### (4) *How to Begin Home Cell Groups*

In order for the home cell group "system" to be successful, the pastor is the key person involved. In other words, the controlling factor in home cell group is the pastor. According to the Rev. Cho, it's very important for the beginning of a home cell group that the pastor becomes convinced of the necessity of home cell groups as the key to the life or death of his church. And he needs to remain the obvious leader, training the cell leaders and motivating them to reach the established goals, even after the program is rolling.

The Rev. Cho gives some recommendations to the pastor for the first steps in establishing home cell groups: "... start small. Take a dozen lay leaders and train them as cell leaders. Then have them form their own home cell meetings, and watch over them carefully for six to eight months. Once this group of cells has begun to bear fruit, it will be time to get the whole church involved."

The essential thing for the success here is the selection the right lay leaders who are Spirit-filled, enthusiastic and dedicated. Once the leaders are selected, they need to be trained in leading meetings. It is emphasized that they have to be

in a regular and constant contact with the pastor so as to learn from him and to fit in with his teaching and ministry philosophy.

*(5) Several Prerequisites for Establishing a Growing Church Based on Home Cell Groups*

According to the Rev. Cho, the most important thing is that each cell group leader has real fellowship with the Holy Spirit. And such fellowship needs to be prompted by the pastor, who should already be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Another important requirement for successful home cell groups is the motivation of lay leaders. Motivating should be done in three ways: recognition, praise and genuine love.

In conclusion, the Rev. Cho asks the question of how to use these principles—delegating authority to lay leaders and forming home cell groups, being in constant fellowship with the Holy Spirit, motivating lay leadership—to make a church really grow. The primary requirement for having real church growth is to set clear-cut goals, not only to build a growing church but also to form a victorious personal prayer life. He also speaks of having a vision and says that church growth comes about because that growing church is inside us.

Thus, it becomes clear that the home cell group movement of the Yoido Full Gospel Church is ultimately oriented to the evangelism and the church growth that will only be possible with the power of the Holy Spirit.

**B. BAND Ministry: Making a Korean Style of Small Groups for Church Growth**

The "BAND Ministry" has been emerging as one of the most influential models of the small group-centered ministry in today's Korean Church. The prominent representative is the Rev. Chang, Hakil who has been trying to solve the problem of the lack of mutual relationship and spiritual nurture, by applying the Wesleyan tradition of the "little church movement," especially the bands, to today's ministry. He is convinced that like the early Methodist societies, the bands are most helpful for the mutual nurture and spiritual growth of church members, which also can bring the desirable church growth.

According to him, band and class meeting were the basic units of early Methodist small groups. However, while the class meeting promoted growth in those who had a desire to grow in faith, the primary purpose of the band was to

train and nurture those who had the strong intention of living the thorough God-centered life, in order to make them the Christian leaders of the church as well as of the society. Thus, the band is regarded here as a more effective and fruitful model for reforming the Korean Church which has fallen into a kind of formalism.

(1) *The Understanding of the Little Church Movement of Early Methodism and Its Application.*

According to him, Wesley's 'little churches within a church' movement combined both the institutional aspect and the charismatic aspect of the church. And this Wesleyan synthesis gives a very important direction to the Korean Church for its reformation, because Wesley's intention was not to subvert the existing institutional church, but to reform the church by the inward vitalization of small communities.

For this purpose, the "BAND ministry" adopts the Wesleyan word, band, in its own way. The definition of the BAND is as follows: "the terminology BAND is the word which includes all Wesleyan concepts of Class Meeting, Select Society, United Society. Thus, the BAND is the word that claims to be a "little church within a church." It also means "the ministry for church reformation."

The BAND is further divided into two concepts. While "Society" and "Class Meeting" are called "Open BAND," "Band" and "Select Society" are named as "Closed BAND." The former is an open community toward the world, which has the purpose of caring for nonbelievers and new Christians in love, in order to save them and nurture them. The latter is, on the other hand, the gathering of those who have been born again in Christ in order to make those members not only thoroughly dedicated coworkers for each part of the church, but also the leaders appointed to the "Open BAND." They will lead these BANDS in their appointed ministries.

The Rev. Chang continues to explain how he has been applying this BAND Ministry to his local church. He divided his church organization into five communities according to the five small groups in Early Methodism: Great Ranch (United Society), Ranch (Class), Band (Band), Company of the Dedicated (Selected Society), Penitents (Penitents): Among them, Band and Company of the Dedicated play a specially significant role in the successful implementation of the BAND Ministry, because its primary purpose is to make dedicated

coworkers for the Lord's work by training and nurture:

"Great Ranch" and "Ranch" are the groups that consist of both nonbelievers and believers and are open to the world. Thus, they are called the "Open BAND." They are compared to the "spiritually young family" in which spiritual parents, children, and embryos (nonbelievers) gather together. Their purpose is to care for the weak in faith and to give birth spiritually to the nonbeliever.

BAND consisted of generally six to eight members according to age and is classified as "Closed BAND," together with Company of the Dedicated. This Closed Band is compared to the mature family. Its purpose is to train the members for sanctification, so that they may become the committed leaders of the church. The Closed BANDs can be identified as "little churches," because they perform the essential tasks of the church by themselves, such as missions and evangelism, education, fellowship and social service, within the whole church.

Closed BANDs contribute to the growth of the church through their "constant expansion and reproduction." This process is called "establishing a branch family." That means, the BAND members who have grown up to the state of the spiritual parent through raising and nurturing in the Closed BANDs, are being appointed to the "father and mother of the members in Ranch to form a new spiritual family. They, as spiritual parents of new family, raise and care again for unbelievers and those who have no conviction of salvation, in order to make them grow spiritually and to become the members of Closed BAND. This circulation makes the growth and missions of the church possible, according to the theory of the BAND Ministry."

(2) *The Practice of BAND Ministry: Making the BAND Church*

In short, the BAND Ministry is to implement the organization and management of "little churches within a church," based on the principle of the BAND which the Rev. Chang learned from the small group movement of early Methodism. Thus, the primary task of the BAND Ministry is how it organizes and trains the new registered members of the church into the BAND members. And its goal lay not only in the spiritual maturity of members, but ultimately in church growth through "expanding and reproducing Ranches as well as forming Closed BANDs as little churches within a church."

This theory of the BAND Ministry has been applied successfully to the local church of the Rev. Chang. According to him, the process of "making the BAND



church" is composed of four levels (about one year time for each of them).

In the first level, they select core members, called a "pilot group," and train them intensively in the areas of ecclesiology, soteriology, communal life and person-to-person ministry for new believers. And, they explain the BAND to all church members to create a responsive atmosphere.

The second level is to form the "quasi-Band" of trained pilot group members, in order to nurture them further to be the membership of Closed BAND. At the same time, the "Ranches" are formed out of church members and put under the care of the members of the quasi-Band:

The task of the third level is concentrated on forming the Closed BANDS. The members of the pilot group become the leaders of Closed BANDS.

In the last level, Ranch and Closed BAND are being separated for the continuing process of its growth and nurture.

As the above introduction shows, it is the most important thing for the BAND Ministry to form and manage the Closed BAND. The principle and organization of the BAND Ministry adopts mostly the Rules of early Methodism regarding its class meeting and band. But at the same time, the BAND Ministry is closely linked to the image of family that is very common and persuasive in the Korean context. The core of the small group movement of the BAND Ministry is to form spiritual family communities, through which it moves toward "the true worship community, the community of love, the community of education, and the community of witnesses."

Finally, the Rev. Chang mentions four positive effects or results that come from the practical application of the BAND Ministry, based on his own survey. First, it has contributed to improving a sense of community of church members. Second, it has made the spiritual growth of members possible. Third, social concern of members has been also improved. And last, it increased the numeric growth of the church. According to him, his Shindang Methodist church had about one thousand members in the first stage of the BAND Ministry, but it has grown to about 2,200 members in the last four years.

### **III. Conclusion**

The Korean Church has now been coping with the problem of declining membership as well as of the loss of social trust. In this critical situation, the small

group-centered ministry has become one of the major concerns of churches that are concerned with church growth and evangelism. We are not only talking about the numeric growth of the church; we came to realize the importance of the so-called "organic growth" and "social growth." We also began to have concern about smaller churches, in the situation where explosive church growth is no longer common. I am convinced that the small group movement of early Methodism should be revived again for the vitality and spiritual growth of the today's church, although there are differences in time and situation. Of course, it is not easy to perform the tasks of the small group movement successfully. After all, what counts here are the zeal of leaders and the work of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, the home cell group movement of the Yoido Full Gospel Church and the BAND Ministry both give great insights and directions for such a difficult, but necessary task.

## Book Reviews

Gibbs, Eddie and Ryan Bolger. *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005; 335 pp.

Reviewed by Amy Reardon, The Salvation Army, Northwest Division, Seattle, USA

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Fuller Theological Seminary professors Eddie Gibbs (Donald A. McGavrah Professor of Church Growth) and Ryan K. Bolger (assistant professor of church in contemporary culture and academic director of the master of arts in global leadership) spent four years researching “emerging churches” throughout the United States and the United Kingdom, and interviewing their leaders. The result is *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, a book that evokes both discomfort and hope within the reader. The reader is required to grapple with the notion that the church is currently not Kingdom-based and has little impact in the world. But the promise of a meaningful, influential church is extended to those who are willing to change.

Many of the ministries that are explored are sponsored by traditional churches or denominations. Each, however, is a full church in its own right—not a subgroup within a larger church. They do not identify with any of the church models that sprung up in their parents’ generation. At several points throughout the book, it is made clear that “emerging churches are not young adult services, Gen-X churches, churches-within-a-church, seeker churches, purpose-driven or new paradigm churches, fundamentalist churches, or even evangelical churches” (p. 235). They are certainly not megachurches. Most of them are very small—under fifty—and frequently splinter off to remain that way.

It is not long before the reader realizes that the emerging church is not a passing fad. The Western church has “wed itself to ... the modern culture, which is

now in decline" (p. 29). As modernity fades out of existence, the church in its current state, must fade with it. A new chapter in human history has begun (sadly, currently labeled with the non-descript moniker "post-modernity"), and what is known as the "emerging church" will likely be the shape of the church in our future. Eleven reasons why the church needs to evaluate culture and make subsequent changes are given in the first chapter. Among these are: "because Christendom and modernity are in rapid decline," "because the church is in decline," and "because the majority of current church practices are cultural accommodations to a society that no longer exists." Gibbs and Bolger are eager that readers should understand that emerging churches are not meant to be generational. However, modernity will cease to exist when the last baby boomers (born 1964) are gone, so by necessity these changes may reflect the culture as currently pertains to younger people. But they are meant to be lasting changes for a new era, not the whims of a particular generation.

What is the emerging church? Gibbs and Bolger identify nine common practices that define them. Three of these practices are essential, the other six spring from the first three practices, and may not be found consistently in all churches. The three "core practices" are: identifying with the life of Jesus; transforming the secular realm; living highly communal lives. The six remaining activities are: welcoming the stranger; serving with generosity; participating as producers; creating, as created beings; leading as a body; taking part in spiritual activities. A chapter is dedicated to the exposition of each of these practices. Appropriately, the bulk of the text reflects the opinions of those interviewed, which can be quite divergent from one another. Gibbs and Bolger expound and clarify. They continually affirm the ideas shared by their interviewees. As some of the interviewees' ideas may be a shock to the system for many readers, one would occasionally wish for less affirmation, and more explanation—perhaps even the inclusion of a completely different point of view. After the authors' gentle persuasion (in chapter one) that the church must change, they forge ahead, leaving little room for the reader's hesitation. A mild effort is made to pacify the wary reader in the chapter conclusions. As the authors summarize the views expressed by their interviewees, some dilution occurs. However, this comes across as a bit disingenuous when compared to the interviewee quotes within the chapters.

Much of the practices of the emerging churches will remind the Salvationist

of Salvationism at its best, at its most raw. The first two core practices, to begin with, feel like home territory. The first practice is "identifying with the life of Jesus." The emerging churches emphasize serving and forgiving, as Jesus did. The Army has always found ways to serve its community, and it preaches a message heavily laced with forgiveness, particularly as it reaches out to those who find themselves in undesirable circumstances. Gibbs and Bolger write: "The gospel of emerging churches is not confined to personal salvation. It is social transformation arising from the presence and permeation of the reign of Christ." This is our heritage. But how many soldiers can claim to be involved in social transformation? Indeed, how many officers? This discussion in the book is poignant when the Salvationist realizes that in our church, we have relinquished this job to professionals and non-soldiery volunteers. Further, our brand of "social transformation" has substituted program for "presence and permeation."

The second practice is "transforming the secular realm." Modernity meant duality, including a sharp division between what was secular and what was sacred. To transform secular space is to erase the lines and find sacredness everywhere. The early Salvationists demonstrated this in part as they hired music halls and employed drinking tunes. But we are challenged to go further by immersing ourselves in culture, finding what work Christ is already doing there, and joining him. Worship is to infiltrate everything we do, and church should be wherever "the church" (the body of believers) carries itself. Salvationists might call this holy living.

The third core practice is living as community. The exhortation here is to understand church as "a people, a community, a rhythm" rather than "a meeting, a place, a routine" (p. 115). Anna Dodridge of Bournemouth, UK says: "We see church as the people and the relationships we have with one another." But it is more than just friendship—it is accountability. And while the leaders of the emerging churches go to great pains to emphasize that Sunday morning or Thursday night meetings are not the focal point, those meetings still exist—perhaps not weekly in every emerging church, but regularly. They do not meet in church buildings, but in homes, cafes, even clubs and pubs (particularly in the UK).

The remaining six practices seem to boil down to one simple, yet wonderful, principle: everyone has something to offer. The emerging churches are no

respecters of persons. Strangers are welcomed to the Eucharist table. (Not a jarring idea for Salvationists, whose idea of the common meal is much earthier, but foreign in some mainline churches.). Everyone is expected to serve, and to do so out of humility, engaging with those in need without patronizing. Kenny Mitchell of Tribe (New York) says: "We believe that Christ is all about single moms and drunks." (This resonates with the Salvationist!). All members are expected to explore their artistic talents, and offer them. The quality of their art is not an issue. What matters is the worship experience of creating art (visual, musical, poetic, etc.) and presenting it to God. Leadership is shared. In their early stages, many of the churches tried to function without any leaders at all. But, the authors note, "Whenever a group of people meets together for any length of time, someone will emerge as a leader" (p. 199) In those churches that have identified permanent leaders, they view themselves as facilitators, enabling the will of the body to be carried out. Other churches allow different leaders for different functions, and leadership changes hands regularly.

Finally, the book describes the emerging churches' bent toward ancient practices, liturgy and other ritual: They embrace things beautiful and things spiritual, and enjoy a connection with the past. Meditation and reflection are valued. This reflects the yearning of post-moderns, who value what is mystical over what is scientific and rational.

A lengthy appendix offers a mini-autobiography of each of the fifty leaders whom the authors interviewed. They are not uninteresting, but offer little insight into the theological and spiritual formation of these men and women.

The book does an excellent job of convincing the reader that change is necessary. The first chapter is so powerful in this regard that this reviewer considers it vital reading for Army leaders and soldiers. But the book loses a bit of its credibility in its bludgeoning of the modern church. Its criticisms are too broad and too harsh. In the first two chapters, the authors assert that the modern church is outdated. As the book progresses, one wonders if the authors could concede that the modern church was *ever* effective. The palpable distaste for the modern church is also evident among the interviewees. But the churches they disdain are rigidly stereotyped. It is assumed, for example, that modern churches care more about buildings and salaries than sinners and social justice. Modern churches are hierarchical and stifling; worship is predictable and the structure of the church

hinges on the celebrity (that is, the senior pastor). Many churches may suffer from these maladies, but all churches do not suffer from all of them. The Salvation Army, birthed in modernity, originally evaded most of these trappings. Perhaps as we have institutionalized, we have succumbed to more of them. But many of the accusations cannot be leveled fairly against the Army, even in its current state. If the church today is to engage in conversation about change, we must begin with a sober but fair assessment of who we really are.

It is exciting to imagine what the Army may look like in the future if it will acknowledge the necessity of adapting to the new culture. Indeed, there are already some Army models, such as 614 Vancouver (Vancouver, B.C.). We do not need to completely reinvent ourselves, as perhaps other churches might. We need to return to the passionate ideas on which we were founded: service, humility, community engagement, creativity, adaptability, social justice and the understanding that the kingdom of God is at hand.

McLaren, Brian, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1998, 221 pp.

Reviewed by Ian Swan, Collège for Officer Training, Winnipeg, Canada

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Brian McLaren challenges us to focus our attention on the world around us; a world which has undergone more changes, in all fields of human endeavor, at a faster pace, than ever experienced before. He then reminds us that the church, or rather its ministry, lives in that world. At the heart of his challenge lies the question of whether or not the church is relevant to postmodern society and whether or not we see ourselves functioning in the world or apart from it. I value this perspective and feel that this very question should be asked repeatedly as we examine our ministry and the structures which support it.

McLaren quickly makes the assertion that our present programs and structures do not effectively respond to the new environment in which we find ourselves and as a result we are not only losing present membership but failing to impact on future membership. Having identified why the church is not effectively interacting with communities around it, McLaren begins to make recommendations on how we might produce a "new church model" which is contextualized, relevant and empowers ministry.

As we begin to cognitively construct this "new church model" we are warned not to renew or restore our present models. McLaren makes the point that in our desire to revitalize our ministry we sometimes attempt to renew or rediscover that passion which once drove growth. At other times we try to reintroduce the methods used during times of growth as if they are the missing ingredients which when added to the mix will produce results exponentially! I interpret this warning as an attempt to forestall any desire to return to the good old days. We need to realize that our ministry has not lost its passion nor have we become sloppy with our methodology but as the world has changed around we have failed to keep pace. Therefore, McLaren insists that we re-invent the Church so that it is relevant to the communities in which we minister.

Now the part that I find exciting and challenging is that the assignment is not



only to make ministry relevant for today but for the future! In other words, we are not only attempting to catch up with the world but to project where the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will take us and begin to strategically place ourselves in a proactive position. Now we're moving off the map! We're moving from the known, and experienced to the unknown. We are attempting to place ourselves and our ministry at a historical juncture similar to that of the Jerusalem Council as detailed in Acts at which the scope and direction for the Gentile Mission was established.

The possibility of "reinventing our church," according to McLaren, is determined by our ability to encourage a shift of perspective from within our present congregations. "Change your church's attitude toward change, and everything else will change as it should." I understand the word "church" as it is used here to mean the: leadership, governance structures, membership's values, policy and procedure manuals. In other words, we should structure everything and everyone for mission priorities.

I would suggest that this is the greatest challenge facing the church today. Instead of seeing ourselves as the last bastion against the loss of tradition and values we need to think and act in ways that promote and ensure mission values. This proactive approach would ensure that the message of the gospel will always be relevant in the ever changing communities of the world. However, if our ministry is to be centered in mission, it is then necessary to clearly articulate what that mission is. McLaren does this very succinctly and effectively. In reading his mission statements I was immediately reminded of and drew parallels to General Gowan's paraphrasing of our own International Mission Statement. Herein lies one of The Salvation Army's greatest and perhaps least exploited strengths.

Returning to the issue of traditions, McLaren insists we must be prepared to "trade up our traditions for tradition." By this he means that Christ should always be the central tradition of the church and that we must not allow our accumulated traditions, whatever they might be, to take precedence over Christ or his message of Good News. The message of the Incarnational Christ is always relevant to a world in need. Therefore, if our ministry is unproductive, our churches empty, we must ask the question: Is the world of today rejecting Christ? Or is the world of today rejecting the way we present Christ, a Christ clothed in our accumulated and outdated traditions, a Christ which cannot be understood and there-

fore cannot be accepted by a 21<sup>st</sup> century society?

I found the book to be a stimulating read; concepts and models are presented in an accessible language while the thrust of the presentation remains focused on the practical realities of everyday ministry. I should also warn you that if you are not by nature a list person you will find this work at times a little tedious. McLaren gives us chapter after chapter of lists; he admits that many of these chapters were conceived on long flights and initially arose from compare and contrast exercises. Having said that, and admitting that I'm not by nature a list person, I did find the succinct clarity of points useful in helping me to navigate through the various arguments and discussions.

McLaren forthrightly admits that this book is a reworking of his earlier work entitled *Reinventing Your Church*. In his own words, "*Reinventing Your Church* echoed the language of a 1980s church-growth book, while this book is more about the 2080s." This shift in perspective highly recommends this as a must read for anyone who is concerned about effective ministry. For as McLaren states, effective ministry is not about "methods" or "quick fix" techniques but rather about the proclamation of the gospel so that its relevancy is evident to all.

Other works by the same author include: *A Generous Orthodoxy* and *More Ready Than You Realize*.

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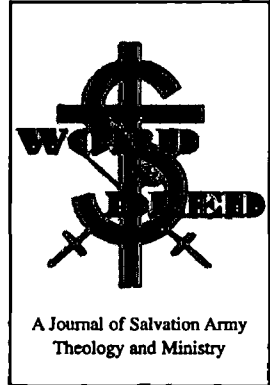
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