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JOHN WESLEY AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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The religious education theory and practice of John Wesley merits careful study. In his day, Wesley was a pioneer of popular education, stimulating the intellectual life of the English people and conducting educational enterprises continuously for over fifty years. Gross has concluded that Wesley must be recognized as the only leader of importance in the 18th century England who had real and practical interest in educating children of all classes. So rapidly did this movement for popular education grow that by the middle of the 19th century, to be illiterate carried with it a stigma.¹

In Wesley the eighteenth century found an educator who replaced by intellectual and moral discipline the lacks and poor conditions of public life. He organized the poorest classes into a strict yet kindly orderliness, teaching them self respect as well as reading, writing and arithmetic.²

Body says concerning Wesley's educational guidance, "credit must be given to Wesley for supplying a course of higher education. Wesley may be regarded as the true successor to Erasmus by providing great provincial universities in his day, spreading knowledge and culture throughout the land, breaking down the barriers of privilege and

creed, and making learning accessible to all."³

I. *The Influence of Susanna Wesley in Formulation of Wesley's Educational Outlook*

The source of Wesley's detailed program of how children should be trained was due largely to his remembrance of his mother's management of the numerous children at the Epworth Rectory. Ten of the nineteen children in the Wesley household survived infancy. Susanna Wesley was almost exclusively responsible for their training. She refused to send her children to the local school master, John Hollan, because she felt he was notoriously incompetent and wicked. She looked upon all her children as talents committed to her in trust by God. Although she desired that they should be vested in useful knowledge, it was her "principle intention to save their souls."⁴

She made it her habit to converse one evening a week with each child separately. Thursday evenings were devoted to John. So deeply was the boy impressed by the conferences that at eight years of age he was judged by his father fit to receive holy communion.⁵

Susanna Wesley prepared books suited to her children's needs because she found none

1. John O. Gross. *John Wesley: Christian Educator* (Nashville: The Board of Education, The Methodist Church, 1954), p. 14.

2. Alfred H. Body. *John Wesley and Education* (London: The Epworth Press, 1936), p. 138.

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

4. Eliza Clark, *Susanna Wesley* (Boston: Famous Women Series, 1886), p. 47-48.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

available that met her severe requirements. Among these were: "An Exposition of the Apostles Creed," "An Exposition of the Ten Commandments," and "Religious Conference Written for the Use of My Children."

Later in a letter to her son, Susanna stated her foundation of religious education: "I insist upon conquering the will of children betimes because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual."⁶

Wesley entered a lengthy letter in his journal from his mother. In this letter, Susanna articulated her principles of child rearing. The following points are summarized: (1) Cowardice and fear of punishment often leads a child to lying. To prevent this, a law was made that whosoever was charged with a fault, if he would confess it and promise to amend, he should not be beaten. (2) No sinful action such as lying, pilfering, playing at church, playing on the Lord's day, disobedience, quarrelling should ever go unpunished. (3) No child should ever be beaten twice for the same fault. (4) Every signal act of obedience should always be commended and rewarded. (5) If a child performed any act of obedience or did anything with an intention to please, though the performance was not well, the act should be kindly accepted, and the child with sweetness directed how to do better in the future. (6) That personal property be inviolably preserved and none suffer to invade the property of another in the smallest manner. (7) Promises are strictly observed. Once a gift is bestowed, the right passes away from the donor and cannot be resumed. (8) No girl be taught to work till she can read very well: and then she be kept to her work with the same application and for the same time that she be held to reading.⁷

II. *The Influence of Educators Upon Wesley*

Wesley visited Jena and Herrnhut and saw the Moravian schools in action. Body feels that in Herrnhut, Wesley discovered the practical application of the teaching of Comenius, the Dutch educator. With Comenius, education was not merely a means to eradicate natural sin, but to build up a moral control over man.⁸

Comenius taught first, "whatever is to be known can be taught" (that is, by presenting the object or idea directly to the child, not merely through its form or symbol); second, an orderly progression from the known to the unknown: "Carefully observe the few ideas which they already have, endeavoring to graft what you say upon them"; third, that we should not leave any subject until it is thoroughly understood.⁹ Wesley echoed this when he stated, "Above all, let them not read or say one line without understanding what they say. Try them over and over; stop them short, almost at every sentence and ask them what do you mean by that, read it again. So that, if it be possible, they must pass nothing until it has taken hold upon them."¹⁰ The fourth principle of Comenius was the complete surrender of the child's will to that of the teacher.¹¹ Later this paper will demonstrate this principle in the teaching of Wesley (see footnotes 48-50).

At Herrnhut, Wesley learned that the education of the Moravians was "to amend the will" of their scholars. Moravians taught that if the will is moved the child could learn more in a few hours than otherwise in a few months. Wesley also followed this rule. "A wise parent should begin to break their will the first moment it appears. In the whole act of Christian education . . . there is nothing more important than this . . . the will of the parent is to a little child in the place of the will of God. But in

6. Nehemiah Curnock, editor, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: 1909-1916), III, p. 34. Further reference to this work will refer to the shortened title of *Journal*.

7. *Journal*, III, Summarized from page 34-39.

8. Body, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 49-51.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

order to carry this point, you will need incredible firmness and resolution; for after you have once begun, you must never give way."¹²

It is difficult to agree with Body. The evidence is not conclusive that Wesley was influenced by Comenius. Many of the principles found in Comenius were also used by Susanna Wesley. Perhaps it is best to say Comenius' educational philosophy reinforced the approach to learning laid by Susanna.

Wesley built up his educational scheme of sound religious training combined with perfect control of the children. In the second essential of this doctrine, the perfect control of his pupils, he found much to agree with in the works of Locke, and this he did not hesitate to adopt. The citation of a few passages from John Wesley's work placed along side corresponding passages from *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* will show not only a striking similarity in thought content, but even a marked resemblance in expression. Locke said: "Few of Adam's children are so happy as not to be born with some byass in their natural temper, which it is the business of education to take off or counter balance." Wesley uses almost the same words, "The bias of nature is set the wrong way: education is designed to set it right." Wesley's use of the term "bias," hardly a natural choice for him in this context, seems to indicate considerable indebtedness to the words of Locke, while the whole sentence is a typically Wesley abridgment.¹³

This ought to be observed as an inviolable Maxim, that whatever once is deny'd them (i.e. children), they are certainly not to obtain by crying or Importunity, unless one has a mind to teach them to be impatient and troublesome by rewarding them for it when they are so (Locke).

Let him have nothing he cries for; absolutely nothing, great or small: else you undo your own work (Wesley).

Most Children's Constitutions are either spoiled or at least harmed by Cockering and tenderness . . . Let his bed be hard, and rather Quilts than Feath-

ers. Hard lodging strengthens the Parts; whereas being bury'd every night in Feathers melts and dissolves the Body (Locke).

All their beds have mattresses upon them, not featherbeds, both because they are most healthy, and because we would keep them at the utmost distance from softness and effeminacy (Wesley).

Body ties the two men together (Locke and Wesley). "In spite of the manifest differences between the schemes of education proposed by each man, a study of the parallel passages quoted by each man does leave the strong feeling that Wesley was really indebted to Locke for much of his educational theory."¹⁴

III. *The Educational Background in Which Wesley Ministered*

The schools of John Wesley's day were limited to the upper classes and the few schools in existence fell far below Wesley's standards. Body summarizes Wesley's five-fold indictment on the educational system of his day.¹⁵ (1) Schools were badly situated. Most of them were in great towns of England. The children had too many other children around them who would drive them away from school. (2) Wesley strongly objected to the promiscuous admission of all sorts of children into the schools. This tended to corrupt the other children. Later Wesley followed a policy of expulsion of a boy from Kingswood. He writes in his journal concerning the children and the management, "they all agree that one of the boys studiously labored to corrupt the rest. I would not suffer him to stay any longer under the roof, but sent him home that very hour." (3) Instruction in religion was extremely defective in charity schools. Wesley charged that heathen schools' (Body) masters of the day who were uninstructed in the elements of religion corrupted the faith of young children. (4) Wesley criticized the basic choice of education. The basic subjects of learning, writing and arithmetic were neglected utter-

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

ly to allow greater time for the classics, even "languages." Many of the classical authors who were studied commonly in schools were destructive to religion. (5) There was a total lack of a method of attack. The classics were read without any attempt to grade them according to the difficulty of their subject matter or syntax. This gives a clue as to Wesley's chief educational idea: that religion and education must go hand in hand. He did not believe in the religious education merely because he was a minister, he definitely believed that the two ideas (religion and education) were mutually dependent and that in no uncertain manner, the righteous prospered as the green bay tree mentally while the unrighteous sowed the wind of ungodliness and reaped a whirlwind of perpetual ignorance.

Wesley had a built-in resistance to the boarding schools of that day. He calls them "nurserys of all manners of wickedness."¹⁶ Boys should not be sent to them. Girls should not be sent to large boarding schools, for there they will be taught by other girls (everything that a Christian woman ought not to learn) and will be unable to continue in the fear of God and save their souls."¹⁷ Later Wesley says of boarding schools, "Methodist parents who would send your girls headlong to hell, send them to a fashionable boarding school!"¹⁸

Early Methodists recruited from the underprivileged class were unschooled and, for the most part, made up the ranks of the educationally forgotten men of the eighteenth century. Wesley knew that they must

have an education if they were to be helped. He sincerely believed that while Methodists may be poor, they need not be ignorant. Also, Wesley realized that the results of his revival had to be united with education if results were to be permanent.

The first itinerate preachers in the Methodist church were deprived of educational opportunity. Wesley wanted them to have a broad general knowledge and insisted they spend five hours each day in hard study. In 1745 he drew up a list of books covering practical and doctrinal divinity, philosophy, astronomy, poetry, history, etc. He went so far as to state the success of his preachers was in relation to their use of mental appeal in preaching.

IV. *The Theological Foundation of Wesley's Religious Education*

Some of the major sources for Wesley's concept of religious education are: "A Treatise on Baptism," "On the Education of Children," "On Family Religion," and "On Obedience to Parents." Other sources include a tract which appeared in the Arminian magazine in 1783 called "A Thought on the Matter of Educating Children"; three articles, "A Short Account of the School Near Bristol," "A Plain Account of the Kingswood School," and "Remarks on the State of Kingswood School," and finally a tract entitled, "Serious Thoughts Concerning Godfathers and Godmothers."

Wesley's view of religious education of children grew naturally from his theology. He believed in the depravity of the entire human race, including its youngest members. Both young and old are by nature entirely lacking in God's natural and moral image, and in consequence are entirely alienated from God.

Wesley felt that salvation from sin was the main purpose of life and that conversion begins in repentance, which is the knowledge and conviction of a man's despicable condition. The change of conversion was in man himself, a new birth or regeneration was brought about and man's

16. Wesley: *Works*, Vol. III, p. 34. All references in the footnotes to Wesley's *Works* are from *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.*, New York, 1831, edited by John Emory and published in seven volumes. Although this edition contains Wesley's *Journal*, this study has used the standard edition of *The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.*, London, 1909-1916, edited by Rev. Nehemiah Curnock. This is the most scholarly edition and contains notes and documents not easily accessible elsewhere.

17. *Works*, II, 306.

18. *Journal*, V, 452.

relationship to God was changed when he became justified. The consequences in outward life of the individual became holiness or piety, a growing experience in the life of God as man was nourished by use of the means of grace.

Wesley felt the first step in the redemption of the child is baptism. The new birth, the beginning of the inner change, is reached by adults through baptism only on the condition that they repent and believe the gospel. That spiritual life is reached by children through an outward sign of baptism without this condition, for they neither can repent nor believe.¹⁹ Infants are in a state of original sin and they cannot be saved ordinarily unless this is washed away by baptism. They are included in the covenant with God and capable of solemn consecration to him. This consecration can only be made by baptism. They have the right to come to Christ, to be ingrafted into him and ought to be brought to him for that purpose. Baptism regenerates, justifies and gives the infant all the privileges of the Christian religion. Baptism, then, for Wesley was not only proper, but a sacred duty.²⁰

Wesley taught that through baptism "a principle of grace is infused."²¹ He went on to say, "The work accomplished is so far effectual, that if they die before they commit actual sin, they will be eternally safe."²²

If the child lives, he need never pass again through the door of repentance to faith, unless he does actually commit sin. However, it was natural for children to commit sin, for the principle of nature is still working in the child.

The only way to conserve the innocence of children is to guard them completely against contamination during their helpless years and at the same time build character. As a result, they may resist evil by their own strength when they become of age. This

task is education.²³ Again Wesley states, "The grand end of education is to cure the diseases of human nature."²⁴ "The bias of nature is the wrong way: education is designed to set it right. This, by the grace of God, is to turn the bias from self will, pride, anger, revenge and the love of the world, to resignation, lowliness, meekness and the love of God."²⁵ The work begun by parents is to be continued in the schools by instructors. These instructors should tread in the same steps.²⁶ That is the reason Wesley was so careful to guide parents in the choice of schools for their children.

Also for the same reason, Wesley was concerned for the choice parents made of godfathers and godmothers for their children at baptism. He had anxiety over the neglect of this office (see the brief tract, "Serious Thoughts Concerning Godfathers and Godmothers"). The sponsor, according to the liturgy, "undertakes to see to it that the infant realizes, as soon as he is able, the nature and solemnity of this profession and to influence him to attend worship, learn the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and all things else he should know for the health of his soul that he may be brought to lead a holy life."²⁷

Why did Wesley believe in the application of revival methods to children? He believed, it will be recalled, that anyone who had sinned after his baptism had denied that right and, therefore, must have recourse to a new birth if he is to be saved. Again, "any willful sin, such as lying, profaning the Lord's day or the Lord's name is a denial of baptism as much as sinful affections, and necessitates a new birth."²⁸ We conclude that Wesley felt conversion is universally necessary for children as well as adults. Prince comments on the conversion

23. John W. Prince. *Wesley on Religious Education* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1926), p. 95.

24. *Works*, II, 310.

25. *Works*, VII, 459.

26. *Works*, VII, 460.

27. Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

28. *Works*, I, 160-61.

19. *Works*, V, 38.

20. *Works*, VI, 16.

21. *Works*, VI, 15.

22. *Works*, VI, 14.

experience: "Wesley did not hold that religious education makes conversion unnecessary, but that religious education and conversion supplement each other."²⁹

In the sermon, "On the Education of Children," Wesley states that training a child in the way he should go means to cure the diseases of nature and to train the individual in religion is the same thing.³⁰ In 1891, Charles Kelly attempted to articulate Wesley's educational aim: "To bring God into the lives of men and women; to awaken, sustain and animate within them the blessed consciousness of knowing, loving and serving God."³¹ This definition leaves out the impact of Wesley's unique contribution of discipline, methods or theological results (conversion, holiness, etc.).

Prince comes closer to interpreting the purpose of religious education as expressed by Wesley:

The goal of all work with children at home, in the schools, in the Methodist society is to make them pious, to lead to personal religion, and to insure salvation. It is not merely to bring them up so that they do no harm and abstain from outward sin, nor to get them accustomed to the use of grace, saying their prayers, reading their books, and the like, nor is it to train them in right opinions. The purpose of religious education is to instill in children true religion, holiness and the love of God and mankind and to train them in the image of God.³²

V. John Wesley's Principles of Religious Education

Although Wesley was a leader of popular opinion and did much to advance the intellectual condition of the English people, stressing especially their religious development, it cannot be said that he made any brilliant discoveries in theories or methods of educating children, either religious or secular. Wesley was a product of the

eighteenth century and shared its blindnesses to the meaning of childhood.³³

Several people questioned the right of Wesley to instruct children.³⁴ The charge basically was that Wesley had no children of his own, therefore, could not give proper instruction to others about training the young. To this Wesley answered, "Neither had St. Paul, nor any of the apostles. What then? Were they, therefore, unable to instruct parents? Not so. They were able to instruct everyone that had a soul to be saved."³⁵

1. *A child is a unit for salvation.* Gross views Wesley's concept of salvation: "He never considered a child as a child, but rather as a unit for salvation, bred in sin, apt to evil, and altogether as a 'brand to be plucked out of the burning'."³⁶

2. *Wesley firmly believed that a genuine and deeply religious life is possible in childhood.* It is difficult to say at what age Wesley expected to see holiness manifested in children. Often the ages of children to whom he refers as undergoing religious experiences were not recorded in his journal.³⁷ When he does record ages, they are only approximate. However, it is surprising that Wesley cites several incidents of children of extremely tender age. In his journal of April 8, 1755, he mentions arriving at a home at 5:00 in the afternoon. The young girl (age two and a half) died a few hours before Wesley arrived. He uses the phrase, "Such a child as is scarce heard of in a century" to describe the child. He describes the young girl: "if the brother or sister spoke angrily to each other, or behaved triflingly she either sharply reproved or tenderly entreated them to give over. If she had spoken too sharply to anyone, she would humble herself to them and not rest till they had forgiven her. After her health declined, she was particularly pleased when that hymn was sung, 'Abba Father' and

29. Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

30. *Works*, II, 309.

31. Charles H. Kelly, *Wesley, The Man, His Teaching and His Work* (London: Free Church College, 1891), p. 96.

32. Prince, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Journal*, V, 189.

35. *Journal*, V, 253.

36. Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

37. Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

would frequently sing that line herself: 'Abba Father, hear my cry!'"³⁸

Wesley gave another incident in his journal on June 28, 1746, of a three year old girl who refused to be comforted when she thought she had displeased God. This girl held daily prayers and was teaching other children Christianity.

In his journal of September 16, 1744, Wesley describes the deathbed conversion of a four year old. "I buried near the same place one who was soon finished her course, going to God in the full assurance of faith when she was little more than a four year old."

Prince summarizes Wesley's concept of children's conversion: "They do however, show that Wesley believed it was possible for very young children to be religious, and they also gave some idea of the nature of the religion which, though striking him as unusual in children so young, he would cultivate as early as possible."³⁹

Evidently Wesley did not believe the experiences of children were merely the result of social suggestion. Prince feels that Wesley's reasons for holding to the possibility of mature religious consciousness in children so young lay in his doctrine of grace, that when the Spirit is the Teacher there is no delay of learning.⁴⁰ Later Wesley comments on the same: "If you say, nay, but they cannot understand you when they are so young, I answer, No; nor when they are fifty years old, unless God opens their understanding. And can he not do this at any age?"⁴¹

The children at Kingswood school were affected by the recurring revivals. Those who were saved were between the ages of six to fourteen years of age. Wesley believed himself to be right for spiritual change at approximately age ten. It was at this age that he thought he had sinned

away the "washing of the Holy Ghost" which he had received at baptism.⁴²

3. *Begin Religious instruction when the child has the ability to reason.* Wesley felt that the beginning of conscious religious instruction should coincide with the dawn of reason.⁴³ He says in the same paragraph, "Scripture, reason, and experience jointly testify as that, inasmuch as the corruption of nature is earlier than our instruction can be, we should take all pains and care to counteract this corruption as early as possible."⁴⁴

4. *Educate the child out of the disease of sin.* Wesley felt that to praise children for other than religious worth is but teaching them to value what is unworthy. "They who teach children to love praise, train them up for the devil."⁴⁵ He went on to state, "Children should be commended exceedingly sparingly and then only if with it they teach them that God alone is praise worthy and the source of all that his children possess for which they are commended."⁴⁶ He further comments:

To strike at the root of their pride, teach you children as soon as possible that they are fallen spirits; that they are fallen short of that glorious image of God wherein they were first created; that they are not now as they once were, incorrupt pictures of the God of glory; bearing the express likeness of the wise, good, the Holy Father's Spirit, but more ignorant, more foolish, and more wicked than they can possibly conceive. Show them that, in pride, passion, and revenge, they are now like the devil. And that in foolish desires and groveling appetites they are like beasts of the field.⁴⁷

This practical application of Wesley's conviction of the doctrine of original sin may seem severe to us but was a foundation stone of Wesley's concept of Christian education.

5. *The will of the child must be broken.* Body again quotes Wesley's view of discipline. "In all events, from that age (be-

38. *Journal*, IV, 110-111.

39. Prince, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Works*, II, 431.

42. *Journal*, I, 465.

43. *Works*, VII, 459.

44. *Ibid.*

45. John Wesley, *Instructions for Children*, p. 135.

46. *Works*, II, 313.

47. *Ibid.*

fore the child can speak) make him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it. Let none persuade you it is cruelty to do this, it is cruel not to do it. Break his will now and his soul will live and he will probably bless you through all eternity."⁴⁸ Later Wesley says, "Break their wills that you may save their souls."⁴⁹

Wesley seems to have a severity in his handling of children, especially in his admonition to break the will of the child. However, he advises in several places that discipline of the child should be undertaken, "by mildness, softness and gentleness . . . by advice, persuasion and reproof."⁵⁰ Later he says that needless severity is especially to be avoided, otherwise "it will not be strange if religion stinks in the nostrils of those who were so educated."⁵¹

6. *Pedagogical techniques.* At times Wesley instructed his followers in pedagogical methodology. (a) Speak to them plainly; otherwise speaking to children will be of no avail. (b) Secure their attention before you teach. In speaking to children, one of the most difficult things is the introduction to the sermon. "To draw and fix the attention of the children is one of the greatest difficulties in speaking to them."⁵² (c) Use such words as little children may understand, just as they use themselves. Carefully observe the few ideas which they already have and endeavor to graft what you say upon them.⁵³ "To speak of God and use the words of the assembly's catechism, that 'the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever,' is to employ terms beyond any capacity of little children."⁵⁴ (d) Use illustrations from everyday life. "In speaking of God, interest children first in the sun, in its warmth, its work in causing flowers and grass and

trees to grow. Then point to God as the power behind the sun, causing it to shine, giving it its warmth. From that, it is easy to speak of his power and love, even the smallest things such as a child."⁵⁵ (e) Establish a relationship of love. In Wesley's words, "God loves you. He loves to do you good. He loves to make you happy. Would you then not love him? You love me, because I love you and do you good. But it is God that makes me love you. Therefore, you should love him. He will teach you how to love him."⁵⁶ (f) Next Wesley talks about the tutorial place of education. Repetition or patience was a part of his methodology. "And finally, if teaching is to bear any fruit, teach patiently."⁵⁷ By this he meant that perseverance and diligence must be a part of the person who would teach children. "You must tell them the same thing ten times over or you do nothing."⁵⁸ Wesley adds in the minutes of the conference:

Some children are inconceivably dull, others so giddy and perverse that if the teacher follows his own inclination he will give up in despair. I remember to have heard my father asking my mother, "How could you have the patience to tell that blockhead the same thing twenty times over?" She answered, "Why if I had told him but nineteen times I should have lost all my labors." What patience indeed, what love, what knowledge.⁵⁹

VI. *The Place of Teachers In Religious Education*

In 1783, Wesley published an article, "A Thought on the Matter of Educating Children," in which he strongly maintains that all teachers ought to be religious.

Even religious masters may still be mistaken with regard to the matter of instilling religion unto children. They may not have the spirit of government to which some even good men are stranger. They may habitually lean to this or that extreme, or remissness or of severity. And if they give children too much of their own will, or needlessly

48. Body, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Works*, II, 303.

51. *Works*, VII, 459.

52. *Works*, VI, 464.

53. *Works*, II, 304.

54. *Works*, II, 430-31.

55. Prince, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

56. *Works*, II, 304, 305.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Works*, VII, 91.

59. *Minutes*, I, 68.

and churlishly restrain them; if they either use no punishment at all, or more than is necessary, the leaning either to one extreme or the other, may frustrate all their endeavors. In the latter case, it will not be strange if religion stinks in the nostrils of those who were so educated. They will naturally look on it as an austere melancholy thing; and if they think it necessary to salvation, they will esteem it a necessary evil and so put it off as long as possible.⁶⁰

A religious education can be successful only in the guidance of a teacher in whom is the spirit of true religion, and as for these pretenders in the ranks of religious instructors, they think they have religion, when indeed, they have none at all; and so add pride to their other vices.⁶¹ Gross also states: "The failures resulting from religious teaching could be traced to the failure of the teacher. To be a successful teacher, he held, one must possess the spirit of true religion but in addition, to be a capable classroom manager and instructor."⁶²

Wesley did not hesitate to change teachers. In Kingswood when necessary Mr. Simpson was dismissed and Thomas McGearry, A.M., a young man of twenty-two, took his place. Wesley wrote to him as follows:

Dear Thomas,
You seem to be the man I want. As to salary, we'll have L.30 a year, board, etc., will be 30 more. But do not come *for money*. (1) Do not come at all unless purely to raise a Christian school. (2) Anybody behaving ill, I will turn away immediately. (3) I expect you to be in the school eight hours a day. (4) In all things, I expect you should be circumspect. But you will judge better by considering the printed rules. The sooner you come, the better.

I am your affectionate brother,
John Wesley⁶³

According to Tyerman this was Wesley's last complaint at Kingswood.⁶⁴ He further reports that twelve months afterwards, the school was visited with a gracious outpouring of God's good spirit. In 1786, Wesley

visited the school and found it in excellent order. He went on to state, "It is now one of the pleasantest spots in England. I found all things just according to my desire; the rules being well observed and the whole behavior of the children showing that they were now managed with the wisdom that cometh from above." In 1787 he expressed himself to the same effect as in fact he did to the end of his life. In 1789, September 11, "I went over to Kingswood: sweet recess! where everything now is just as I wish . . . I spent some time with the children; all of whom behaved well: several are much awakened, and a few are rejoicing in the favor of God."⁶⁵

VII. *Outworking of Wesley's Concept of Religious Education*

The term "outworking" implies the practical manifestations or media through which the religious concept of Wesley was expressed. We will not deal with measuring the results of his religious education emphasis, either in the life of individuals or the church.

1. *Kingswood School and Charity School.* Wesley did more than condemn the boarding schools of the day. He set up and ran his own schools. Also he endorsed for Methodist people several private mistresses in schools of the right sort.⁶⁶ The charity schools that Wesley set up as well as the Kingswood school for the higher education of Methodist boys reflected his belief of the primacy of religious education. The Kingswood school was to be a model Christian institution, which would not disgrace the apostolic age.⁶⁷

According to Gross, Wesley vowed he would have an educational program at Kingswood superior in some respects to any other city he had seen at home and abroad. He himself outlined its curriculum and prepared the necessary text books in English grammar, French, Greek, and Hebrew.

60. *Works*.

61. Body, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68.

62. Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

63. *Methodist Magazine*, 1876, p. 324.

64. L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1872), pp. 399-400.

65. *Journal*.

66. *Works*, II, 306.

67. *Works*, VII, 345.

These textbooks which contained 1,729 printed ages, give some idea of the immense amount of labor involved.⁶⁸

The famous Kingswood rule concerning play has risen through the years to plague all Methodists. This rule is: "The student shall be indulged with nothing which the world calls play. Let this rule be observed with strictest nicety for those who play when they are young, will play when they are old." Gross indicates Wesley's memories of play at Charterhouse may have formed this attitude towards recreation. He was an undersized boy and often bullied and beaten for the sport of larger students.⁶⁹ Body, however, attributes this rule to the Moravian influence and Herrnhut, indicating the source as an old German proverb.⁷⁰

2. *The Sunday School Movement.* The Sunday school movement has been called a root out of which England's system of day schools grew. In 1780, Robert Raikes, the founder of the modern Sunday school movement, was eager for a way of dealing with the children released from the restraints of employment on Sunday. The idea of a school on Sunday was suggested to him by Sylvia Bradburn, a wife of one of the early Methodist preachers.⁷¹

Gross feels that it is not fair to intimate that the suggestion made by Sylvia Bradburn originated with her. Neither does he feel it fair to minimize the importance of Robert Raikes. But he feels that the concept of systematic religious instruction of children as reflected in the Sunday school, was a life long concern of John Wesley.⁷² Wesley's work in teaching children in Savannah, Georgia in 1737 is cited frequently as the first Sunday school on the American continent.

Wesley makes several references in his

journal to Sunday schools. July 18, 1784 reads, "Before service, I stepped into the Sunday school which contained two hundred and forty children. I find these schools springing up where ever I go." In the beginning the Sunday school dealt primarily with secular subjects, but later the emphasis was on religious education, especially as the day school grew.

Wesley was interested in the Sunday school movement and contributed to it wherever possible. He said of it, "One of the noblest specimens of charity of which have been set foot in England since the time of William the Conqueror."⁷³ Later, Wesley says of Sunday school:

So many children in one parish are restrained from open sin, and taught a little good manners, at least, as well as to read the Bible. I find these schools springing up wherever I go. Perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of. Who knows but some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?⁷⁴

Finally, Wesley says of the Sunday school, as the movement gained momentum, "It seems these will be one great means of reviving religion throughout the nation. I wonder Satan has not sent some able champion against them."⁷⁵

3. *Sermons and Hymns for Children.* Wesley preached to children on many occasions. He states in his journal, June 13, 1790, "In the evening I preached to the children of our Sunday school, six or seven hundred of whom were present."

Another provision Wesley made for the spiritual and religious training of children was his publication in 1790 of *Forty-Four Hymns for Children*. Many of these were chosen from Charles Wesley's hymnbook, *Hymns for Children and Others of Ripe Years*. In his introduction, he states:

There are two ways of writing or speaking to children; the one is to let ourselves down to them; the

68. Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Body *op. cit.*, pp. 52, 53.

71. Addie Grace Wardle, *History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1918), p. 17.

72. Gross, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

73. Letter to Duncan Wright, cited by Tyerman, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

74. *Journal*, VIII, 3.

75. Letter to Richard Rodda, cited by Tyerman, *op. cit.*, p. 500.

other, to lift them up to us. Dr. Watts has wrote in the formal way and has succeeded admirable well speaking to children as children and leaving them as he found them. The following hymns are written on the other plaine. They contain strong and manly sense, yet expressed in such plain and easy language a child may understand. But when

they do, they will be children no longer, only in years and stature.

This collection of hymns was one of Wesley's last publications and showed that even in his extreme old age, his concern for children had not decreased.

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