

John Wesley: Discipleship, Economic Wisdom, and the Common Good
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Introduction: Why do Wesley and the Methodist movement of the 18th century matter for 21st century?

Context: Attributes of Wesley's worldview and the Methodist movement

- Eschatological vision and community
 - Expect providential increases without complete perfection until the Return of Christ.
 - The Holy Spirit is the power of the future.
- Evangelism and discipleship are inseparable
 - Conversion, holiness and public concern are inseparable.
 - "Faith operating by love"
- Enthusiasm tested by empirical experience and ethical action
 - Amos Yong: "When the Spirit is working, there is a new sociology."
 - The miraculous is part of mission, not entertainment for religious consumers.
- Empowerment: all classes contribute to flourishing
 - Africans, women and the poor were leaders in early Methodism.
 - A person should go as far as their callings, gifts and skills can take them.
- Ecumenical cooperation
 - *Letter to a Roman Catholic: "...Let us endeavor after every instance of a kind, friendly and Christian behavior toward each other...to say all the good we can both of and to each other...with the most endearing expression which is consistent with love and sincerity...and suffer no disposition which is contrary to tender affection...Let us endeavor...to help each other in whatever we are agreed leads to the kingdom...O let you and I (whatever others do) press on to the prize of our high calling!"*
- Ethics of responsive love: no separation of personal/social or theology and morality
 - NO place for slavery
 - NO place for greed or materialism that exploits the poor
- Engagement with life: theologically-informed action: Colossians 3:17-24
- Economics: much more than "earn, save, and give all you can..."
 - Wesley's context and weakness: stable inflation rate and zero-sum perspective
 - Too many learned earning and saving without sacrificial giving!

Integration: Discipleship, economic wisdom and the common good: inseparable facets of a kingdom of God ethos

Discipleship

- Theological foundations: Moravian devotion rooted in justifying grace and a transformed heart for mission; Anglican sensibilities and disciplines reflected in the focus on the Sermon on the Mount and the integration of the foci of the Paul and James in the N.T.
- Sanctification: Christian perfection rooted in the purity of heart, a mind conformed to Christ and maturity in wisdom that integrates Scriptural precepts with empirical realities.
- Public discipleship: the ways of God are best for society even if many are not full believers.

Economic wisdom

- Diligence in labor, stewardship of property and wealth are godly attributes
- Generosity to the poor, disdain for luxury and voluntary sacrifice for the common good are normal Christian ethics
- Systemic evils must be confronted: especially pensions for rich, distillation, the lack of meaningful work and any forms of slavery

The common good – “transforming the manners’ of society

- Wesley, Wilberforce, and others were working on as many as 70 major social initiatives
- All are included in God’s mission for good
- Subsidiarity at work: personal transformation, family vitality, local church (band, class, meeting) evangelization and compassion, flourishing, private businesses serving the public all come before local and national government.

Impact: Legacy, subversion, and renewal

- Halevy Hypothesis: 18th C spiritual and social renewal prevented a secular (French-style, 1789) revolution in England and later minimized the Marxist impact.
- Alas, Methodism lost its anti-slavery and public ethics ethos in 19th C in the USA.

Applications

- With Scriptural understanding informed by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, the tradition of the church, and consensus of the community, there are no unsolvable problems.
- Affordable housing, budget deficits, economic justice...all become possible when people of conscience unite.
- Brian Fikkert: *When Helping Hurts* and *Becoming Whole*: Overcoming poverty and approaching shalom involves transforming both the whole person and the institutions of society.

More information (in addition to the extensive resources of the Acton Institute)

- www.madetoflourish.org
- www.oikonomianetwork.org
- www.theologyofwork.org