

Reclaiming Holistic Salvation

By Randy L. Maddox
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As John Wesley contemplated the mediocrity of moral character and the ineffectiveness in social impact of Christians in 18th-century England, he became convinced that a central cause was the anemic understanding of salvation assumed so broadly in the church. In response, he focused his renewal efforts on reclaiming an understanding and embodiment of the *holistic salvation* that he found affirmed in Scripture and the broad Christian tradition. The characteristic doctrinal emphases and distinctive practices of early Methodism were central expressions of these focal efforts, and the resulting spiritual vitality of the movement is well-known.

This vitality is less evident today in the various communities descended from Wesley's ministry. Both insiders and observers are more likely to speak of mediocrity and ineffectiveness. The only consolation offered is that few other Christian traditions appear to be doing better. Rather than accepting this comparative justification, however, those who are heirs of Wesley's renewal movement — such as Seattle Pacific University — would do better to ponder whether we have settled for the anemic understanding of salvation that he was challenging. As a backdrop for this reflection, it is helpful to review the emphases in Wesley's mature understanding of the salvation that God offers in and through Christ.

Not just forgiveness, but spiritual transformation
The first emphasis shines through in Wesley's most pointed definition of salvation: "By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health ... the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth" (*Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*).

The "vulgar" notion that Wesley is rejecting here reduces salvation to God's forgiveness of our guilt as sinners, which frees us from future condemnation. While this picks up the theme of Romans 1–3, it omits an equally biblical theme that can be represented by Romans 7–8, where the deepest impact of sin is our spiritual debilitation ("What I want to do, I cannot!") and God's gracious gift is the Spirit that enables our spiritual healing. Reflecting the "whole tenor of Scripture," Wesley encouraged his contemporaries to seek and to enjoy the benefits of truly *holistic salvation*, where God's forgiveness

is woven into God's broader gracious purpose of our present spiritual transformation.

Not just for individuals, but for society as well
The second emphasis in Wesley's understanding of salvation is also hinted at in the definition above. When salvation is focused on forgiveness and "going to heaven," it takes on strong individualistic tones, since these are usually seen as discrete events for each person. By contrast, Wesley insisted that salvation was fundamentally social in nature. In the words of his well-known aphorism: "There is no holiness but social holiness."

Careful consideration reveals three dimensions in Wesley's emphasis on the social nature of salvation. The foundational dimension is his conviction that the support and accountability of a community of fellow pilgrims is crucial for growth in Christlikeness. The second dimension is his confidence that the growth nurtured in community will find expression in our lives, moving us not only to avoid doing harm to others but also to offer aid to all in need. Wesley also recognized the importance of seeking to transform those political and economic structures that cause human suffering. This third dimension of social salvation is particularly evident in his later years, in tracts such as *Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions* and *Thoughts upon Slavery*. Weaving these dimensions together, Wesley urged his followers to support one another in the pursuit of truly *holistic salvation*, seeking God's gracious transformation of our lives and of our various social structures.

Not just for souls, but for bodies as well

The third emphasis in Wesley's understanding of salvation can be illustrated from his instructions to his assistants about their ministry among the Methodist people. He charged them to leave behind books that could provide ongoing guidance, highlighting in particular two works: 1) his abridgement of Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, which Wesley valued as a guide to spiritual health; and 2) *Primitive Physick*, a collection of medical advice that Wesley provided as a guide to physical health.

Most Methodists today are unaware of the second volume, and scholars who come across it often dismiss it as a collection of "home remedies." This seriously misjudges its nature and its centrality to Wesley's ministry. He read broadly on the topic of medicine throughout his life and gathered most of the remedies in *Primitive Physick* from prominent medical authors

of his time. This was as much a use of his scholarly gifts to provide aids for his people as was his collection of spiritual writings in *A Christian Library*. Moreover, in the preface to this volume (and in other publications), Wesley added advice for promoting wellness to his suggestions for treating wounds and illnesses. He was not simply offering cures but promoting physical flourishing.

In other words, *Primitive Physick* is one expression of Wesley's deep conviction that God the Great Physician desires to heal soul and body together, to provide us all with both inward and outward health. While he allowed that it will be complete only in our resurrected state, Wesley resisted the tendency to minimize the physical dimension of this healing work in the present. He longed for Christians to see that participation in God's work of truly *holistic salvation* involves nurturing not only our souls but also our bodies, and addressing both of these dimensions in our outreach to others.

Not just for humans, but for the whole of creation

The final emphasis in Wesley's mature understanding of salvation is surely the one least familiar to his present heirs. This emphasis also stood in starkest contrast to the understanding of salvation of most of his peers. Although Scripture speaks of our ultimate hope in terms of the new heavens and new earth, a variety of philosophical influences had led most Christians by Wesley's day to assume that our final state is "heaven above," where human spirits dwelling in ethereal bodies join with all other spiritual beings (no animals) in continuous worship of the Ultimate Spiritual Being. Wesley learned this model in his upbringing, and through the middle of his ministry he presented it as obvious and unproblematic. But as he continued to probe the biblical witness to salvation, he became convinced that God's saving grace reaches beyond humanity to embrace the whole creation. This led him to issue late in life provocative sermons defending the resurrection of animals and the inclusion of the physical matter of our universe — properly transformed — in "the new creation" of heaven.

The most significant aspect of Wesley's reflection on this cosmic dimension of ultimate salvation is his sense of its relevance for present Christian life. He recognized that convictions about God's ultimate purpose should serve as guides for what we value now. Thus, he defended his speculation about God's future blessings of animals on the grounds that it might provide encouragement for us to imitate now the God whose "mercy is over all his works." Lest this be left in generalities, he frequently exhorted against abusive treatment of animals and nature. Avoiding such abuse ourselves, and helping prevent it by others, was one more way that Wesley believed we can participate in the truly *holistic salvation* that God offers in and through Christ.

Continuing relevance of Wesley's agenda

As one comes to appreciate the various emphases about *holistic salvation* that Wesley was concerned to reclaim in his day, it becomes clear that his agenda is far from completed. To highlight just the first dimension, popular explanations of genetic and psychological determinism have convinced most

people today that we should not hope for significant transformation of our character — the best we can do is accept the way we are. Among Christians, this acquiescence has taken the form of reducing salvation implicitly or explicitly to "Christians are not different, just forgiven." The need for reclaiming and defending the biblical affirmation of present spiritual transformation is still very much with us. Similar continuing need in the other dimensions of holistic salvation would be easy to demonstrate.

As we celebrate the 300th anniversary of Wesley's birth, we can take pride in the ways in which SPU reflects Wesley's emphasis on *holistic salvation*. A central goal of the University Foundations courses in our Common Curriculum is to ensure that students are aware of the biblical affirmation of spiritual transformation and of the rich Christian tradition of spiritual formation practices. Our Christian Faith Exploration programs give prominence both to the supportive role of small groups and to the formative role of regular participation in service to those in need. We have a long tradition of preparing graduates in nursing, wellness and other disciplines who see their care for people's physical health as part of their Christian vocation. And we have witnessed in our midst a small but committed band who model God's care for the whole creation.

If Seattle Pacific is to be true to our heritage, however, we cannot rest content with these present positive expressions.

What's "Free" About "Free Methodist"?

By H. Mark Abbott



THE WORD "FREE" can mean different things to different people. "Cheap" as in "Cheap Methodists" is how one uninformed wag understood the word. "Free" can connote irresponsibility, the lack of boundaries and discipline. But that kind of "free" hardly applies to John Wesley, serious-minded founder of the 18th-century Wesleyan movement. He and his "Holy Club" colleagues at Oxford lived such disciplined lives that in derision they were called "Methodists."

Like Wesley himself, we continue to seek even more faithful ways for SPU to witness to and to embody the *holistic salvation* that God offers to all. This ongoing mission has implications for the full spectrum of the University. There is need not only for teaching but also for primary scholarship in fields ranging from psychology to genetics that can help counter the present despair of the possibility of transformation of our spiritual/moral character. Similarly, we can surely become even better at helping our community — students, staff and faculty — to appreciate and nurture the various aspects of the social dimension of Christian life, countering the overly individualistic currents in our broader culture. Again, we must do more than just continue our support of programs that train people to promote physical healing and wellness; we are uniquely situated to help our students and the broader culture appreciate more fully just how integrally connected are physical and spiritual health.

But perhaps the greatest challenge that we face in this coming century is to take even more seriously God's concern for the whole of creation. In the midst of frequent polarization over issues of ecology, development and justice in our culture, what better place could there be than SPU to articulate a vision of the truly holistic scope of God's saving grace? And what better place could there be than Seattle Pacific University to equip graduates who will bring that grace to our troubled world?



It is an auspicious time to be alive for Randy L. Maddox, the Paul T. Walls Chair of Wesleyan Theology at SPU. Maddox is an internationally recognized authority on both John Wesley's theology and the theological developments in later Methodism. At SPU since 1998, he earned his doctorate in theological studies from Emory University, holds ministerial orders in the United Methodist Church, is a member of the Wesleyan Theological Society and serves on the steering committee of The John Templeton Oxford Seminars on Science and Christianity.

Author of Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology, Maddox is actively involved in this year of Wesley celebration. Earlier in the year, he spoke on "John Wesley as Holistic Healer" at international Wesley conferences held at Emory University and in Nassau, Bahamas, and on "John Wesley as Theological Mentor" at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. Scheduled venues for presentations this summer include Duke University Divinity School, Drew University and the annual meeting of the American Theological Library Association in Portland, Oregon.

On October 16 at 9:30 a.m., Maddox will deliver the annual Walls Lecture at Seattle Pacific, this year speaking on "Celebrating the Whole Wesley." The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call 206/281-2003.

The irresponsible kind of "free" also does not fit the deeply committed missionaries from New York who founded Seattle's First Free Methodist Church in 1880. Eleven years later, this "mother church," along with the 16 other congregations in Washington and Oregon, founded Seattle Pacific University, first known as Seattle Seminary.

Free Methodist missionaries crossed the country from east to west, not only starting churches, but also launching schools. B.T. Roberts, founder of the Free Methodist denomination, was known as a champion of the liberal arts. About the new school in Seattle, he was concerned, writes Don McNichols in *Seattle Pacific University: A Growing Vision*, that "the institution must not be too strictly denominational; rather, it should be competitive with public education."

To Roberts and the other 1860 upstate New York founders of the Free Methodist Church, "free" highlighted their reasons for separating from the parent Methodist Episcopal Church. Actually, Roberts along with his associates in the ministry and among the laity were excluded from the parent church because of their protest against theological liberalism, lack of concern for pressing social issues and loss of spiritual vitality.

Freedom from slavery was one of the freedoms these spiritual and social reform-

ers called for. Freedom to speak the truth openly was another concern, leading these early Free Methodists to avoid membership in secret societies. Another commitment was to free pews. In that time and place, church pews were often rented or sold, thus relegating the poor to benches in the back or in the balcony. Think of it! Now, people can sit anywhere they want in a worship service; they can choose the back or the balcony! Social issues have changed since 1860, but Free Methodists continue to have a sensitive social conscience.

A commitment to freedom from worldliness led early Free Methodists to espouse simplicity in life and in worship. Wary of formalism, Free Methodists for instance did not sanction musical instruments in their worship services till the middle of the 20th century. The denomination's quests for freedom from sin's domination and for freedom in the Spirit were in close harmony with the emphases of John Wesley. Free Methodists to this day continue to pursue vitality in worship and holiness of life.

Today's stated denominational mission is "to make known to all people everywhere God's call to wholeness through forgiveness and holiness in Jesus Christ, and to invite into membership and to equip for ministry all who respond in faith."

The mission statement encapsulates Free Methodism's vision of itself in the 21st century. Free Methodists today desire to be faithful both to orthodox Christian faith and to the legacy of the 18th-century Wesleyan movement. In this, Free Methodists resist the revision and reduction of classic orthodoxy frequently evident in more theologically liberal brands of Methodism. In this, Free Methodists today continue to highlight John Wesley's classic doctrine of Christian holiness.

At the recent 34th General Conference of the Free Methodist Church, held on the campus of SPU, considerable discussion and preliminary approval was given to a new statement on "sanctification." This statement retains the high goal of sanctification as the Holy Spirit's re-creation of God's people "after the image of God ... conforming them to the image of Christ." The new statement, however, more clearly recognizes not only the decisive moment(s) of response to God, but also the ongoing process of Christian growth.

Far from the irresponsible meanings of "free," today's Free Methodists desire freedom in Christ — and freedom to be the people God calls them to be.

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