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Editorial

The Second Latin American Congress in Evangelisation held at Lima, Peru last November spoke the Word of God to a people who do not know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and who cry out against moral corruption, political and demonic oppression and the denial of human rights. 1980 will be remembered as a year of ecumenical conferences—WEF's *Serving our Generation* near London (March); WCC's *Your Kingdom Come* in Melbourne (May); LCWE's *How Shall They Hear?* at Pattaya (June) and Edinburgh '80 on Frontier Missions (October). In addition there have been a number of world denominational gatherings. To varying degrees they have all struggled with the issue of how to relate Christ's evangelistic commission to the social demands of the gospel to love our neighbours who are polarising into rich and poor.

In practice, evangelical Christians respond to immediate and urgent needs, be they evangelistic or social responsibility. In theory, they believe that the Bible sets priorities and determines methods of obedience to the demands of the Gospel. Their dilemma is how to relate theory and practice, especially when the resources of people and money are hopelessly inadequate to meet either the call to world evangelisation or the demands of global suffering and injustice. In the search to discern priorities a flood of theological and pragmatic questions arise—Is evangelism only verbal proclamation? Do community development programmes secularise the church? Can there be a new political and economic order without supporting violence?

The answers of both Melbourne and Pattaya were one-sided and in a sense were intended to be so. A simple marriage of convenience is no answer. A much more thorough Biblical analysis of the lostness of mankind and the bondage of man in society is needed, and at the same time a deeper awareness of the dynamics of the diversity of our human situation. Insights from human philosophies and ideologies must be brought to the test of Scripture, and the focus of the church as new communities that are a foretaste of the coming Kingdom kept clear.

The two numbers of ERT for 1980 deal with issues that relate to Biblical authority and trustworthiness and to liberation from injustice and to community development. The April 1981 issue will feature areas of Biblical hermeneutics. Understanding the task did not begin with our generation. We have a heritage of "common roots". Emilio Antonio Núñez' keynote address *Heirs of the Reformation* at CLADE II reminds not only his own continent of this fact, but the whole evangelical world. [p. 176](#)

John Wesley, Theologian of the Spirit

A. Skevington Wood

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For too long, many have dismissed John Wesley as an unsystematic preacher. In this article a well-known church historian argues that Wesley made a distinctive contribution to the theology of the Holy Spirit. Contextualised at the heart of the most remarkable revival that

Britain has ever known, Wesley's insights on the use of the rule of Scripture have clear implications for Christianity today.

(Editor)

Recent research has reassessed John Wesley's contribution to theology. His stature in this area has been enhanced by such investigations. Too often in the past he has been dismissed as something of a lightweight. A. N. Whitehead regretted that the Methodist movement could 'appeal to no great intellectual construction explanatory of its modes of understanding'.¹ While it is true that Wesley produced no *Summa Theologica*—his incessant itineration in the interests of mission left him no leisure for such a demanding enterprise—his extensive occasional writings reflect a mature and creative theological judgment. It has been claimed that Wesley was essentially a theologian of Christian experience. Certainly his sermons and treatises provide an exposition of the spiritual advance encouraged and made possible by the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. But Wesley himself approached the phenomena of Christian experience objectively, focusing attention on the ministry of the Holy Spirit underlying them. In this sense Wesley may well be regarded as a theologian of the Spirit. We shall confine ourselves to certain aspects of his approach as they relate to the inception and development of new life in Christ.

SPIRIT OUR GUIDE: SCRIPTURE OUR RULE

While it is useless to search Wesley's thought for any systematic presentation of pneumatology, argues Professor W. R. Cannon, it is only necessary to read even a few of his sermons 'to realise the tremendous emphasis that he gave to the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men'.² Wesley however, was careful to steer clear of two **P. 177** dangers which tend to bring the doctrine into disrepute. In the first place he refused to fall into the trap of so stressing the significance of the Spirit as to depreciate Christ. He realised that the specific task of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Son and to apply the benefits of Christ's redemption. 'This operational stress on the Holy Spirit's administration of the work of Christ makes it imperative that we understand the work of the Holy Spirit in Wesley's thought', claims Dr. L. M. Starkey; 'it is the key not only to his theology but to his entire evangelical enterprise.'³ Precisely because Wesley understood from scripture this supportive role of the Spirit, his theology remains firmly Christocentric.

If Wesley avoided any magnification of the Spirit to the detriment of Christ, the living Word, he was equally concerned that the Spirit should always be seen in relation to the written Word which he has inspired. This was not to subordinate the Spirit to the scriptures but simply to safeguard the principle, re-discovered by the Reformers, that the wisdom imparted by the Spirit comes through revealed Word and does not supersede it. Wesley complained that the Quakers, for example, made scripture 'a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit'.⁴ But, he insisted, 'the scriptures are the touchstone whereby

¹ A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge, University Press, 1933, p.27.

² W. R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, New York, Abingdon Press, 1956, p.214.

³ L. M. Starkey, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology*, New York, Abingdon Press, 1962, p.34.

⁴ *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, Standard Edition, ed. John Telford, London, Epworth Press, 8 Vols., 1931 (Letters), 2.117. Wesley was referring to Robert Barclay in particular.

Christians examine all, real or supposed, revelations ... For though the Spirit is our principal leader, yet he is not our rule at all; the scriptures are the rule whereby he leads us into all truth.⁵ Wesley preferred to call the Spirit our 'guide', who uses the 'rule' of scripture through which to communicate with us.⁶

Wesley employed the term 'inspiration' to describe the overall ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. 'By inspiration we mean that inward assistance of the Holy Ghost which "helps our infirmities, enlightens our understanding, rectifies our will, comforts, purifies, and sanctifies us".'⁷ 'Every good gift is from God, and is given to man by the Holy Ghost', Wesley explained in his *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* Part I (1745). 'By nature there is in us no good thing; and there can be none, but so far as it is p. 178 wrought in us by that good Spirit ... He *inspires*, breathes, infuses into our soul, what of ourselves we could not have.'⁸ Does 'our spirit rejoice in God our Saviour'? It is 'joy in', or by, 'the Holy Ghost'. Have we true inward peace? It is 'the peace of God' wrought in us by the same Spirit. Have we love? It 'is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us'.⁹

Wesley defended his preference for the term inspiration in this sense on the grounds that it is scriptural, that it is found in the Anglican Prayer Book, and moreover that he knew none better. It is more exact than 'influence', since 'breathing bears a near relation to spirit'.¹⁰

THE METHODIST DISTINCTIVE

In his correspondence with 'John Smith' (thought to be the pseudonym of Thomas Secker, Bishop of Oxford and later Archbishop of Canterbury), Wesley did not resist the charge that the Methodists preached 'perceptible inspiration'. 'For this I earnestly contend', he replied; 'and so do all who are called Methodist preachers. But be pleased to observe what we mean thereby. We mean that inspiration of God's Holy Spirit whereby he fills us with righteousness, peace and joy, with love to him and to all mankind. And we believe it cannot be, in the nature of things, that a man should be filled with this peace and joy and love by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit without perceiving it as clearly as he does the light of the Sun.'¹¹ Wesley did not hesitate to underline this as 'the main doctrine of the Methodists' and 'the substance of what we all preach'.¹² He refused to move a hair's breadth from the proposition that '*no man can be a true Christian without such an inspiration of the Holy Ghost as fills his heart with peace and joy and love, which he who perceives it not has it not.*'¹³

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Letters*, 4.39. Here Wesley was endorsing a statement by one of his Anglican critics, John Potter, Vicar of Reymerston, Norfolk, who in 1758 had published *A Sermon on the Pretended Inspiration of the Methodists*.

⁸ *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 3rd edition, ed. Thomas Jackson, London, John Mason, 141 Vols., 1829–31 (Works), 8.106.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Works*, 8.107.

¹¹ *Letters*, 2.63,64.

¹² *Letters*, 2.64.

¹³ *Ibid.*

This Wesley took to be ‘the very foundation of Christianity’, ‘the strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity’, and ‘the most infallible of all proofs’.¹⁴ In these bold assertions he was echoing the dying words of his father, Samuel P. 179 Wesley, Rector of Epworth: ‘The inward witness, son, the inward witness; this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity.’¹⁵ Wesley recognised with the utmost clarity that spiritual life begins with spiritual birth. What ought to have been an obvious inference was in fact far from axiomatic in the eighteenth century. In his evangelistic preaching Wesley, like Whitefield, majored on regeneration. But he also related it immediately to holiness. William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester, in his *Treatise on Regeneration*, appeared to identify it with the entire process of sanctification. Wesley more accurately regarded it as ‘only the threshold of sanctification, the first entrance upon it. And as, in the natural birth, a man is born at once, and then grows larger and stronger by degrees; so in the spiritual birth, a man is born at once, and then gradually increases in spiritual stature and strength. The new birth, therefore, is the first point of sanctification, which may increase more and more unto the perfect day.’¹⁶

JUSTIFICATION, REGENERATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Regeneration is thus distinct from justification. The latter, according to Wesley, is ‘that great work God does *for us*, in forgiving our sins’; the former is ‘the great work God does *in us*, in renewing our fallen nature’.¹⁷ In order of time, these are simultaneous. In logical sequence, however, justification precedes the new birth. ‘We first conceive his wrath to be turned away, and then his Spirit to work in our hearts.’¹⁸ Elsewhere Wesley distinguishes between justification and regeneration like this: ‘The one implies what God does for us through his Son; the other, what he works in us by his Spirit.’¹⁹ Or again: ‘God in justifying us does something *for us*; in begetting us again, he does the work *in us*. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image of God. The one is the taking away the guilt, the other the taking away the power, of sin: so that, although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct natures.’²⁰ P. 180

The agent of regeneration, as of sanctification to which it leads, is the Holy Spirit. He is ‘the fountain of all spiritual life’.²¹ As a result of his new birth, the sinner ‘feels in his heart the mighty workings of the Spirit of God’, to use the language of the Anglican Homily for Rogation Week, as Wesley did.²² But this is not to be interpreted ‘in a gross, carnal sense, as the men of the world stupidly and wilfully misunderstood the expression;

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; *Letters*, 2.383; *Letters*, 1.263.

¹⁵ *Letter*, 2.134,135.

¹⁶ *Works*, 7.205.

¹⁷ *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley*, ed. E. H. Sugden, London, Epworth Press, 1921 (*Sermons*7, 2.227.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Sermons*, 1.119.

²⁰ *Sermons*, 1.299,300.

²¹ *Works*, 6.394.

²² *Sermons*, 2.233.

though they have been told again and again, we mean thereby neither more or less than this: he feels, is inwardly sensible of, the graces which the Spirit of God works in his heart.’²³ These are detailed, as in other passages, as love, joy and peace. ‘By the use of these, he is daily increasing in the knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, and of all things pertaining to his inward kingdom.’²⁴ Only after experiencing the new birth can a man ‘be properly said to live: God having quickened him by his Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ.’²⁵

HOLINESS: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT OR CHARISMATIC GIFT?

It is essential for a proper understanding of Wesley’s teaching on holiness that it should be seen as stemming immediately both from justification and the new birth. ‘In that instant (i.e. of justification) we are born again, born from above, born of the Spirit: there is a *real* as well as a *relative* change.’²⁶ Justification makes possible a positional righteousness in which a man is brought into a new relationship with God, but this needs to be matched by a progressive, actual righteousness, reflected in conduct and character, lest the grace of God should be received in vain. Wesley realised that sanctification is the purpose both of justification and regeneration. The reason why man is put right with God and given new life is that he should live righteously.

‘When we are born again, then our sanctification, our inward and outward holiness begins’, Wesley insisted; ‘and thenceforward we are gradually to “grow up into him who is our Head”.’²⁷ In a memorable passage, the maintenance of the Christian life is described under the analogy of respiration.²⁸ It is by breathing in oxygen p. 181 that natural life is sustained: it is by breathing in the Spirit that supernatural life is sustained. It is the Spirit’s work first to inspire and then to preserve the life of God in the soul of man. Thus ‘we are enabled, “by the Spirit” to “mortify the deeds of the body”, of our evil nature; and as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God.’²⁹

Wesley recognised that the Holy Spirit is ‘the immediate cause of all holiness in us’, since we are in ourselves no more capable of developing spiritual life than of initiating it.³⁰ He explained that the title ‘Holy’, when applied to the Spirit of God, does not only denote that he is holy in his own nature, but that he makes us so too. ‘He is the great fountain of holiness to his Church, the Spirit from whence flows all the grace and virtue, by which the stains of guilt are cleansed, and we are renewed in all holy dispositions, and again bear the image of our Creator.’³¹ On the other hand, Wesley stressed the complementary truth that ‘the proper end and design of all the influences of the Holy

²³ *Sermons*, 2.233,234.

²⁴ *Sermons*, 2.234.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Sermons*, 2.446.

²⁷ *Sermons*, 2.240.

²⁸ *Sermons*, 2.234; cf. *Sermons*, 1.303.

²⁹ *Sermons*, 2.447.

³⁰ *Letters*, 3.9.

³¹ *Works*, 7.486.

Spirit' is to produce holiness in us.³² Such holiness was early defined by Wesley as 'likeness to God', the 'conformity of our will and affections to his will'.³³

'By means of his presence with us, we receive from him a great fullness of holy virtues; we take such features of resemblance in our spirits as correspond to his original perfections.'³⁴

Commenting on [John 7:38](#) in his sermon 'On Christian Perfection', Wesley observed that at the time of our Lord's earthly ministry 'the Holy Ghost was not yet given in his sanctifying graces, as he was after Jesus was glorified'.³⁵ Later, 'when the day of Pentecost was fully come, then first it was that they who "waited for the promise of the Father" were made more than conquerors over sin by the Holy Ghost given unto them.'³⁶ In his *Notes on the New Testament*, Wesley related the same verse to the fact that the fruit of the Spirit could only be borne in full measure after Pentecost.³⁷

Wesley's interpretation of holiness was practical and ethical as well [p. 182](#) as biblical and theological. He stripped the concept of any merely sentimental and unduly pietistic trappings in order to reach the hard core of moral substance. It is significant that a series of thirteen expositions of the Sermon on the Mount was included in the standard collection of forty-four sermons chosen to represent his major emphases.³⁸ Wesley believed that it was the purpose of our Lord's discourse 'to give us a full prospect of Christianity; to describe at large the nature of that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord'.³⁹ Through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, the believer is enabled to conform to the pattern shown to him on a more momentous mount than Sinai. This was the message and experience which changed the permissive face of eighteenth century society and ushered in an age of renewal. Confronted by 'the grave moral need of his day', declared Dr. Howard Watkin-Jones, 'Wesley proclaimed a doctrine of "scriptural holiness" in which the operation of the Holy Spirit never ceased to receive the utmost emphasis.'⁴⁰

This strongly ethical pre-occupation led Wesley to regard the fruit of the Spirit, rather than a manifestation of charismatic gifts, as the major criterion of an effective Christian life. This was a position he reached early in his ministry—even before his evangelical conversion—but which he saw no reason to modify at any later stage. As he enquired 'into the nature and operations of the Holy Spirit, as bestowed upon Christians', he made some pertinent observations.⁴¹ 'And here I shall pass by the particular extraordinary gifts vouchsafed to the first ages for the edification of the Church; and only consider what the Holy Spirit is to every believer, for his personal sanctification and salvation. It is not granted to every one to raise the dead and heal the sick. What is most necessary, is, to be

³² *Works*, 7.491.

³³ *Ibid.* Sermon CXXXVIII, 'On Grieving the Holy Spirit', was written in 1733.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Sermons*, 2.162.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, London, Epworth Press, 1929 (1754) (Notes), 335.

³⁸ *Sermons*, 1.315–542; 2.9–36.

³⁹ *Sermons*, 1.319.

⁴⁰ H. Watkin-Jones, *The Holy Spirit from Arminius to Wesley*, London, Epworth Press, 1929, p.297.

⁴¹ *Works*, 7.514.

sure, as to ourselves, that we are “passed from death unto life”; to keep our bodies pure and undefiled, and let them reap that health which flows from a magnanimous patience, and the serene joys of devotion. The Holy Spirit has enabled men to speak with tongues, and to prophesy; but the light which most necessarily attends it is a light to discern the fallacies of flesh and blood, to reject the irreligious maxims of the world, and to practise those degrees of trust in God and love to man, whose [p. 183](#) foundation is not so much in the present appearances of things, as in some that are yet to come.’⁴²

THE CHARGE OF ENTHUSIASM

In his *Further Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* Wesley met the accusation of his critics that the Methodists claimed ‘such inspiration as the apostles had; and such a receiving the Holy Ghost as that was at the day of Pentecost’.⁴³ Wesley was well aware that he might lay himself open to the familiar charge of ‘enthusiasm’—that is, of misguidedly claiming extraordinary powers from the Holy Spirit. He nevertheless insisted that it is possible for the experience of Pentecost to be renewed in later ages, although he was careful to define the sense in which this is so. ‘Indeed I do not mean, that Christians now receive the Holy Ghost in order to work miracles; but they do doubtless now “receive”, yea, are “filled with the Holy Ghost,” in order to be filled with the fruits of that blessed Spirit. And he inspires into all true believers now, a degree of that same peace and joy and love which the Apostles felt in themselves on that day, when they were first “filled with the Holy Ghost”’.⁴⁴ Hence Wesley could issue a warning which was all the more necessary because of the antinomian excesses of some more extreme groups on the fringe of the revival. ‘Let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit, which is separate from the fruit of it. If the Spirit of God does really testify that we are the children of God, the immediate consequence will be the fruit of the Spirit, even “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance”’.⁴⁵ This *caveat* was characteristically balanced by a second: ‘Let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness.’⁴⁶

Wesley regarded the Spirit himself as ‘best of gifts, and that which includes every good gift’.⁴⁷ His last sermon before the University of Oxford in 1744 dealt with ‘Scriptural Christianity’, from [Acts 4:31](#)—‘And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.’ ‘Not that we find any visible appearance here, such as had been in the former instance’ (i.e. Pentecost), Wesley explained: ‘nor are we informed that the *extraordinary gifts* of the Holy Ghost were given to all or any of them; [p. 184](#) such as the gifts of “healing, of working” other “miracles, of prophecy, of discerning spirits, the speaking with divers kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues ([1 Cor. 12:9, 10](#)). Whether these gifts of the Holy Ghost were designed to remain in the Church throughout all ages, and whether or not they will be restored at the nearer approach of the “restitution of all things”, are questions which it is not needful to decide. But it is needful to observe this, that, even in the infancy of the

⁴² *Works*, 7.514,515.

⁴³ *Works*, 8.107.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Sermons*, 2.358.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Notes*, 243 ([Lk 11:13](#)).

Church, God divided them with a sparing hand. Were all even then prophets? Were all workers of miracles? Had all the gift of healing? Did all speak with tongues? No, in no wise. Perhaps not one in a thousand. Probably none but the teachers of the Church, and only some of them ([1 Cor. 12:28–30](#)). It was, therefore, for a more excellent purpose than this that “they were all filled with the Holy Ghost”. It was to give them (what none can deny to be essential to all Christians in all ages) the mind which was in Christ, those holy fruits of the Spirit, which whosoever hath not, is none of his.’⁴⁸

Wesley assumed that the special gifts of the Spirit had been withdrawn after the New Testament period, although he was prepared to keep an open mind about the possibility of their reappearance at a later period or in the final age. But he preferred not to indulge in idle speculation. ‘Without busying ourselves, then, in curious, needless enquiries, touching those *extraordinary* gifts of the Spirit, let us take a nearer view of these his ordinary fruits, which we are assured will remain throughout all ages: of that great work of God among the children of men, which we are used to express by one word, “Christianity”; not as it implies a set of opinions, a system of doctrines, but as it refers to men’s hearts and lives.’⁴⁹

On one occasion Wesley did allow himself to ventilate a hypothesis to account for the disappearance of *charismata* from the early Church. Travelling to Cornwall in 1750, he read an ‘odd book’—*The General Delusion of Christians with regard to Prophecy*.⁵⁰ It was written by John Lacy, one of the French ‘prophets’. While dissociating himself from the eccentricities of the Camisards, Wesley [p. 185](#) commented: ‘I was fully convinced of what I had long suspected: (1) That the Montanists in the second and third centuries, were real, scriptural Christians: and (2) That the grand reason why the miraculous gifts were so soon withdrawn was not only that faith and holiness were wellnigh lost, but that dry, formal, orthodox men began even then to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves, and to decry them all as either madness or imposture.’⁵¹

In his correspondence with Dr. Conyers Middleton, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, Wesley listed the chief *charismata* conferred upon the apostolic Church as: (1) casting out devils; (2) speaking with new tongues; (3) escaping dangers, in which otherwise they must have perished; (4) healing the sick; (5) prophecy, foretelling things to come; (6) visions; (7) divine dreams; and (8) discerning of spirits.⁵² Some of these appear to have been mainly intended for the conviction of Jews and heathens (exorcism and tongues); some mainly for the benefit of believers within the body of Christ (healing, prophecy, discernment of spirits); and all of them in order to preserve the Church from extinction in the era of the great persecutions.

⁴⁸ *Sermons*, 1.92,93; cf. *Notes*, 401 ([Ac 2:38](#)): “The gift of the Holy Ghost’ does not mean in this place, the power of speaking with tongues; for the promise of this was not given “to all that were afar off”, in distant ages and nations; but rather the constant fruits of faith, even righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.’

⁴⁹ *Sermons*, 1.94.

⁵⁰ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, Standard Edition*, ed. N. Curnock, London, Epworth Press, 8 Vols., 1909–16 (Journal), 3.490; cf. *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 4.77.

⁵¹ *Journal*, 3.490.

⁵² *Letters*, 2.327. Middleton had published *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church* (1748), in which he denied that miracles were even performed by Christ and the Apostles, let alone in the early Church. Wesley was able to show, from his detailed grasp of parristics, that such manifestations did not altogether cease until the beginning of the fourth century.

As he rebutted the charge of enthusiasm, Wesley repeatedly denied that he or any who remained in connection with him made any profession of possessing the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. If they had, they might reasonably be expected to substantiate their assertion. 'But this is not our case', Wesley insisted. 'We lay claim to no such thing. The Apostles did lay claim to extraordinary inspiration, and accordingly proved their claim by miracles. And their blessed Master claimed to be Lord of all, the eternal Son of God. Well, therefore, might he be expected to "do the works which no other man did", especially as he came to put an end to the dispensation which all men knew to be of God.'⁵³ The Methodists could hardly be censured for failing to prove what they had never affirmed.

Bishop Warburton arraigned Wesley because he had 'laid claim to almost every apostolic gift in as full and ample a manner as they were [p. 186](#) possessed of old'.⁵⁴ Wesley set out the *charismata* from [Mark 16:17, 18](#) and [1 Cor. 12:8-10](#). 'Five of them are enumerated in the former catalogue; to three of which—speaking with new tongues, taking up serpents, drinking deadly things—it is not even pretended that I lay any claim at all. In the latter, nine are enumerated. And as to seven of these, none has yet seen good to call me in question—miraculous wisdom, or knowledge, or faith, prophecy, discernment of spirits, strange tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.'⁵⁵ That only left exorcism, healing and the performance of miracles. Wesley had little difficulty in discounting such charges. On several occasions he joined with others in praying for the deliverance of those bound by the devil and rejoiced to see an immediate and gracious answer, but as to formal exorcisms he replied: 'I never used them. I never saw them; I know nothing about them.'⁵⁶ Similarly, he had on occasion witnessed physical cures in response to the intercession of faith, but this he distinguished from the apostolic gift of healing.⁵⁷ Had he possessed and exercised the latter, he would hardly have needed to prescribe the homely remedies contained in his *Primitive Physic*.

While Wesley resolutely resisted any suggestion that either he or his followers laid claim to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, he did not exclude the possibility that their exercise might be restored. As a matter of observation, he recorded that they died out when Christianity was recognised as the state religion in the Roman Empire. 'Yet I do not know that God hath anyway precluded himself from thus exerting his sovereign power from working miracles in any kind of degree in any age to the end of the world. I do not recollect any scripture wherein we are taught that miracles were to be confined within the limits either of the apostolic or the Cyprianic age, or of any period of time, longer or shorter, even till the restitution of all things. I have not observed, either in the Old Testament or the New, any intimation at all of this kind. St. Paul says, indeed, once, concerning two of the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (so, I think, the text is usually understood), "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues they shall cease." But he does not say, either that these or any other miracles shall cease till

⁵³ *Letters*, 5.248. George Fleury, Rector of Waterford, had demanded that those who claimed the extraordinary powers of the Spirit should produce commensurate miracles. Cf. *Works*, 8.234,235 for a similar response from Wesley.

⁵⁴ *Letters*, 4.340.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Letters*, 4.345, cf. 2.251.

⁵⁷ *Letters*, 4.344,345; cf. 2.253,254.

faith and hope shall cease also, till they all be swallowed up in the vision of God, and love be all in all.’⁵⁸ **p. 187**

While Wesley was alert to the genuine operation of the Spirit in his time, he was not blind to the possibility of spurious intrusions. In his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766), Wesley referred to the ‘great increase of the work of God’ in London during the year 1762.⁵⁹ He described how, at the height of the revival, ‘enthusiasm broke in’, despite his own warnings.⁶⁰ ‘Two or three began to take their own imaginations for impressions from God, and thence to suppose that they should never die; and these, labouring to bring others into the same opinion, occasioned much noise and confusion. Soon after, the same persons, with a few more, ran into other extravagances; fancying they could not be tempted; that they should feel no more pain; and that they had the gifts of prophecy, and of discerning of spirits.’⁶¹ Wesley was reminded of what he already knew: namely, that Satan sows tares among the wheat of Christ. He realised that this has always been the case, especially when there is any remarkable out-pouring of the Holy Spirit.⁶² As Augustine recognised, the devil is the ape of God and he will invariably endeavour to counteract the work of the Spirit by attempted imitation. Wesley regretted that, as a result, the genuine renewal in the Spirit represented by the mainstream of the Methodist movement was brought into disrepute and became an object of ridicule.⁶³

PURE LOVE

What, then, is the distinguishing feature of the Spirit-filled life? How may the genuine experience be identified and the false exposed? Once again, Wesley points to the fruit of the Spirit as delineated in [Galatians 5:22, 23](#). Whereas the gifts may be counterfeited, the fruit cannot, it is this that marks off the work of God from the delusion of the devil. ‘That proud spirit cannot humble thee before God. He neither can nor would soften thy heart, and melt it first into earnest mourning after God, and then into filial love. It is not the adversary of God and man that enables thee to love thy neighbour; or to put on meekness, gentleness, patience, temperance, and the whole armour of God. He is not divided against himself, or a destroyer of sin, his own work. No; it is none but the Son of God who “cometh to destroy the works of the devil”. As surely, therefore, as holiness is of God, **p. 188** and as sin is the work of the devil, so surely the witness thou hast in thyself is not of Satan, but of God.’⁶⁴

For Wesley, love was the ultimate evidence. In his comments on [John 4:19](#) (‘We love him, because he first loved us’), Wesley affirmed: ‘This is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity. None can say more: why should any one say less, or less intelligibly?’⁶⁵ Such consuming love for God, which leads to corresponding love of man, is

⁵⁸ *Letters*, 2.261.

⁵⁹ *Works*, 11.406.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Works*, 11.407. Wesley quoted with approval the comments of a candid friend.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Sermons*, 1.217,218.

⁶⁵ *Notes*, 915 (I John 4.19).

poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us for this very purpose. 'Entire sanctification'—which Wesley sees as the result of the Spirit's fullness—'is neither more nor less than pure love—love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life.'⁶⁶ Love, as the highest of the Spirit's gifts and the first of the Spirit's fruits, is the *sine qua non* of the Christian life.

Wesley lived at the heart of the most remarkable revival that Britain has ever known. It reflected various characteristics and conveyed many benefits. Wesley himself, however, was in no doubt at all as to what was the clearest proof of its authenticity. 'Many of our brethren and sisters in London, during that great out-pouring of the Spirit, spoke of several *new* blessings which they had attained. But after all, they could find nothing higher than *pure love* ...'⁶⁷

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New International Version—The Bible of Evangelicals

A review article by Robert G. Bratcher

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At long last conservative Protestants in the United States have brought forth a translation that bids fair to establish itself as the Bible for evangelicals. When the Revised Standard Version appeared in 1952, it was subjected to severe criticism by many conservatives and fundamentalists. Several Bibles were eventually published under conservative auspices (e.g. the Amplified Bible in 1965, the Modern Language Bible in 1969, and The New American Standard Version in 1971), but none of them succeeded in taking its place as the standard Bible for evangelicals.

BACKGROUND TO THE TRANSLATION

The effort which finally culminated in this translation began in the 1950s, when committees were appointed by the Christian Reformed Church (in 1956) and the National Association of Evangelicals (in 1957) to study the possibility of a new translation. In 1967 the New York Bible Society assumed responsibility for the project and appointed a committee of fifteen scholars to direct it. In 1968, Dr. Edwin H. Palmer became the full

⁶⁶ *Letters*, 5.223; cf. *Sermons*, 2.448: 'Love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul.'

⁶⁷ *Letters*, 7.57. The reference is to the intensification of the revival in the year 1762.