

**GENUINE CHRISTIANITY:**

*Wesleyan Theology and Praxis in a Multicultural Society*

Rev. Dan Sheffield

Director, Global and Intercultural Ministries

*The Free Methodist Church in Canada*

Adjunct Lecturer, Missional Leadership

*Tyndale Theological Seminary*

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## Introduction

John Wesley had a broad sense that all human beings, all societies, cultures, and religious systems were within the scope of God's gaze – “embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, God is already at work within those cultures and many of the religious systems by natural revelation, or prevenient grace – that action of God the Holy Spirit whereby human beings are given clues, foretastes, of God's abiding presence in the world, drawing them toward reconciliation.

Given the increasing cultural diversity of the Canadian context, how does theology viewed through a Wesleyan lens inform our ministry engagement? What does a distinctively Wesleyan theology and praxis look like in a multi-ethnic community?

This presentation will pay attention to Wesley's *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* as a background for discussion, seeking to discern a Wesleyan response to “the stranger.” Several reflections on Wesleyan ecclesiology help inform my thoughts on how congregational life serves as a means of grace. Finally I identify several practices that may be seen as particularly Wesleyan ways of framing the interaction with cultural difference in Canadian society – and serve as an apologetic for the Gospel in our context.

### I Wesleyan theological response to “the stranger”

In Wesley's letter *cum tract*, *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*,<sup>2</sup> he takes great pains to assert “that actual Christian faith and life, not only in apostolic and patristic, but also still in modern times, reflects the supernatural power of God and the miraculous presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> The great miracle of Christian living is still present and active in the context of Christian community. Christian life and practice is the greatest apologetic for the faith. Reflection upon the nature of Wesleyan theology and “the stranger” may help us articulate an inclusive and reconciled Christian community as a miraculous evidence of the power of God in the midst of a culturally and religiously diverse society.

#### *Full of love to his neighbour*

In making his case for “who is a Christian, indeed?” and “what is real, genuine Christianity?” Wesley asserts that the genuine Christian “is full of love to his neighbour.” This is:

universal love, not confined to one sect or party, not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions, or in outward modes of worship, or to those who are allied to him by blood or recommended by nearness of place. Neither does he love those only that love him, or that are endeared to him by intimacy of acquaintance... It soars above all these scanty bounds, embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies; yea, not only the good and gentle but also the froward, the evil and

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<sup>1</sup> John Wesley, “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity,” in *John Wesley*, edited by Albert Outler, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. p.184

<sup>2</sup> Published as pamphlet in 1753, *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* was originally part of a more extensive open letter from Wesley to Dr Conyers Middleton seeking to respond to Middleton's rejection of the doctrinal authority of early church fathers regarding the continuation of miraculous powers post the apostolic era.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Outler, editor, *John Wesley*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. p.182.

unthankful. For he loves every soul that God has made, every child of man, of whatever place or nation.<sup>4</sup>

In Luke 10:25-37, the expert in the law asks Jesus, “and who is my neighbour?” Jesus’ response was a specific illustration of love across cultural barriers. In Wesley’s thinking, “love for one’s neighbour, says Marquardt, “was characterized not only by its selflessness, but also by its absolute refusal to judge the person to whom it is given. Out of the relationship with God defined by love grew unlimited love for all humanity, even in the face of a neighbour harbouring hatred. In the context of Wesley’s theological ethics, it is an untenable idea that national or racial differences, social position (as outsiders), or religious or philosophical differences make a person unworthy of love. Every person deserved love because he or she was loved by God.”<sup>5</sup>

### *That All May Come*

The Wesleyan assertion that “all” are *to be loved* – even the stranger – is also articulated as “all” are *welcome* to respond to God’s call.

My message as from God receive,  
*Ye all may come to Christ*, and live;  
O let his love your hearts constrain,  
Nor suffer him to die in vain!<sup>6</sup>

Stuart Jordan adds, “there is little point in the theoretical belief that ‘all’ may come, unless all are, in practice, made welcome.”<sup>7</sup> Pointing toward the context of Christian community where the Wesleyan picture of genuine Christianity is intended to become reality.

Wesley makes the test of true Christian living this generosity of spirit, this love for every human being that God has created. It is a generosity of spirit to the stranger, the antagonistic, the person from another nation. In our Canadian context this genuine Christian love would embrace those like ourselves, as well as those with a different set of cultural and religious values, opinions and practices.

### *The Drawings of the Father*

Coupled with this impulse of universal, welcoming love toward the stranger is the notion that God by the Holy Spirit is already active in human experience and drawing all persons toward restoration through Jesus. Prevenient grace is that “gift of God’s activity in our lives, sensitizing and inviting us.”<sup>8</sup> Thus God is already engaging with the stranger, who is not yet in Christ, preceding our own relationship with them.

Wesley spoke of this activity as including

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<sup>4</sup> Wesley, “Plain Account...” in Outler, p.184.

<sup>5</sup> Manfred Marquardt, *John Wesley’s Social Ethics*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Come Sinners to the Gospel Feast.”

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Jordan, “Parables of a New Community,” in *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, ed. R P Heitzenrater, Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002, p.207.

<sup>8</sup> Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994, p.89-90.

all that is wrought in the soul by what is frequently termed "natural conscience," but more properly, "preventing grace"; --all the drawings of the Father; the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; --all that light wherewith the Son of God "enlighteneth every one that cometh into the world;" showing every man "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God"; --all the convictions which His Spirit, from time to time, works in every child of man--although it is true, the generality of men stifle them as soon as possible, and after a while forget, or at least deny, that they ever had them at all.<sup>9</sup>

Missiologist Mathias Zahniser states that "the Holy Spirit has already been working diligently among these people (of different religious systems) to influence the construction of their world – working with great creativity against great opposition." The work of Christian mission then is "to discern where the Spirit is at work and bring the story of Jesus to that point, to illuminate what the Spirit is up to and to support the Spirit's project."<sup>10</sup>

A Wesleyan response to the stranger of a different religious or cultural system is that of dialogue and discernment, seeking to understand where God has already been drawing, awakening, justifying and sanctifying. Recognizing that while many will have resisted and turned away from those drawings, just as within our own religious and cultural context, many others have responded to God's call and met Christ within their own cultural context.

### *Salvation as Present Healing*

Wesley's notion of salvation as healing has significance for this discussion of the interaction of peoples and cultures who already have a history of "otherness," brokenness and alienation. Wesley viewed our sins as

wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil, have gashed and mangled us all over. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave.<sup>11</sup>

Ernest Troeltsch remarked that, "(Methodism) brought a new sense of the sacredness of personality...it had brought the impulse of personality and individuality into the life of the masses, who were being brutalized by the industrial system, and with its clarity it helped them in their distress."<sup>12</sup> Wesley spoke of the present hope of salvation, not just in "the by and by" but in real terms as

a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This

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<sup>9</sup> J Wesley, Sermon 43, "Scripture Way of Salvation," §I.2.

<sup>10</sup> Mathias Zahniser, "Encountering World Religions: An Evangelical Response," *A Theology of Mission for Free Methodist World Missions*, edited by Dan Sheffield, Indianapolis: FMWM, rev. ed. 2006, p.37.

<sup>11</sup> J Wesley, Sermon 26, "Sermon on the Mount IV" §III.13.

<sup>12</sup> Troeltsch in Marquardt, p. 121.

implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.<sup>13</sup>

The disposition of character (“tempers”) is renewed after the image of God, as are everyday actions (“conversation”). Salvation as healing in the inner person is expressed as holy living in the outer world. Human beings, “and by extension their societies, cultures, and environments, may be healed from the disease and alienation of sin.”<sup>14</sup>

In a Wesleyan worldview the real possibility of healing human relations, across ethnic and cultural barriers, is a tangible result of Christ’s sacrifice. “In fact... the practice of baptism forms us into a new story in which our previous stories are united to Christ through inclusion and reconciliation rather than negation, evaporation, or homogenization (in Christ, Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free, do not disappear but are instead reconciled).”<sup>15</sup>

#### *Entertaining the stranger – a means of grace*

Wesley connects engagement with the poor and marginalized as a means of grace, as a practice “necessary to full sanctification.” In his sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* he particularly identifies “feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted” as actions which should be the natural consequence of repentance and renewal in Christ, but which also serve as transformative grace-encounters.<sup>16</sup> Marquardt indicates that “because human nature was not basically good and perfect, people must let themselves be ever anew filled with love in a relationship with God marked by faith. They must activate this relationship in service to others and thereby strengthen the mind of Christ within them.”<sup>17</sup>

Wesley was concerned that the normal means used to dispense charity (give to a cause so that others would take care of the poor on your behalf) perpetuated the conditions that charity was meant to eliminate – the need for healing of personal relationships across the divide between rich and poor, prisoner and free man. Marquardt notes, “Wesley... demanded that those active in the social work of his fellowship must deliver help to the poor, not merely send it. To him, the gulf between the strata of society appeared too great for the wealthier people to know the gravity of the poor’s actual situation.”<sup>18</sup>

Genuine Christianity in Wesley’s view, among other things, includes both embracing and entertaining the stranger, offering genuine hospitality, first, out of a deep “universal” love – the same kind of love that is intended by “love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself;” and secondly, as a means of encountering the grace of God in the other. “In each encounter with otherness it can also be said that the people of God encounters God as Other and so rediscovers its essential dependence upon God.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> J Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Mean of Reason and Religion, Pt. I*, §3, Works 11:106.

<sup>14</sup> Howard Snyder, “What’s Unique About a Wesleyan Theology of Mission?” *A Theology of Mission for Free Methodist World Missions*, edited by Dan Sheffield, Indianapolis: FMWM, rev ed. 2006, p.24.

<sup>15</sup> Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007, p.59.

<sup>16</sup> J Wesley, Sermon 43, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” §III.10.

<sup>17</sup> Marquardt, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> Marquardt, p.109.

<sup>19</sup> Stone, p.215.

## II Wesleyan ecclesiology: congregational life as means of grace

Wesley's ecclesiology, that is, how the gathering of Christian community is understood and structured, was pragmatic, in that the means should always support the ends – or be cast aside. The forms of Christian community that we develop should result in grace-transformed lives.<sup>20</sup> In every encounter with the stranger among us we find the possibility of being more and more conformed to the likeness of Christ. Reflection upon the notion of congregational life as a means of that transformative grace helps us understand the power of Wesleyan practice in creating this apologetic of Christian community for the strangers among us.

### *Worship and sacrament*

In a Wesleyan view it is “the agency of the Holy Spirit as the means by which Christ is present to faithful communicants” – which has implications for prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace to be at work.<sup>21</sup> The seeker, the penitent and the maturing are all welcome at this table where grace is conveyed for transforming sin-distorted lives. The Lord's Supper takes place within the context of a liturgical framework that guides participants through a reflection on, and confession of, sins. There is obvious value found in this repeated exercise “for deepening our awareness of motivations, prejudices and practices that remain in need of healing.”<sup>22</sup>

The *Sunday Service* adapted by Wesley from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, in which he deleted a long penitential section, gave greater focus to “making Sunday worship more a eucharistic celebration of Christ's resurrection than a solemn time of penance.”<sup>23</sup> This refocusing makes the corporate worship environment a place of public testimony as well as reflection and renewal for seekers and believers alike.

It is Wesley's insistence on Eucharistic attendance and public worship that calls regenerated believers out of their homes to participate in the shared table of the Lord in a public context. This sharing of the common cup and bread where all are grateful recipients of God's grace, no matter the differences in education, social status, culture, language or race, becomes a powerful witness/*martyrion* to the onlooking world.

### *Communal Accountability*

The Wesleyan movement was birthed around the notion of gathering together for mutual encouragement and support in the process of growth in grace. As Wesley put it, “The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness.”<sup>24</sup> He connects growth in grace with the outworking of that grace in community. Wesley added, “I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with [others].”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God, and to build them up in His fear and love. Order, then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is worth nothing.” As quoted in H. Ray Dunning, “Toward a Wesleyan Ecclesiology” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 22.1 (1987), p.116.

<sup>21</sup> Maddox, p 204.

<sup>22</sup> Maddox, p.205

<sup>23</sup> Maddox, p.206

<sup>24</sup> Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems, Works*, 14:321.

<sup>25</sup> J. Wesley, Sermon 24, “Sermon on the Mount IV,” §I.1.

Wesley saw discipline in the Christian life as one of the crucial contributions of the Methodist people. This discipline came in the form of small communal structures of accountability: the class meeting, bands, penitent bands, and select societies. In Maddox's framework these structures bring together the divine and human dialectic: "to support members' *responsible* participation in the transforming work of God's *grace*."<sup>26</sup> Heitzenrater puts it this way:

Wesley's view of holiness, love of God and love of neighbor, works of piety and works of mercy, using the means of grace, becomes embodied in Methodism, which he views as the place where the Church can experience the grace, presence, and power of God in ways that represent genuine Christianity in its organized form—the Church. Thus, Methodism itself became a means of grace, a religious community in which people could experience the power and presence of God's love, the part of the Church that was experiencing what the Church was intended to be.<sup>27</sup>

*"Help us to help each other, Lord"*<sup>28</sup>

Social holiness for Wesley was a dialectical process. God's grace was extended, to which a seeker responded; that grace received, now required an outworking in social engagement. That social engagement resulted in another encounter with the grace of God which in turn contributed to ongoing transformation. Love for God would produce love for others, love for others would produce love for God; a continual feedback loop.

In his apologia for *Genuine Christianity*, Wesley says that it is God-filled, selfless love that produces "gentleness, tenderness, humanity, courtesy and affability" toward one's neighbour.<sup>29</sup> Love for one's neighbour is defined not just by personal selflessness, "but also by its absolute refusal to judge the person to whom it is given."<sup>30</sup>

This kind of love rejoices in the good virtues of all, enters into their happiness, sympathizes with their pains, and engages compassionately with their infirmities. It is void of jealousy and suspicion, produces generosity, openness, frankness, patience, candor, willingness to believe and hope the best of others.<sup>31</sup> All qualities that require interaction in community to be proven valid.

Wesley's view of Christian community, in its various small and large group formats, is of a gathering at the intersection between belief and unbelief, between godly and ungodly, between rich and poor, and we might add, in our context, between persons of different cultures and ethnicities, between dominant and minority cultures. A community that, in itself, is an apologetic to the world – a means of grace.

### **III Wesleyan practices and multicultural ministry**

How do these brief reflections on Wesleyan theology and ecclesiology help flesh out a Wesleyan way of being the People of God in a culturally diverse neighbourhood?

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<sup>26</sup> Maddox, p.212.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Heitzenrater, "Wesleyan Ecclesiology: Methodism as a Means of Grace," The Källstad Lecture, Överås Metodistkyrkans nordiska teologiska seminarium, Göteborg, Sweden -- May 24, 2005, p.10.

<sup>28</sup> Charles Wesley, *A Collection of Hymns...* #489, stanza 3

<sup>29</sup> J. Wesley, "Plain Account..." in Outler, p.122-123.

<sup>30</sup> Marquardt, p.107.

<sup>31</sup> J. Wesley, "Plain Account..." in Outler, p.123.

Queens University professor, Will Kymlicka helps to navigate the discussion in Canadian society about the challenges of multicultural living -- the space between the multicultural state and the intercultural citizen. The multicultural state creates constitutions, charters, institutions, and legal structures that fairly allow citizens, who are the product of multiple cultures, to live together with respect and civility.

Ideally, these two levels should work together in any conception of citizenship: there should be a 'fit' between our model of the multicultural state and our model of the intercultural citizen. The sort of multicultural reforms we seek at the level of the state should help nurture and reinforce the desired forms of intercultural skills and knowledge at the level of individual citizens. Conversely, the intercultural dispositions we encourage within individual citizens should help support and reinforce the institutions of a multicultural state.<sup>32</sup>

It is precisely this interface between the wider multicultural, pluralistic society in which Canadians live, and the challenge of authentic engagement with one's different neighbour that causes alienation in our society. It is here that I believe Wesleyan theology and practice can lead to loving, reconciling, healing, including, grace-enabling, relationships across the barriers, without which intercultural citizenship is just an exercise in good intentions.

The following represent (or *should* represent) practices of healthy Wesleyan congregations in culturally diverse communities:

### **1. A welcoming faith community**

Methodists, or other varieties of Wesleyans, from around the world are showing up in our churches. What will we do?

**Christian communities operating within a Wesleyan orientation will be at the forefront of welcoming brothers and sisters in Christ from other cultural backgrounds into the life and fellowship of their congregation.**

There is an ongoing conversation in Western, pragmatic, church-planting circles of the value of specific ethno-linguistic congregations as the most appropriate response for newcomers to Canadian society. There are cogent arguments for this approach, including the need for contextually appropriate worship, or worship that fits the heart language and cultural framework of the newcomer. While recognizing the validity of distinct groups self-organizing as they see fit, a Wesleyan worldview would question the value of this model as a long-term response.

Missiologist Dean Flemming clarifies that

The Wesleyan catholic spirit is open to a truly "transcontextual" hermeneutic, one that rejects all forms of provincialism and "contextualism" and seeks in humility to learn from the interpretive insights of Christians in other cultures, to the end that we all come to a deeper and richer understanding of the faith. Authentic

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<sup>32</sup> W. Kymlicka, (2003) "Multicultural States and Intercultural Citizens" *Theory and Research in Education*, Vol 1, (2), p. 148.

contextualization is far more than an academic exercise or a topic for scholarly debate. It is a missiological necessity for the whole church.”<sup>33</sup>

That is, a Wesleyan orientation to a culturally diverse community would suggest that Christians from other cultural frameworks are invited, offered hospitality, welcomed, into the Wesleyan congregation where they desire to fellowship. This, in fact, becomes a missional, contextual, response to a culturally diverse neighbourhood. Rather than “ghetto-izing” believers of other cultures, all are welcome in the Wesleyan congregation – a powerful symbol of the transformative power of the Christian gospel that breaks down walls. “This is where the salvation-healing leads, if we walk in the Spirit. This healing makes the church a sign and agent of the larger, broader healing that God is bringing in Christ through the Spirit.”<sup>34</sup>

## **2. Inclusive ministry of local churches**

We welcome those who are different from ourselves. Will we now allow their voices and their contributions to shape our processes and practices?

**Christian communities operating within a Wesleyan orientation will include the voices and insights of their brothers and sisters in Christ from other cultural backgrounds into the processes and practices of their congregation.**

Just as there should be no debate about the inclusion of women in the leadership community of a Wesleyan-oriented congregation, there should likewise be no hesitation in including believers of other cultural frameworks and value systems into the process of forming the values and identity of a congregation.

Lovett Weems points out that “often the challenge is not in regard to welcoming difference, but resistance to changing things like worship approaches and leadership practices.”<sup>35</sup> When we welcome difference are we prepared to engage and adjust as we recognize the urging of the Spirit through the voice of an-other?

Stuart Jordan, a Wesleyan ministry practitioner urges:

the churches need to recognize their potential as parables of inclusive community; as places of meeting beyond barriers of age, gender, race, culture, or class... We are good at laying on splendid international meals and at exploring the visual expressions of cultural life. We need to move further though, to recognize and examine the profound differences and difficulties that can exist: the clashes of style, of stereotypes, of expectations. We need to become ‘laboratories of the Spirit’ since such congregations have unique opportunities to learn lessons about multicultural coexistence which others need to hear.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Dean Flemming, , “The Third Horizon: A Wesleyan Contribution to the Contextualization Debate,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol 30, 2,1995 (139-163), p.163.

<sup>34</sup> Snyder, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> [www.churchleadership.com/leadingideas/updates/140205.html](http://www.churchleadership.com/leadingideas/updates/140205.html) , accessed Feb 6/14.

<sup>36</sup> Jordan, p.207.

In our increasingly multicultural Canadian society it could be that Wesleyan-oriented congregations actually working at this business of becoming “one new humanity,” full of diversity but united in Jesus, may have something to say back to the community at large. “To speak of *ecclesia* is to speak of a calling to be the people of God in public, a new and transnational nation gathered and assembled as a visible politics in and for the world.”<sup>37</sup> Wesley would say this is the best apologetic of the power of the Christian gospel.

### **3. Intercultural accountability groups**

We have welcomed “them” into our congregations; we are including “their” insights into the shaping of our congregations. Will we now engage authentically as a family, with all the good, the bad and the ugly?

**Christian communities operating within a Wesleyan orientation will be built upon small accountability groups that authentically engage across cultural differences.**

This is the heart of Wesleyan praxis – seekers, the repentant, and the maturing, must gather in small groupings to hold one another accountable for how the gospel is reshaping (transforming) attitudes of mind and habitual behaviours that were common place, when we were living with minds and habits conformed to the (cultural) patterns of the world around us.

Wesley’s “social religion” requires working out salvation in the context of authentic community. How we treat our neighbour, our fellow believer of another culture, is surely a concern that Wesley would say is at the heart of genuine Christianity. And that is best figured out in the context of close fellowship and interaction, with hearts prepared to hear what the Spirit might be saying about *my* spiritual condition through the voice of “the other.”

Snyder puts it this way: “If God can transform people into the likeness of Jesus Christ, he can build communities that transcend racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural differences. Wesley’s conviction that salvation is healing suggests potent possibilities for building reconciled and reconciling communities that are a foretaste of the “great multitude” pictured in the Book of Revelation.”<sup>38</sup>

### **4. Contribute to public conversation about difference**

We have welcomed and included “the other” in our personal and our congregational lives. Will we now participate in public, expressing a Christian perspective on cultural differences in Canadian society?

**Christian communities operating within a Wesleyan orientation will participate in public conversation about cultural difference.**

Wesley and the Methodists were contributors to many conversations in the public sphere throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. Wesley was concerned for “a reformation of manners” throughout English society, by which he meant many sorts of public

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<sup>37</sup> Stone, p.177.

<sup>38</sup> Snyder, p. 26.

behaviours and civil practices that he believed did not conform to a biblical worldview, including imprisoning debtors, oppressive child labour, prison conditions, and slavery. Wesley was educated, well-read and articulate to speak or write on many of the current affairs of his day, which he did.

Weems indicates:

Wesley sought to hold different, and often competing, claims together with integrity. He did so because he felt a kinship with many different people and perspectives. He saw much value in traditions not his own. Consequently he desired to preserve and incorporate those values. His commitment to third alternatives helped to provide a vehicle for inclusion.<sup>39</sup>

Again, Flemming:

One of the dynamics of Wesleyanism is its ability to adapt to new cultural, social, and intellectual climates in a way that some of the absolutist and systematically oriented traditions do not. Wesley's theology itself was a theology in process, not a static finished product... Only when we subject Wesleyan theology to exegetical and biblical-theological rigor and allow it to speak dynamically to ever-changing contexts do we remain genuinely true to Wesley and the theological tradition he spawned."<sup>40</sup>

Have we thought deeply about the challenges and concerns of an increasingly culturally diverse society? Are we able to articulate a biblical-theological perspective on culture and difference? Can we express this through a Wesleyan paradigm? Are we able to express this at the table of public discourse in our communities?

## **5. Walk with the immigrant**

Why leave this practice to the end? Perhaps because we don't have a right to engage the newcomer amongst us, until we have worked our way through the previous practices. It is one thing to welcome "others" who are of "the family of believers," but how will we engage the stranger of another religious system, or someone who is indifferent to Christian faith? On the other hand, perhaps it is this practice which helps shape all of our responses above.

**Christian communities operating within a Wesleyan orientation will walk with the immigrants living amongst them, practically demonstrating love and empathy.**

Wesley takes us back to love:

This same love is productive of all right actions. It leads him into an earnest and steady discharge of all social offices, of whatever is due to relations of every kind: to his friends, to his country and to any particular community whereof he is a member. It prevents his unwillingly hurting or grieving any man. It guides him

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<sup>39</sup> Lovett H Weems, Jr. *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999. p 93-94.

<sup>40</sup> Flemming, p. 159.

into a uniform practice of justice and mercy, equally extensive with the principle whence it flows. It constrains him to do all possible good, of every possible kind to all men...<sup>41</sup>

We love in practical ways, in the spirit of 1 John 3:16-18, because we were first loved by God. But, then, as we engage with the stranger, we note that this involvement is actually changing us, a means of God's unfolding grace in our lives. "Love for others, born from experiencing God's unlimited love, creates the preconditions of social involvement: social sensitivity, solidarity in community, and compassion for others. Love awakens the conscience to unlimited responsibility for others, regardless of their religious, moral or social character."<sup>42</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*, Wesley is certain that Christian life and community may be the single greatest apologetic for the Christian faith. Not a set of propositions, but the way a group of people live together with Jesus as the head.

Wesley's notion of salvation as a healing, reconciling action decentralizes our self-interest and leads us into transformation through our encounter with God. This encounter with God the Other brings into view every relationship where we are challenged by the Stranger/the Other. We are called to love God, and our neighbour. Opening ourselves, becoming vulnerable before God, also makes us receptive to others in the same space, no matter language, culture, gender, nationality, or skin tone.

The Wesleyan and Methodist conviction that engagement with the marginalized is an act of mercy which serves as a channel of God's grace for both the giver and the receiver, informs our engagement with immigrant newcomers of diverse cultures, many of whom struggle on the margins of Canadian society.

It is Wesley's notions of what is required to structure growth in discipleship (ecclesiology) which makes the crucial connection between theological formulations and the lived experience of Christian community. The Wesleyan interplay between small group community – where intercultural dialogue and friendships can emerge around the Word of God and the voice of the Spirit – and the larger public assembly – where gathering at the Lord's Table abolishes power and privilege constructed by cultural difference – may well be a unique contribution to the theology and praxis of multi/intercultural Christian communities.

There is more work to be done to discern the connections between a Wesleyan worldview and ministry engagement in multicultural communities. Intentional application of the five practices listed here would produce interactions worth paying attention to. Also of benefit would be research and reflection on existing examples of Wesleyan-oriented congregations, to discern if Wesleyan theology and practices are having a role in influencing their engagement with cultural diversity.

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<sup>41</sup> J. Wesley, "Plain Account..." in Outler, p. 123.

<sup>42</sup> Marquardt, p. 136.

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## **Introduction**

### **I Wesleyan theological response to “the stranger”**

*Full of love to his neighbour*

universal love, not confined to one sect or party, not restrained to those who agree with him in opinions, or in outward modes of worship, or to those who are allied to him by blood or recommended by nearness of place. Neither does he love those only that love him, or that are endeared to him by intimacy of acquaintance... It soars above all these scanty bounds, embracing neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies; yea, not only the good and gentle but also the froward, the evil and unthankful. For he loves every soul that God has made, every child of man, of whatever place or nation.<sup>43</sup>

*That all may come*

*The drawings of the Father*

*Salvation as present healing*

*Entertaining the stranger – a means of grace*

### **II Wesleyan ecclesiology: congregational life as means of grace**

*Worship and sacrament*

*Communal accountability*

*“Help us to help each other, Lord”*

### **III Wesleyan practices and multicultural ministry**

#### 1. A welcoming faith community

The Wesleyan catholic spirit is open to a truly “transcontextual” hermeneutic, one that rejects all forms of provincialism and “contextualism” and seeks in humility to learn from the interpretive insights of Christians in other cultures, to the end that we all come to a deeper and richer understanding of the faith. Authentic contextualization is far more than an academic exercise or a topic for scholarly debate. It is a missiological necessity for the whole church.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Wesley, “Plain Account...” in Outler, p.184.

<sup>44</sup> Dean Flemming, , “The Third Horizon: A Wesleyan Contribution to the Contextualization Debate,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol 30, 2,1995 (139-163), p.163.

## 2. Inclusive ministry of local churches

the churches need to recognize their potential as parables of inclusive community; as places of meeting beyond barriers of age, gender, race, culture, or class... We are good at laying on splendid international meals and at exploring the visual expressions of cultural life. We need to move further though, to recognize and examine the profound differences and difficulties that can exist: the clashes of style, of stereotypes, of expectations. We need to become ‘laboratories of the Spirit’ since such congregations have unique opportunities to learn lessons about multicultural coexistence which others need to hear.<sup>45</sup>

## 3. Intercultural accountability groups

“If God can transform people into the likeness of Jesus Christ, he can build communities that transcend racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural differences. Wesley’s conviction that salvation is healing suggests potent possibilities for building reconciled and reconciling communities that are a foretaste of the “great multitude” pictured in the Book of Revelation.”<sup>46</sup>

## 4. Contribute to public conversation about difference

One of the dynamics of Wesleyanism is its ability to adapt to new cultural, social, and intellectual climates in a way that some of the absolutist and systematically oriented traditions do not. Wesley’s theology itself was a theology in process, not a static finished product... Only when we subject Wesleyan theology to exegetical and biblical-theological rigor and allow it to speak dynamically to ever-changing contexts do we remain genuinely true to Wesley and the theological tradition he spawned.”<sup>47</sup>

## 5. Walk with the immigrant

This same love is productive of all right actions. It leads him into an earnest and steady discharge of all social offices, of whatever is due to relations of every kind: to his friends, to his country and to any particular community whereof he is a member. It prevents his unwillingly hurting or grieving any man. It guides him into a uniform practice of justice and mercy, equally extensive with the principle whence it flows. It constrains him to do all possible good, of every possible kind to all men...<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>45</sup> Stuart Jordan, “Parables of a New Community” in *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, ed. R P Heitzenrater. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002, p.207.

<sup>46</sup> Howard Snyder, “What’s Unique About a Wesleyan Theology of Mission?” *A Theology of Mission for Free Methodist World Missions*, edited by Dan Sheffield, Indianapolis: FMWM, rev ed. 2006, p. 26.

<sup>47</sup> Flemming, p. 159.

<sup>48</sup> J. Wesley, “Plain Account...” in Outler, p. 123.