

5-1-1965

# An Investigation of the Doctrine of Divine Providence in Relation to Man as Viewed by John Wesley

J. Ronald Herzog

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## Recommended Citation

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF  
DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN RELATION TO MAN  
AS VIEWED BY JOHN WESLEY

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
Western Evangelical Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by  
J. Ronald Herzog  
May 1965

APPROVED BY

Major Professor: Eldon Fuhrman

Cooperative Reader: Kenneth P. Wesche

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"There is scarcely any doctrine in the whole compass of revelation, which is of deeper importance than this."<sup>1</sup> Such is John Wesley's comment concerning the providence of God. Wesley, himself, had a keen interest in providence. In his Journals alone he makes no less than forty-eight direct references to providence along with many inferences. These, along with many more references in his other writings, show a lifelong concern with the subject.

#### I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to make a thorough investigation of Wesley's doctrine of divine providence in relation to man. Then, on the basis of this investigation, the author sought to determine the ultimate end of his doctrine of providence and its operation with regard to man in the light of its ultimate end.

#### II. JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

First of all, the investigator had a strong interest in the subject of divine providence. Upon desiring to make a study in this area, it seemed logical to turn to his own heritage in Wesleyan theology.

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<sup>1</sup>John Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, Thomas Jackson, ed., 3rd. edition, 14 vol., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.) VI, p. 315.

The Evangelical United Brethren Church, of which the author is a member, has its roots within the Methodist Church. Thus, it was determined to go to the founder of the Methodist Church to make this study.

The second reason for this study is related to a rising interest in recent years concerning John Wesley's theology. In 1938 George Croft Cell wrote his book The Rediscovery of John Wesley in which he conceived of Wesley's theology as within the confines of Calvinistic theology.<sup>2</sup> As a result a new interest was created in Wesley that has brought about many new works dealing with his theological thought. In 1946, William R. Cannon published his book, The Theology of John Wesley in which he expounded the thesis that "Wesley's concept of justification was the source and determinant of all the rest of his theology."<sup>3</sup> In addition Leo Cox wrote on Wesley's concept of perfection in which he related it to his doctrines of sin and grace.<sup>4</sup> John Deschner concentrated on Wesley's Christology, noting particularly its priestly functions.<sup>5</sup> L. M. Starkey, Jr., wrote on the work of the Holy Spirit in Wesley's

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<sup>2</sup>George Croft Cell, The Rediscovery of John Wesley. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935.

<sup>3</sup>W. R. Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1946), pp. 29ff.

<sup>4</sup>Leo Cox, "Wesley's Concept of Perfection," unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, State University of Iowa, 1959. Cf. especially pp. 34-118; 299-338.

<sup>5</sup>John Deschner, Wesley's Christology (Dallas: Southern Methodist University, 1960), pp. 150-190.

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theology in which he emphasized the freedom of the Holy Spirit's work.<sup>6</sup>  
And Arthur S. Yates has expounded Wesley's doctrine of assurance.<sup>7</sup>  
These are some of the more prominent examples of renewed interest in John Wesley.

Of the recent books published on subjects in Wesley's theology, no one, to the investigator's knowledge, has concentrated on his doctrine of divine providence, nor has anyone in the past. William Cannon has devoted a chapter and John Deschner has given it some consideration, but other than this, there is a dearth of material. In view of the importance of divine providence in Wesley's mind, as well as its place in Christian theology, this investigator has felt it important to give it serious consideration.

### III. DEFINITION OF PROVIDENCE

To begin a study of divine providence it is felt that a Wesleyan definition of divine providence must be formulated so that a common understanding of the term could be recognized by the reader. First, however, let us view some definitions given by other theologians. Charles Hodge has this to say concerning providence: "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and

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<sup>6</sup>L. M. Starkey, Jr., The Work of the Holy Spirit (New York: Abington Press, 1962), pp. 124ff.

<sup>7</sup>Arthur S. Yates, The Doctrine of Assurance (London: The Epworth Press, 1952), pp. 53-81.



governing all his creatures and all their actions."<sup>8</sup> William Pope defines providence as "the Divine presence in the world as sustaining, controlling, and guiding to their destination all things that are made."<sup>9</sup> The final definition is that of H. Orton Wiley who says divine providence is: "that activity of the Triune God by which He conserves, cares for and governs the world which He has made."<sup>10</sup> Wesley would be in general agreement with each of these definitions. In his sermon on Divine Providence he speaks of God as the "all-wise and all-gracious Being" who is the "Preserver as well as the Creator of everything that exists."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore he states that:

. . . his wisdom and goodness. . . are inseparably united, and continually act in concert with Almighty power, for the real good of all his creatures. His power being equal to his wisdom and goodness, continually co-operates with them. And to him all things are possible: He doeth whatever pleaseth him in heaven and earth, and in the sea, and all deep places: And we cannot doubt of his exerting all his powers, as in sustaining, so in governing, all that he has made.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, divine providence could be defined for Wesley as the all-powerful, all-wise and all-gracious sustaining and governing of everything that exists.

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<sup>8</sup>Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), I, p. 575.

<sup>9</sup>William B. Pope, A Compendium of Christian Theology, 3 vols. (New York: Hunt and Eaton, n.d.), I, p. 437.

<sup>10</sup>H. Orton Wiley, Christian Theology, 3 vols. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1940), I, p. 477.

<sup>11</sup>Works, VI, pp. 315, 317, 428.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 317.

## METHOD OF PROCEDURE

The procedure of investigation that was used was first, to make a thorough study of Wesley's own works, including his Journals, Sermons, Letters, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament and other writings. This was done in order to gather all that he said concerning the subject of divine providence and related subjects. Second, an investigation was made of secondary sources dealing with Wesley's theology to discover what other men have said concerning Wesley's theological thought, particularly with regard to providence. Finally, the material was gathered, studied, evaluated and organized in the following manner: Chapter two deals with Wesley's thoughts on the origin of providence in the nature of God. This chapter proceeds by determining in the following order: the source of religious knowledge, the nature of God as viewed in the light of creation and providence, and the character of God as holy love. A discussion of these subjects was necessary to gain an understanding of how in Wesley's mind God would sustain and govern all things in the light of his nature.

The third chapter entitled "Providence and Man," was divided into three sections. The first section discussed the significance of man. This study was made to determine if man was the central object for Wesley with regard to the ultimate end of providence. The second section dealt with his view concerning the nature of man. By understanding his position at this point, it was sought to determine if there were any limitations placed upon God's government of man.

The final section viewed Wesley's three-fold circle of providence over man. This investigation was made for the purpose of discovering what Wesley meant by the varying degrees of divine providence over man.

Chapter four sought, furthermore, to determine the ultimate end of providence and, then, to discover the operation of providence over man in the light of the ultimate end. This is followed by chapter five the final summary and conclusions.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BASIS OF PROVIDENCE IN THE NATURE OF GOD

A discussion of the relationship of God to his universe and moral beings in Providence leads us first to His essential nature and character. William Cannon would remind us that: "What God does is determined by what God is."<sup>1</sup> It follows, then, that if God acts in an eminent way as governor of the universe, the manner in which Wesley views providence will be largely determined by his doctrine of God. But before we consider what Wesley believed about the divine governor it will be necessary to note his view concerning religious knowledge.

#### I. WESLEY'S APPROACH TO A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Wesley's approach to religious knowledge takes him right to the Creator to find its source. God as the source, however, has not allowed man to know all things. On the contrary, He has limited man's knowledge to that which is necessary to meet his needs. This God has done in order to keep man humble before his Creator, that he might put his confidence in God and resign himself to God's will. Man, on the other hand, has an insatiable desire to know all things because of a universal principle fixed by God in his nature.<sup>2</sup> Such is Wesley's view of this point.

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<sup>1</sup>Cannon, op. cit., p. 153.

<sup>2</sup>Works, VI, pp. 337-338.

### Means of Knowing God

In man's search for knowledge, the question may be asked, how does man come to a true knowledge of God? According to Wesley, there are four ways or means by which God can be known: natural creation, the Bible, Christian tradition and Christian experience. Wesley shies away from any belief that God has stamped an idea of himself on every human soul. In fact, he is emphatic when he says that "no man ever did, or does now, find any such idea stamped upon his soul."<sup>3</sup> Thus, a true knowledge of God must come from without, at least until man has a Christian experience.

Concerning natural creation, Wesley says that, "the world around us is the mighty volume wherein God hath declared himself." The value of nature is in the fact that it is a book written in a universal language for all to read. Its language is things that picture the divine perfections. These things tell us of "the immensity and magnificence, the power and wisdom of its creator." Thus, he says that every part of nature tells us of its God.<sup>4</sup>

Wesley finds a definite limitation in what natural creation can reveal about God. In regard to the limits of natural revelation, his comments are these:

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>John Wesley, A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation: Or a Compendium of Natural Philosophy, 2 vols., 3rd American edition (New York: N. Bangs and T. Bason, 1823), I, p. 313.

I grant, the existence of the creatures demonstratively shows the existence of their Creator. The whole creation speaks that there is a God. But that is not the point in question. I know there is a God. Thus far is clear. But who will show me what that God is.<sup>5</sup>

Seeing the limits of natural creation in showing God, Wesley turns to special revelation as found in the Scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible, for Wesley, is the ultimate in God's revelation of himself. It is the means to which all other means of knowing God must bow. His esteem and use of the Bible are expressed in the following remarks:

To candid, reasonable men, I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God; just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing--the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from Heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In His presence I open. I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights. 'Lord, is it not Thy Word, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God"? Thou "givest liberally, and upraidest not." Thou hast said, "If any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know." I am willing to do, let me know, Thy will.' I then search after and consider

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<sup>5</sup>Works, VIII, pp. 197.

<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, Standard Sermons, E. H. Sugden editor, 2 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1921) I, p. 225-226.

parallel passages of Scripture, 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual.' I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.<sup>7</sup>

Wesley considered the Bible as "a most solid and precious system of divine truth."<sup>8</sup> In verifying its inspiration, he put forth the following argument:

The Bible must be the invention either of good men or angels, bad men or devils, or of God.

1. It could not be the invention of good men or angels; for they either would nor could make a book, and tell lies all the time they were writing it, saying, "Thus saith the Lord," when it was their own invention.

2. It could not be the invention of bad men or devils; for they would not make a book which commands all duty, forbids all sin and condemns their souls to Hell to all eternity.

3. Therefore, I draw the conclusion, that the Bible must be given by divine inspiration.<sup>9</sup>

Since, according to Wesley, the Bible is a book divinely inspired, he is further led to say that it is infallible. In his remarks on the phrase found in II Timothy 3:16 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' he concludes that "all Scripture is infallibly true."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Sermons I, pp. 31-32.

<sup>8</sup>John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament. (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1958), p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>Works, XI, p. 484.

<sup>10</sup>Sermons, I, pp. 249-50.

In conclusion, Wesley says that the Bible is the source of the best knowledge, that of the only true God and Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> It is a means of knowing God of which every part is worthy of Him, for it has neither defect nor excess.<sup>12</sup>

That Wesley did not scorn the place of Christian tradition as a means of religious knowledge is seen in his high regard for the Apostolic Fathers. He considered their writings to be free from any mistaken interpretations of the gospel, because they were greatly assisted by the Holy Ghost. However, the interpretations of the Gospel following the Apostolic Fathers he held in suspicion. Such ideas are clearly seen in the following statement:

The plain inference is, not only that they were not mistaken in their interpretation of the Gospel of Christ; but that in all necessary parts of it, they were so assisted by the Holy Ghost, so to be scarce capable of mistaking. Consequently, we are to look on their writings, though not of equal authority with the Holy Scriptures, . . . yet as worthy of a much greater respect than any composures which have been made since. . . .<sup>13</sup>

The value of traditional evidence is slight in Wesley's thinking, however, because though it speaks loud and clear, it is a great way off and thus makes little impression. On the other hand,

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<sup>11</sup>Works, XIV, p. 252.

<sup>12</sup>Notes, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Works, XIV, pp. 225. For further supporting material see the following reference. John Wesley, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, John Telford editor, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931) II, p. 384-85, 387-88.



internal evidence i.e. Christian experience is an intimately present reality, and can be seen by all persons. Unlike internal evidence, traditional evidence is more vulnerable to criticism and attack.<sup>14</sup>

In order of importance, then, Wesley would place the Bible first, Christian experience second, and Christian tradition last. The particular part that Christian tradition plays as a means of knowing God is that of assisting in understanding Scripture. Wesley, after making a thorough study of the Scripture said: "If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak."<sup>15</sup>

We finally come to a consideration of Christian experience as a means of knowing God. Wesley's theology has been referred to by some as a theology of experience.<sup>16</sup> On this basis men like Henry Bett have gone on to say that for Wesley, experience is the final court of appeal in his doctrine of authority.<sup>17</sup> However, in more recent studies on Wesley new facts have been uncovered to indicate that the place of experience as a source of religious knowledge and authority must be modified. Many scholars now believe the Bible

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 384-85.

<sup>15</sup>Sermons, I, p. 32.

<sup>16</sup>For example see: Cell, op. cit., p. 72, and Ernest Rattenbury, Wesley's Legacy to the World (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1928), p. 84.

<sup>17</sup>Henry Bett, The Spirit of Methodism (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), p. 96.

rather than experience was the basis of his doctrinal formulations.<sup>18</sup>

With the Bible as Wesley's "constant and ultimate source of knowledge and authority,"<sup>19</sup> what part does experience play as a source of religious knowledge? Wesley would answer by saying that experience is the verifier or corroborator of faith and practice, while Scripture is the rule, the Holy Spirit is the guide and reason is the interpreter.<sup>20</sup> Personal experience of that which is promised in Scripture is for him the strongest corroboration of the truth of Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

It may be said in conclusion of this section, that Wesley gave no exclusive emphasis to one avenue of religious knowledge and authority. In nature we are aware of the existence of God, in the scripture we find the truth about God, in Christian tradition, particularly the church fathers, we are helped to an understanding of the truth of God and in religious experience we find a verification of a knowledge of God. Together these four avenues of religious knowledge form the bulwark of Wesley's authority.

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<sup>18</sup>For a further discussion of the recent modifications see: Eldon Fuhrman, The Concept of Grace in the Theology of John Wesley (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, The State University of Iowa, Iowa City, 1963), pp. 13-14, 50-52.

<sup>19</sup>Robert Burtner and Robert Chiles, A Compend of Wesley's Theology (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 17; Works, VII, p. 424.

<sup>20</sup>John Wesley, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, Nehemiah Curnock editor, 8 vols, (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), V, pp. 493-495; Sermons, II, p. 103.

<sup>21</sup>Letters, II, p. 383-84.

The Relationship Between Reason and a Knowledge of God

Having considered the sources of a knowledge of God, the question arises as to what is the relationship between reason and religious knowledge? First it must be understood that Wesley did not decry reason by saying that reason has no place in religion. To him "religion and reason go hand in hand," thus "irrational religion is false religion."<sup>22</sup> He is careful also not to overvalue reason by declaring it an infallible guide into all truth and all virtue. This is the mistake of those especially who renounce the Scriptures as God's word.<sup>23</sup> For Wesley there is a medium ground on which to view the place of reason in religion as is seen below.<sup>24</sup>

Wesley in defining reason sees it in three different ways, that of apprehension, judgment and discourse. By apprehension, he is thinking of a thing as it is conceived in the mind. By judgment, he is thinking of a thing as it is related to things conceived previously as to whether they agree or disagree. And by discourse he is thinking of the movement "from one judgment to another."<sup>25</sup>

Since reason does have a place in religion according to Wesley, it remains to be seen what reason can and cannot do. First, as to what it can do, Wesley believed that reason is the channel through

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<sup>22</sup>Letters, V, p. 364.

<sup>23</sup>Works, VI, p. 351.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

which revelation can be understood by man. By reason, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scripture can be understood concerning its teaching about "the being and attributes of God" as well as "his method of dealing with the children of men."<sup>26</sup> Second, as to what reason cannot do, Wesley says it cannot develop a theology outside of revealed revelation. Reason can through the visible things of creation acknowledge the existence of an eternal, powerful Being, but it cannot acquaint us with Him.

As we know there is an Emperor of China, in whom yet we do not know; so we knew there was a king of all the earth, yet we knew Him not. Indeed we could not by any of our natural faculties. By none of these could we attain the knowledge of God. We could no more perceive Him by our natural understanding, than we could see Him with our eyes.<sup>27</sup>

According to Wesley it takes a God-given faith which can enlighten reason to explore "the deep things of God," plus the work of his Spirit to reveal them to us.<sup>28</sup> Reason, then, cannot produce faith which is given by God, nor can it produce hope or love of God, says Wesley. The hope referred to here is a spiritual hope which "springs from Christian faith." The love of God is that which flows from faith and hope. A faith that perceives "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," in giving his own son that we might have eternal life, and a rejoicing in hope of the glory of God."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., VII, p. 197-98.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., VI, pp. 355-360.

In conclusion, then, reason is a necessary ingredient to a knowledge of God. Though it is not the source of religious knowledge, it is the means of understanding religious knowledge as it comes through revelation.

#### The Relationship Between Faith and a Knowledge of God

The senses of feel, taste, smell, hearing and sight, says Wesley, are avenues through which a knowledge of the visible would come. Without them nothing can be known concerning physical things. The senses, however, can only supply a knowledge of the visible world, beyond this, they cannot go. They can furnish no knowledge of the invisible world. According to Wesley, "the wise and gracious Governor of the worlds, both visible and invisible, has prepared a remedy for this defect. He hath appointed faith to supply the defect of sense."<sup>30</sup> Thus Wesley goes on to say:

Sense is an evidence of things that are seen; of the visible, the material world, and the several parts of it. Faith, on the other hand, is the "evidence of things not seen;" of the invisible world; of all those invisible things which are revealed in the oracles of God.<sup>31</sup>

He leaves no room for the oracles of God found in Scripture to be perceived outside of faith. To the man without faith they are a "dead letter."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Works, VII, pp. 231-32.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

In particular, faith is an evidence of the existence of the soul, of other orders of spirits, namely angels, and of the existence of the Lord Jehovah.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, our senses which fail to grasp the invisible world cannot grasp the eternal world either. To know anything concerning the world beyond physical death, faith must once again supply the information. Says Wesley, faith "draws aside the veil which hangs between mortal and immortal beings."<sup>34</sup>

Here, faith provides knowledge concerning the immediate end of the righteous as well as the unholy after death. In addition, it reveals the future events such as the second coming of Christ, the general judgment and the kingdom of God.<sup>35</sup>

It must be concluded, then, that faith is basic to a perception of the knowledge of God. Without it a true knowledge of God cannot be known. Thus it is seen that through the Bible, natural revelation, Christian tradition, and Christian experience a knowledge of God is received, and through faith that has a rational basis a knowledge of God is perceived.

## II. THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD

Upon considering Wesley's approach to the knowledge of God,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-33.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 233-34.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 234-35.

we turn now to his views concerning the nature and character of God. In seeking to understand the true nature of God he goes directly to some form of revelation. He accepts the fact of God and makes no attempt to prove the existence of God from a philosophical approach. Neither does he involve himself in speculative theology concerning the nature of God.

Wesley's discussion of the Trinity reveals his aversion to speculative theology. In his discussion of the Trinity, he clearly states that it is a fact revealed in Scripture. The manner of its existence, however, he says is not revealed, and since it is not revealed he prefers not to speculate on the subject.<sup>36</sup>

Even though Wesley limited himself to religious considerations in his doctrine of God, he still considered it necessary to explain God's relationship to the universe, including his control over all his works. Thus, on the basis of assuming the existence of God and accepting by faith his power and goodness, he proceeded to discuss the nature of God in the light of creation and providence.

#### The Nature of God Revealed in Creation

Wesley says that God revealed himself in nature under a two-fold character as Creator and Governor. These two aspects of God's character are not inconsistent with each other; however, they are distinct.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Works, VI, p. 204.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., X, p. 361.

As Creator God acted according to his own sovereign will. As a result, heaven and earth and all things therein were created "according to his own good pleasure."<sup>38</sup> Thus he elaborates by saying that the beginning, duration in time, and place of the universe are determined by his sovereign will. Also it is true concerning the number of stars, the component parts of the universe and the magnitude of every atom and every heavenly object. Furthermore, he created the earth with all its furniture both animate and inanimate.

Man himself was created by a sovereign act whereby he was made an embodied spirit along with a spiritual nature endued with understanding, will, and liberty. Likewise God has determined the times and bounds of every nation, the time, place and circumstance for every new born individual, the body of each individual whether weak or strong, sick or healthy, and various degrees of understanding and knowledge. However, at this point he recognizes that the individual environment acts as a secondary cause.<sup>39</sup>

God, therefore, in creating has acted with the eternal right to make what and when and how he pleases, as well as disposing of what he has made in any way that he desires.<sup>40</sup> In conclusion, Wesley says that "as Creator, He could not but act according to his own sovereign will."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 361-62.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>40</sup>Works, X, p. 81.

<sup>41</sup>Journal, VI, p. 155.



For Wesley, then, God's creation exhibited His design and purpose with no part being of itself evil. Hence, God was able to pronounce all of creation as very good.<sup>42</sup> It was very good, because each part was good, that is, "suited to the end for which it was designed; adopted to promote the good of the whole, and the glory of the great Creator."<sup>43</sup>

If everything that God created was very good, according to Wesley, then the question may well be asked, how does he explain the presence of evil in the universe? To begin with, he readily admits its presence both physical and moral. In making this recognition, however, it would appear that he jeopardizes the goodness of God. Wesley, however, has no fear at this point because he safeguards the goodness of God by saying that the world was in a different state of existence than it is presently.<sup>44</sup> When God originally created the universe, it was without blemish or defect. There was no corruption or destruction in the inanimate creation. Neither was there death in the animate creation nor its forerunners,--sin and pain.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, evil was not in the original nature of things. Thus Wesley could conclude by saying that "He (God) needs none of us to make apologies, either for him or for his creation."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Works, VI, p. 206.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>45</sup>Works, VI, p. 213.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

With regard to the Trinity, Wesley says the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were active in creation.<sup>47</sup> To the Father he attributes creation,<sup>48</sup> to the Son he ascribes the work of creation,<sup>49</sup> by the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup> To know precisely the role Christ played in creation is difficult to explain because Wesley does not elucidate clearly on the subject. In his explanation of John 1:1, it would seem that Christ was the instrument of the Father's creative work.<sup>51</sup> However, Wesley notes in I Cor. 8:6 that the creative work was first ascribed to the Father and then to the Son.<sup>52</sup> Thus it remains simply to leave the problem unresolved.

Thus, Wesley sees God the creator revealed as a sovereign power. He is the sole source of existence through which all things receive their nature, function, and end. These are assigned according to his will which is absolutely good. Also, Wesley makes affirmation of certain attributes of God as creator. These attributes are: his eternity, the existence of God whose duration "had no beginning" and "which will have no end;"<sup>53</sup> his wisdom and knowledge, "his appointing the ends of all things" and "the means which he hath prepared and made

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<sup>47</sup>Notes, John 1:1, 17:10.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., Rev. 16:13, Matt 6:9, James 1:17.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., Heb. 2:7, 1:2.

<sup>50</sup>Sermons, II, pp. 227-228.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 302.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 608.

<sup>53</sup>Works, VI, p. 189.

conducive to those ends;"<sup>54</sup> his omnipotence, that there are no "bounds to his power;"<sup>55</sup> his omnipresence, his existence "through infinite space;"<sup>56</sup> his omniscience, his presence in "every part of the universe;"<sup>57</sup> his foreknowledge, "all time, with everything that exists therein, is present with him at once;"<sup>58</sup> and his unity, which expresses God to be the one and only true God.<sup>59</sup> Thus, Wesley establishes the creatorship of God which forms the basis for saying that God is also governor.

#### The Nature of God Revealed in Providence

Not only does God reveal himself as sovereign creator, but he also reveals himself as Preserver. Wesley is convinced that God the creator is imminently present throughout His whole universe to sustain it by His power. He who is omnipresent knows everything He has made, even every atom, and preserves it moment by moment, otherwise it would cease to exist.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, things do not happen in the universe by mere chance. In a letter written on January 2, 1781, to Ann Bolton, Wesley states:

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., VII, p. 265.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 265-266.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 226-27.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., VIII, p. 264.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 315-16.

It is a great step towards Christian resignation, to be thoroughly convinced of that great truth, that there is no such thing as chance in the world; that fortune is only another name for Providence. An event, the cause of which does not appear, we commonly say, comes by chance. O no; it is guided by an unerring hand, it is the result of infinite wisdom and goodness.<sup>61</sup>

Thus all things and all events are under God's management,<sup>62</sup> even the minutest of human existence.<sup>63</sup> Nature itself is still under God's absolute control, even though it suffers under the curse of sin.<sup>64</sup> The natural phenomena are all manifestations of God's will. This concept is brought out clearly in a treatise entitled Serious Thoughts Occasioned by the Late Earthquake at Lisbon in which he attributes all the destruction of life and property to God who judges the world.<sup>65</sup> According to Wesley, "True philosophy ascribes everything to God."<sup>66</sup> However, he makes one exception, he does not ascribe our own sin to God's providence.<sup>67</sup>

Wesley in his sermon On Divine Providence states his belief that men everywhere and in all ages have had some concept of divine

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., XII, p. 484.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 313.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., XI, p. 224.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., VII, p. 387.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., XI, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., V, p. 476.

providence.<sup>68</sup> However, in most cases it is dark, confused and imperfect.<sup>69</sup> If man is to ever have a clear, consistent and perfect account of God's governing of the world, it is necessary to go to the Scriptures. For in the Scriptures we have the "history of God" which the inspired writers preserved in an unbroken, connected chain from beginning to end. And as the whole book has revealed life and immortality so it has also revealed Immanuel, God with us, and his kingdom ruling over all.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, Wesley believed that God governs in a benign and gracious manner. Thus he states:

And is the Creator and Preserver of the world unconcerned for what he sees therein? Does he look upon these things either with a malignant or heedless eye? Is he an Epicurean God? Does he sit at ease in the heaven without regarding the poor inhabitants of earth? It cannot be. He hath made us. . . . and he cannot despise the work of his own hands. . . . On the contrary, he hath expressly declared, that as his 'eyes are over all the earth,' so he 'is loving to every man, and his mercy is over all his works.' Consequently, he is concerned every moment for what befalls any of the children of men. It is hard, . . . to comprehend this; . . . considering the complicated wickedness, and the complicated misery, which we see on every side.<sup>71</sup> But believe it we must, unless we will make God a liar; . . .

God's infinite wisdom is continually employed to see that all the affairs of creation operate for the good of his creatures. In this

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 313.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>71</sup>Works, VI, p. 317.

way his wisdom and goodness go hand in hand and are in concert with Almighty power to bring about the real good of all his creatures.<sup>72</sup>

Though God has sufficient power and wisdom to do all things, yet he cannot deny himself, says Wesley. Therefore, what he has done in his prior work of creation he cannot oppose in his providential acts. If he could, he would destroy all sin with its attendant pain in a moment, and thus abolish wickedness out of his creation. But because he created man in his own image by giving him a spirit endued with understanding will, and liberty, he cannot. To do so, he would have to over-rule man's free moral agency, the very quality that makes him man. Thus God has purposely limited himself with regard to man, whereas, on the other hand, he is free to use inanimate and animate objects as he pleases. His wisdom is revealed, therefore, in the fact that he chooses to govern man as man and not as a stick or stone.<sup>73</sup>

Man is made capable of virtue points out Wesley, by being given freedom. True, admits Wesley, he is also capable of vice. But for God to have destroyed the alternative of vice, he would also destroy the possibility of virtue.<sup>74</sup> In this way man remains different from all other created things, inanimate and animate, in that he can oppose God's will and so create numerous irregularities in the divine

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Works, VI, p. 318.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

government.<sup>75</sup>

At this point, the relationship between general and particular providence in Wesley's thought needs to be considered. His emphasis is obviously upon the latter. For him there is no providence at all if we exclude a particular providence.<sup>76</sup> He did, however, affirm a general providence in which God acts in the common course of nature by general laws, but he never felt that God would not or could not suspend the laws of nature if he was pleased to do so. If God saw fit to suspend a law of nature to preserve the life of his servants, he would. If necessary he could cause gravitation to cease to operate.<sup>77</sup> Thus, Wesley affirmed his belief in miracles.

Such a concept of providence Wesley felt was true because the Bible taught it.<sup>78</sup> He further argued that it is absurd to hold to a general providence and not to a particular when he says:

What is a general, of whatever kind it be, that includes no particular? Is not every general necessarily made up of its several particulars? . . . Every whole must, in the nature of things, be made up of its several parts; insomuch that if there be no parts, there can be no whole.<sup>79</sup>

Having considered the role of Christ in creation, it remains to consider what role Christ plays in providence. Wesley, not only

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

<sup>76</sup>Journal, VI, p. 326.

<sup>77</sup>Works, VI, p. 322.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

viewed Christ as actively involved in creation, but also the same is true with regard to providence. He says that Christ "sustains all things in being. . . . He is the cement, as well as support, of the universe."<sup>80</sup> Were he to withdraw His hand for a moment, the creation would fall into nothing.<sup>81</sup>

In conclusion, the nature of God as sovereign is revealed in his governing of inanimate and animate objects as he pleases. In contrast, his wisdom is revealed in His governing of men without overruling his free will. With regard to divine providence several points have been brought out which are: it is restricted by the sovereign act of creation, it extends to the minutia of the universe, it excludes chance, it is revealed in a clear, consistent, and perfect manner in Scripture, it is extended in a benign and gracious manner for the good of His creatures, it is both general and particular, and it is administered by Christ. Such are Wesley's views on these matters.

#### The Character of God as Holy Love

We come now to the consideration of Wesley's thoughts concerning the moral character of God as Holy Love. It is in His moral character that we find the basis of his government and that which defines the operation of providence. The revelation of God as holy love is seen in the law and the redemption found in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>80</sup>Notes, Col. 1:17.

<sup>81</sup>Works, VI, p. 426.



With regard to God's holiness, Wesley tells us that the law is an incorruptible picture of the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity.

It is He whom, in His essence, no man hath seen, or can see, made visible to men and angels. It is the face of God unveiled, God manifested to give, and not to destroy, life--that they may see God and live. It is the heart of God disclosed to man.<sup>82</sup>

This law, then, which reveals the character of God, is, as Wesley states, the moral law<sup>83</sup> which is unchangeable and thus reveals the unchangeableness of God.<sup>84</sup> This unchangeable law is a copy of the eternal mind or a transcript of the divine nature which is holy, just, and good.<sup>85</sup> As indeed it is holy, it is the express image of God, who is essential holiness.<sup>86</sup>

Wesley in referring to divine holiness, at one point considered it as a mere attribute. However, in an extended discussion of the subject, it is seen to hold a more exclusive position in his thought. There are two words in the original that are very different in meaning, but are both translated holy.<sup>87</sup> The one means merciful while the other implies much more. The latter, he says:

<sup>82</sup>Sermons, II, p. 45.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 47-48.

<sup>87</sup>The two words in order of their presentation are ἐλεος and ἔγριος.

is the sum of all praise, which is given to the almighty Creator. . . .

This word properly signifies separated, both in Hebrew and other languages. And when God is termed holy, it denotes that excellence, which is altogether peculiar to himself; and the glory flowing from all his attributes conjoined, . . . whereby he is, . . . in as incomprehensible manner separate and at a distance, not only from all that is impure, but from all that is created. God is separate from all things. He is, and works from himself. . . . Hence it is that holy and holiness mean the same as God and Godhead. And as we say of a king, his majesty, so the Scripture says of God, his holiness (Hebrews XII:10).

This holiness is often styled glory: often his holiness and glory are celebrated together, . . . for holiness is covered glory, and glory is uncovered holiness. The Scripture speaks abundantly of the holiness and glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And hereby is the mystery of the Holy Trinity abundantly confirmed. That is also termed holy which is consecrated to Him, and to that end separated from other things. And so is that wherein we may be like God, or united to Him.<sup>88</sup>

In viewing the character of God as divine love, Wesley says that He is not only a God of unblemished justice and truth, but a God of mercy.<sup>89</sup> As the law revealed the holiness of God it also reveals the love of God. This Wesley believes when he states:

this law, which the goodness of God gave at first, and has preserved through all ages, is, like the fountain from whence it springs, full of goodness and benignity it is mild and kind, it is as the Psalmist expresses it 'sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.' . . . wherein are hid all the treasures of the divine wisdom, and knowledge, and love.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Notes, Rev. 4:8.

<sup>89</sup>Works, VII, p. 266.

<sup>90</sup>Sermons, II, p. 51.

Equal with the glory of God's holiness is the glory of God's love.<sup>91</sup> John was commenting on the statement "God is love," refers to love as God's reigning attribute, which "sheds an amiable glory on all His other perfections."<sup>92</sup>

It is evident, in noting Wesley's comments on God's holiness and love, that he does not restrict himself to precise theological terminology. Neither does he keep a clear distinction between nature and attribute. Irregardless, it is clear in his reference to holiness and love as attributes of God that they are underlying other moral attributes. In that sense they must be regarded as playing a more profound role in the nature of God, that of His moral nature.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Wesley approached the subject of religious knowledge, whose object is God, by indicating four sources, that of natural creation, the Bible, Christian tradition and Christian experience. Of these four, the Bible is the ultimate source through which the others are evaluated. However, the sources of creation, tradition and experience are valuable in giving a clearer understanding and verification of Biblical truth. With regard to God's providence, it becomes evident that Wesley has based his doctrine particularly on the Scriptures of

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., I, p. 436.

<sup>92</sup>Notes, I John 4:8.

the Old and New Testaments. This doctrine, however, was formulated by the process of his reason as it gave understanding to the Scriptural teaching that is perceived by faith.

In Wesley's discussion of the nature of and character of God, he stays away from speculative theology and concentrates on revealed theology. Out of revelation, he sees God as a sovereign Creator. God, the Sovereign Creator, created all things as he pleased according to his own divine will. This creation he pronounced as very good, and though evil, both moral and physical, be present in it, it is only because what God created is not as it originally was when first created.

God the Sovereign Creator, then, becomes the basis upon which Wesley sees God as Preserver and Governor of all things. As preserver, he is imminently present to sustain all things by his power so that nothing happens in the universe by chance. This includes all of nature, though it suffers under the curse of sin, as well as man. Thus, he governs nature as a sovereign ruler, controlling it as he pleases. But man he governs as a gracious and impartial judge. He will not over-rule his liberty, so that man can create irregularities in divine government. Furthermore, Wesley lays strong emphasis upon particular providence, indicating that he governs nature by other than by general laws. If necessary God will perform miracles to preserve the life of his servants. Thus it is beginning to emerge that man may well be the object in the ultimate end of providence.

The role of Christ in Creation is undefined except to say that

He was actively involved in some way. However, the role of Christ in providence is more clearly spelled out. He not only is the cement, but the support of the universe.

In a further analysis of Wesley's concept of the nature of God, he affirms His character as that of holy love. As such, it can be concluded that He will govern man in a just and gracious manner.

## CHAPTER III

### PROVIDENCE AND MAN

Because of the frequent references to man in Wesley's doctrine of providence it is necessary to note its operation with regard to man. In order to properly understand its operation some of his basic concepts of man must be considered. First, the significance of man must be determined. Secondly, it will be necessary to consider the nature of man. Finally, it will be necessary to view the three-fold circle of providence over man.

#### I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAN

Wesley, in considering the significance of man in creation, sets him in contrast to nature. First, he views his magnitude, and second, his duration.

As to man's magnitude, he says, what is a single individual as compared to all the inhabitants of Great Britain, or all of Great Britain to the inhabitants of the whole world? Furthermore, he asks, what is the magnitude of the earth as compared to the mass of matter contained in the solar system, or the solar system to the mass of matter contained in the numberless comets? Beyond this, he asks what is the magnitude of the earth as compared to the mass of matter contained in the solar system, or the solar system to the mass of matter contained in the numberless comets? Beyond this, he asks

again, what is even the space contained in the orbit of a comet as compared to the space occupied by the fixed stars? Wesley also says that whether the bounds of creation extend beyond the fixed stars nobody knows. However, we do know that the bounds of creation are fixed, and what, he asks, are the bounds of creation as compared to infinite space filled by God? In conclusion, then, man seen in the light of the vast universe is insignificant in the eyes of reason.<sup>1</sup>

If man is insignificant as to size, Wesley questions then, is he significant in his duration? He answers by saying that at the time of Moses the divine standard of fulfillment for a man's life was three score years and ten. If, therefore, a man fulfilled the divine standard, or even lived fourscore years this is a poor pittance of duration as compared to men of old such as Methuselah who lived nine hundred and sixty nine years. And, yet, what is the duration of Methuselah's life as compared to the duration of an angel or the mountains or even the earth? Furthermore, what is the duration of an angel as compared to the duration between the beginning of an angel to unbeginning eternity? Finally, how can we possibly compare finite and infinite duration? Any comparison falls short and so, asks Wesley, what is the duration of man compared to eternity?<sup>2</sup>

If, then, man is little as to his size and duration, it is no wonder, states Wesley, that a man of reflection should sometimes fear

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<sup>1</sup>Works, VII, pp. 168-69

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 169-70.

the possibility that the Governor of the universe should disregard him.<sup>3</sup> However, he points out that the possibility of this fear could be cured if man would simply realize he is not merely a material body but that he is much more. His real essence is that of an immortal spirit. He is a spirit made in the image of God, and as such, is of infinitely more value than the whole earth; of more value than the sun, moon, and stars, put together; yea, than the whole material creation. To establish his value, he says that man is of a higher order than all of creation, and also more durable. In fact he is eternal. Though the material world will perish, the soul of man will endure forever. The clinching proof of man's value, however, is revealed in the fact that God gave his only Son, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That this Son of God, equal to the father, should take the form of man and become a servant, then die on a cross there to bear our sins that we might have eternal life, is all the proof necessary to prove God cares for man.<sup>4</sup>

## II. THE NATURE OF MAN

Having determined that man is a special object of God's care, it remains next to consider what is the nature of man. Wesley recognized that man has a body, but, according to him, he is more than this; he is a spirit.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 171-72.



### Man as a Body

The body of man is a machine, "fearfully and wonderfully made." As particles of earth are made to cohere, they are in an unknown way lengthened into fibres; these in turn are wrought into membranes which are wrought into arteries, veins, nerves and glands; these, then, contain various fluids circulating throughout the whole machine. Such is the body of man.<sup>5</sup>

The circulation of fluids in the body is made possible by a considerable quantity of air brought in by the lungs. Every particle of air is accompanied by a particle of ethereal fire as well as a particle of water, so that air, fire and water are received into the lungs together. In the lungs the fire is separated from the air and water and mingled with the blood, while the air and water are thrown out. "Thus, the human body is composed of all the four elements, duly proportioned and mixed together, the last of which constitutes the vital flame, whence flows the animal heat."<sup>6</sup>

Wesley's scientific explanation of man's physical makeup may be attenuated, but the facts remain that he believes him to have a material body. Besides being made up of four strange elements, however, man is something more, which will now be considered.

### Man as a Spirit

Wesley says he finds within himself a different nature, which

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

is nothing akin to the four elements. First, he finds something within him that thinks. This something proceeds by a process of first perceiving an object by the senses, and then forming certain ideas concerning them. It then judges concerning them or sees whether things agree or disagree with each other. Finally it reasons concerning them, that is, it

infers one proposition from another. It reflects upon its own operations; it is endowed with imagination and memory; and any of its operations, judgment in particular, may be subdivided into many others.<sup>7</sup>

Where this thinking principle is lodged, Wesley does not know. However, from his own experience, he thinks it is in some part of the head even though he cannot determine its exact location.<sup>8</sup>

This inward principle not only thinks, but it is capable of determining its own actions. It can express love, hate, joy, sorrow, desire, fear, hope, as well as other inward emotions which are the springboard of action.<sup>9</sup>

Wesley concludes that this inward principle is the soul. In asking the question as to "What is the soul?" he argues that it is not matter for the reason that matter is passive. Only the Almighty Spirit, the source of all the motion in the universe can move it. "But my soul," says Wesley, "has from Him (God) an inward principle of motion, whereby it governs at pleasure every part of the body."

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., II, p. 226.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 226-27.

There is one exception, however, it does not govern those motions which are absolutely necessary for life. These are the action of the lungs, heart, arteries and blood, which is "a marvelous instance of the wise and gracious providence of the great Creator."<sup>10</sup>

Wesley in speaking further of the soul, said that it is made up of one other property, that of liberty. This he emphatically said is not a property of the will. It is capable of directing all the faculties of the soul as well as the body. "It is a power of self determination," which extends to our words and actions in general with few exceptions. Thus, a man has "liberty of contradiction," that is, a power to do or not do. Also he has "liberty of contrariety," which is a power to act in one way or the contrary. Therefore, bodily motions can be performed at ones pleasure as well as decisions of the mind to choose good or evil. These decisions of the mind, however, are not absolutely performed at ones pleasure because of the corruption of human nature, yet, through the grace of God, they are possible.<sup>11</sup>

The aspect of liberty brings up the question as to what Wesley believed concerning predestination. It must, first, be said that he believed in predestination, except when it is thought of as a sovereign decree of God in determining unconditionally the eternal destiny of man. God does not arbitrarily elect some men to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. To argue his point he sets free will in

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., X, pp. 232-33.

contrast to reprobation and shows how the wisdom, justice, and mercy of God are made known through the whole economy of man's salvation by choice and not by determinism. First, the wisdom of God is manifested when God, desiring that all men should be saved, seeks to persuade rather than force every man to accept or reject his salvation.

Secondly, the justice of God is revealed in the fact that man has the capacity to choose good or evil. If he has not this choice, he cannot be judged "for not doing what he never could do, and for doing what he never could avoid." Thirdly, the love of God is displayed when he has regard for all men rather than just a part. If God by a sovereign act could save all men, but instead condemned a part to destruction, where would the phrase "his mercy is over all his works," be evident?<sup>12</sup>

If man is saved or condemned on the basis of his free choice, then, is the attribute of sovereignty denied in God? Wesley says, no! The sovereignty of God appears:

(1) In fixing from eternity that decree touching the sons of men, 'He that believeth shall be saved: He that believeth not shall be damned.' (2) In all the general circumstances of creation; in the time, and place, the manner of creating all things; in appointing the number and kinds of creatures, visible and invisible. (3) In allotting the natural endowments of men, these to one, and those to another (4) In disposing the time, place and other outward circumstances (as parents, relations) attending the birth of every one. (5) In dispensing the various gifts of his Spirit, for the edification of his Church. (6) In ordering all temporal things, as health, fortune, friends, everything short of eternity. But in disposing the eternal states of man. . . it is clear, that not sovereignty alone, but justice, mercy, and truth, hold the reins. The Governor of heaven and earth, the I am, over all, God blessed for ever, takes no step here but as these direct, and prepare the way before his face.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., X, p. 233-35.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

Having expressed his objections to the extreme view of predestination, Wesley stated his own. He believed election to mean one of the two following things. First, it is a divine appointment of some men to a particular task in the world which is not only personal, but absolute and unconditional. Thus, Cyrus was elected to rebuild the temple, and St. Paul, with the twelve, to preach the gospel. Such an election, however, is not seen in any necessary connection with eternal happiness. One who is elected in this sense may still be lost eternally. Judas is an example, He was elected to preach the gospel, and yet he was lost.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, some men are elected to eternal happiness. However, this election is conditional as well as the reprobation opposite thereto. The eternal decree still stands; "He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned." God will not change it, and man cannot resist it. Thus all true believers are the elect, as well as all who remain in unbelief are reprobates, that is, unapproved of God, with no ability to discern the things of the Spirit.<sup>15</sup>

Such was Wesley's view of predestination. To him, any other view is absurd in that it would have contradicted the image of God within man.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., II, p. 210.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 318.

Through the significance of man in Wesley's thinking having been considered, it can be seen that for him man is a special object of divine providence. Since he is immortal, his end is to be different from that of the rest of mortal creation. This end he takes into consideration in his doctrine of providence as seen by his special three-fold circle of providence over man. Furthermore, because Wesley believed man was created in the image of God and given the freedom to choose his own destiny, he conceives the manner in which the Creator would govern the human race to be different from the manner in which he would govern all other created beings. That is, man would be governed in a wise and gracious manner so as not to overrule his freedom. In addition he saw as a result of man's free choices three degrees of providence which make up his three-fold circle. With these thoughts in mind, a consideration will now be made of man and the three-fold circle of providence.

### III. THE THREE-FOLD CIRCLE OF PROVIDENCE

Wesley affirms a three-fold circle of divine providence over man which is in addition to that which presides over the universe. It does not concern inanimate or animate creation. But rather, it is a superintending providence which regards man only.<sup>17</sup> Within the outer circle of providence are all men, including the heathen, Mahometans, Jews, and Christians; the interior circle includes the whole visible church

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

or all who claim to be Christians; the inner circle includes the visible church or all real Christians.<sup>18</sup> As to God's care and attention for each group, it moves from a greater degree to a lesser one, beginning with the inner circle which receives the greatest, to the outer circle which receives the least.<sup>19</sup> The difference appears to be in the receiving of temporal and spiritual blessings. It is clear that all men receive temporal blessings, but not all receive spiritual blessings.<sup>20</sup> In the outer circle God causes the sun to rise, the rain and fruitful seasons along with ten thousand benefits as He fills their hearts with food and gladness.<sup>21</sup> The inner circle not only receives temporal blessings but spiritual blessings as well. With regard to them Wesley says:

He sees their souls and their bodies; he takes particular notice of all their tempers, desires, and thoughts, all their words and actions. He marks all their sufferings, inward and outward, and the source whence they arrive; . . . Nothing relative to these is too great, nothing too little, for His attention.<sup>22</sup>

It is the inner circle that enjoys the inseparable love of God which saves as well as protects.<sup>23</sup> Though it be true that God preserves the lives of all men and wills that they be saved eternally, He is more

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 428.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Notes, Matt. 5:45.

<sup>21</sup>Works, VI, p. 428.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>23</sup>Notes, Rom. 8:35.

eminently the savior of those that believe.<sup>24</sup> However, if God is willing that all men be saved, he intends that no man remain in the outer circle, but that all men come under His special care within the inner circle.

Thus, it appears that in setting up degrees of providence for man, Wesley does not mean that non-believers enjoy any less of God's preserving care than believers. But, rather, it means that non-believers do not receive the spiritual blessings that accompany saving grace.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Wesley in considering the significance of man, first views him as to his magnitude and duration. As to his magnitude he appears insignificant to reason when compared to a nation of people on up to the ultimate, that of infinite space. The same appears true when his duration is compared in the final analysis to infinite time. But since the real essence of man is not that of a material body, the significance of man must be found somewhere else. This significance is found in the fact that man is an immortal spirit created in the image of God. As such he is of infinitely more value than the whole material creation. The proof of man's value, however, is found in the atonement made by Christ for man's sin.

Moving, then, to a consideration of the nature of man, it was

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 779.



seen that Wesley believed man to be both body and spirit. As to his body, he is a machine fearfully and wonderfully made. As to spirit, he is endowed with thinking that which perceives, judges and reasons, a will that which expresses emotions which in turn are the springboard for actions, and liberty, that which directs the faculties of the soul and body.

Included within the discussion of man's liberty were Wesley's ideas on predestination. He believed in predestination but not as an unconditional election of some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. He held that man's salvation is by choice, not by determinism. In holding to salvation as a free choice he in no way claimed to deny God's sovereignty. For it was His sovereignty that determined salvation to be by choice as to whether one would believe or disbelieve the gospel. Concerning predestination Wesley held that some are divinely appointed to a particular task which has nothing to do with their eternal happiness. Still others are elected to eternal happiness, but this election is conditional upon faith.

A discussion of man in particular is followed by a discussion of the three-fold circle of providence over man. The three concentric circles are: the outer circle which contains all men; the interior circle which contain only professing Christians and the inner circle which contains all real Christians. God's care and attention moves in ascending degree from the outer to the inner. However the greater care and attention given to the inner circle is not in the reception of

temporal blessings but in the reception of spiritual blessing deprived the outer circle. Furthermore the special care and attention given the inner circle is extended to all that would be saved.

In conclusion it can be said that man because of his significance as an immortal spirit is a special object of providence. However, as providence operates in his behalf, it does not overrule his liberty but seeks to govern him in a wise and gracious manner. This providence is in a greater degree over the inner circle of true believers in the form of spiritual blessings but not temporal blessings. However providence operates to bring all men into the inner circle so that all may enjoy God's spiritual blessings.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE END AND OPERATION OF PROVIDENCE WITH REGARD TO MAN

It has become evident that man is the central object of divine providence in Wesley's thought. On this basis, the following discussion proceeds to discover: first, what he understood to be the end of providence with regard to man and, second, how he understood the operation of providence to bring about its end.

#### I. THE IMMEDIATE AND ULTIMATE END OF PROVIDENCE

Wesley believed that the purpose for which God created man was "that he might know, and love, and enjoy, and serve his great Creator to all eternity."<sup>1</sup> He saw life as having a sole purpose, that of preparing for eternity and, thus "for this, and no other purpose is our life either given or continued."<sup>2</sup> He never lost sight of this fact, which is crucial in understanding his doctrine of providence.

But man says Wesley, who was created in honor proceeded to become lower than the beasts.<sup>3</sup> He believed that when God created man, He created him holy, merciful, and perfect like himself. As

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<sup>1</sup>Works, VII, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 229-230.

such man dwelt in love since God who is love dwelt in him and he in God; he was incorruptible or immortal after God who is eternal; and he was pure from all evil.<sup>4</sup> To man he gave a perfect law to which he required perfect obedience. This law was the law of love written on the heart. To this law he added on a positive law: "Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of the tree that groweth in the midst of the garden." Attached to this law was a penalty: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Thus man dwelt in Paradise as a holy and happy being.<sup>5</sup>

In time, however, man wilfully and openly disobeyed God by eating of the tree which God commanded against. It resulted in his condemnation by the righteous judgment of God and the sentence of death. The soul was separated from God, the body became corrupted and mortal, and he hastened to death everlasting.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, 'by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin. And so death passed upon all men,' as being contained in him who was the common father and representative of us all. Thus, 'through the offence of one,' all are dead, dedd to God, dead to sin, dwelling in a corruptible, mortal body, shortly to be dissolved, and under the sentence of death eternal. For as 'by one man's disobedience all 'were made sinners'; so, by that offence of one 'judgment came upon all men to condemnation' (Rom. V. 12 & C.)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Sermons I, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 116-117.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 117-118.

Wesley saw man as having lost God's favor as well as God's image, and now in need of salvation. He found the answer to man's lost condition in the atonement of Jesus Christ. God so loved man that he gave his only Son to the land that men might not perish but have everlasting life. In the fulness of time, Jesus Christ became, man, a second General Parent and Representative of the human race. As man he gave his life on a cross to become the sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.<sup>8</sup> Thus states Wesley:

God established a new covenant with man; the terms of which were no longer, "Do this and live," but, . . . "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God hath given to be the propitiation for thy sins, and thou shalt be saved;" first, from the guilt of sin, having redemption through his blood; then from the power, which shall have no more dominion over thee; and then from the root of it, into the whole image of God. And being restored to the favor and image of God, thou shalt know, love and serve him to all eternity. So that still the end of life, the life of every man born into the world, is to know, love, and serve his great Creator.<sup>9</sup>

### The Atonement and Providence

Salvation, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, becomes for Wesley the means of restoring man to the place where he can fulfill the original purpose for which God created him. As such it also becomes the end of providence which he clearly states in his sermon on the Holy Spirit when he says: "Providence in only a wise disposal of events for the awakening of particular persons, and ripening the world in general for the coming of Christ's kingdom."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>9</sup>Works, VII, p. 230.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 515.

Furthermore, he says that the wisdom and knowledge of God's government operates "in counteracting all the wickedness and folly of men, and all the subtlety of Satan" for the purpose of carrying out "his own glorious design,--the salvation of lost mankind."<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that Wesley sees divine providence operating to bring man into salvation. He goes one step further, however, and declares the atonement through which man is saved,<sup>12</sup> to be within "the administration of His (God's) government," so that He might become the "merciful justifier of the sinner that believeth in Jesus."<sup>13</sup> As the "last administration of God's fullest grace" the atonement seeks to "recapitulate, reunite, and place in order again under Christ, their common Head," all men.<sup>14</sup> It therefore, says Deschner, stands at the heart of the three circles of providence as an attracting power to bring all men into the innermost circle.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as a providential act, the atonement further emphasizes the end of providence to be that of man's salvation.

#### The General Nature of Salvation

It needs to be asked at this point, what is this salvation which is regarded as the end of providence? Salvation in Wesley's mind is both

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<sup>11</sup>Works, VI, p. 326.

<sup>12</sup>Notes, Rom. 4:24.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., Rom. 4:26.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., Eph. 1:7,10.

<sup>15</sup>Deschner, op. cit., p. 68.

present and future.<sup>16</sup> In commenting on Eph. 2:8 he said that it speaks directly of justification and sanctification, however, he went on to say that it may be interpreted as the "entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory."<sup>17</sup>

In his sermon Working Out Our Own Salvation, he wrote:

salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) preventing grace; . . . is carried on by convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed repentance; . . . . Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; . . . consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification.<sup>18</sup>

This proper Christian salvation according to Wesley, in turn leads to final salvation,<sup>19</sup> "holiness being the qualification for, the fore-runner and pledge of, eternal salvation."<sup>20</sup> When he stated that God in his providence

commands all things, both in heaven and earth, to assist man in attaining the end of his being, in working out his own salvation, so far as it can be done without compulsion, without over-ruling his liberty.<sup>21</sup>

Wesley is clearly thinking of both present and eternal salvation as being the end of providence. This is clearly seen in the following statement:

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<sup>16</sup>Notes, II Cor. 1:6; Heb. 5:9.

<sup>17</sup>Sermons II, p. 445.

<sup>18</sup>Works, VI, p. 509.

<sup>19</sup>Notes, Heb. 6:9; Col. 1:12.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., I Peter 1:9.

<sup>21</sup>Works, VI, p. 318.

But what are the steps which the Scriptures direct us to take, in working out our own salvation? The Prophet Isaiah gives us a general answer, touching the first steps which we are to take: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." If ever you desire that God should work in you that faith whereof cometh both present and eternal salvation, by the grace already given fly from all sin as from the face of a serpent; carefully avoid every evil word and work; yea, abstain from all appearance of evil.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, providence has an immediate end, that of man's present salvation and an ultimate end, that of his eternal salvation.

Since Wesley thought of salvation as a process moving from present salvation to eternal salvation, and since he regards it as the end of providence, it needs to be noted what he means by the various degrees of salvation, those of justification, sanctification and glorification. By considering these distinct degrees it can be seen more clearly what it is that divine providence is seeking to bring about. It is within present salvation that the first two degrees take place, while eternal salvation or glorification is the third degree.

#### Present Salvation

The first phase of salvation that of present salvation is preceded, says Wesley, by prevenient grace. Prevenient grace being that tendency toward life, which when followed, will lead to repentance, faith, justification and sanctification.<sup>23</sup> It includes the "first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 510.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 509.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



It is that which is synonymous with natural conscience,<sup>25</sup> pointing out the general lines between good and evil.<sup>26</sup> It is found in various degrees in every man, placed there by God rather than called for by man.<sup>27</sup> It, sooner or later calls forth good desires in every man, though most men stifle them before they produce any considerable fruit.<sup>28</sup> It convicts men except a few whose consciences are scared, of acts contrary to light, "so that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath."<sup>29</sup>

"Therefore," says Wesley:

Inasmuch as God works in you, you are now able to work out your own salvation. Since he worketh in you of his own good pleasure, without any merit of yours, both to will and to do, it is possible for you to fulfill all righteousness. It is possible for you to "love God, because he hath first loved us;" and to "walk in love," after the pattern of our great Master. We know, indeed, that word of his to be absolutely true:: "Without me ye can do nothing." But, on the other hand, we know, every believer can say, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, says Wesley, grace is "free for all,"<sup>31</sup> and prevenient grace in particular is the beginning of salvation for all, which leads to the "proper Christian salvation; . . . consisting of those two grand branches, justification and sanctification."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 512.

<sup>26</sup>Notes, John 1:9.

<sup>27</sup>Works, VI, p. 512.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., VII, p. 373.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 509.

Justification. The first degree of salvation is that of justification. Wesley defines justification as pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is an act whereby mercy is shown in forgiving past sins on the basis of the propitiatory death of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he that is justified cannot come unto the condemnation of God for past sins, for they have been blotted out.<sup>33</sup>

Wesley objects to any thought of being justified on the basis of good works. Any good work done before justification have no merit in themselves to earn justification. Only works that follow justification are truly good works, for only what is good and acceptable to God is that which springs from a true and living faith.<sup>34</sup>

The condition upon which a man is justified, according to Wesley is faith. This faith is the one and only necessary condition. It is a supernatural conviction that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Furthermore, it is a "trust or confidence that Christ died for my sins. That he loved me, and gave Himself for me."<sup>35</sup>

The basis for justification is in the atonement of Jesus Christ. Since man was in a state of sin, God so loved him that he gave his only Son to the end that man might not perish but have everlasting life.

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<sup>33</sup>Sermons, I, pp. 120-21.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 124-27.

In the fullness of time, Jesus Christ became man, a second general Parent and Representative of the human race. As such He gave his life on a cross to become the sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. Thus, 'we are justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.'<sup>36</sup>

Sanctification. Wesley sees the work of sanctification beginning at the moment of justification.<sup>37</sup> Justification, itself, being the foundation stone upon which the "gradual work of sanctification takes place."<sup>38</sup> Through justification, says Wesley:

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. We go on from grace to grace, while we are careful to 'abstain from all appearance of evil,' and are 'zealous of good works,' as we have opportunity, doing good to all men; while we walk in all His ordinances blameless, therein worshipping Him in spirit and in truth, while we take up our cross, and deny ourselves every pleasure that does not lead us to God.<sup>39</sup>

Because it is the intention here to state only what Wesley believed concerning sanctification, no effort was made to cover the development of Wesley's thought on the subject. His most mature writings on the subject were found in his Plain Account of Christian Perfection, which was written in 1765, and his sermon The Scripture Way

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., II, p. 446.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 447-448.

of Salvation, which was first published in 1765 also.<sup>40</sup>

In his treatise a Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Wesley made observations in the form of short propositions on sanctification.

These represent the core of his belief on the subject and are as follows:

- (1) There is such a thing as perfection, for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture.
- (2) It is not so early as justification, for justified persons are to "go unto perfection" (Hebrews 6:1)
- (3) It is not so late as death, for Saint Paul speaks of living men that were perfect (Philippians 3:15)
- (4) It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man nor to angels but to God alone.
- (5) It does not make a man infallible; none is infallible while he remains in the body.
- (6) Is it sinlessness? It is not worth while to contend for a term. It is salvation from sin.
- (7) It is 'perfect love' (I John 4:18). This is the essence of it; its properties, or inseparable fruits, are rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks. (I Thessolonians 5:16, etc.)
- (8) It is improvable. It is so far from lying in an indivisible point, from being incapable of increase, that one perfected in love may grow in grace for swifter than he did before.
- (9) It is admissible, capable of being lost, of which we have numerous instances. But we were not thoroughly convinced of this till five or six years ago.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., II, p. 442. See George Allen Turner, The More Excellent Way. Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1952, pp. 149-170, for further discussion concerning the development of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification and the establishment of his mature works on the subject.

- (10) It is constantly both preceded and followed by gradual work.
- (11) But is it in itself instantaneous or not? In examining this, let us go on step by step. An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers: none can deny this. . . But in some this change was not instantaneous.

. . . It is often difficult to perceive the instant when a man dies, yet there is an instant in which life ceases. And if even sin ceases, there must be a last moment of its existence and a first moment of our deliverance from it. . . Therefore, all our preachers should make a point of preaching perfection to believers constantly, strongly, and explicitly; and all believers should mind this one thing, and constantly agonize for it.<sup>41</sup>

In his sermon The Scripture Way of Salvation, Wesley distinguishes between justification and sanctification, but he insists that even as faith is the condition for justification so it is for sanctification. He also affirms that sanctification is an instantaneous work, witnessed to by the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, he notes three different levels of sanctification: (1) implicit sanctification, which corresponds to the new birth,<sup>43</sup> (2) gradual or progressive sanctification, which is marked by being "more and more dead to sin" and "more and more alive to God,"<sup>44</sup> and (3) entire sanctification, in which love excludes sin, fills the heart, and takes up "the whole capacity of the soul."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Works, XI, pp. 441-442.

<sup>42</sup>Sermons, II, p. 446.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 446-47.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 447.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 448.

Thus, the works of justification and sanctification can be seen as a means of renewing fallen man. In so doing, he is being prepared for his eternal state, the end of his being. Therefore Wesley can say that Jesus Christ "by justifying and sanctifying us, hath made us meet for glory."<sup>46</sup>

#### Eternal Salvation or Glorification.

We finally come to the third degree of salvation, that of glorification. Wesley sees the doctrine of this Revelation--referring to the Book of Revelation--as ending in the "everlasting happiness of all the faithful." Thus,

the mysterious ways of Providence are cleared up, and all things issue in an eternal Sabbath, an everlasting state of perfect peace and happiness, reserved for all who endure to the end.<sup>47</sup>

Eternal happiness begins when we first know Christ, and the Holy Spirit bears witness to our hearts that Christ is Lord. This is real, solid and substantial happiness. It is at this point that eternal life begins.<sup>48</sup> Wesley went on to say

That heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper heavenly state commences, while the love of God, as loving us, is shed abroad in the heart, instantly producing love to all mankind; general, pure, benevolence, together with its genuine fruits, lowliness, meekness, patience, contentedness in every state; an entire, clear, full acquiescence in the whole will of God; exalting us to 'rejoice evermore, and in everything to give thanks.'<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Notes, p. 742.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 1047

<sup>48</sup>Works, VI, p. 430.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

As the Christian's knowledge and love of God increases so does the inward kingdom of heaven increase. When finally God becomes his All by taking full possession of his heart and reigns without a rival; when he becomes one with Christ, and Christ with him; then complete happiness comes. Thus none but the true inward Christian can be happy.<sup>50</sup> The true inward Christian is here defined by Wesley as a sanctified individual.

From his conclusion, Wesley makes certain observations. First, he says that since there is but one God in heaven and earth, so there is only one happiness for man, either in heaven or earth. The God who made man for himself, made him so that he can find no rest, till he finds it in him.<sup>51</sup> Secondly, "that this happy knowledge of the true God is only another name for religion; I mean Christian religion; which, indeed, is the only one that deserves the name." Its nature consisting not in a set of notions called faith, or a round of duties, nor any number of outward actions, but simply a knowledge and love of God, as manifested in his Son through the eternal Spirit.<sup>52</sup> Thirdly, none but a Christian is happy. Non Christians might be merry, but they cannot be happy.<sup>53</sup> Finally, "every Christian is happy; and that

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 432.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

he who is not happy is not a Christian." If religion and happiness are the same then it is impossible to have one without the other.<sup>54</sup>

As has been noted, the entering into happiness through sanctification, ushers in the kingdom within the Christians in which Christ is absolute Lord.<sup>55</sup> However the inward kingdom is not the final phase of the kingdom for man nor will Christ's kingdom cease with the end of the inward kingdom.

The inward kingdom is a spiritual kingdom equated with the kingdom of God.<sup>56</sup> The kingdom of God, in turn, is one kingdom made up of two different phases, the kingdom on earth and the future happy state in heaven.<sup>57</sup> The inward kingdom or kingdom of grace represents the kingdom on earth while the kingdom of heaven or kingdom of glory represents the future or eternal kingdom in heaven.<sup>58</sup> Those who are members of the inward kingdom are proper subjects for the eternal kingdom. Though they do not possess the kingdom in its fullness yet, they shall if they endure to the end.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 433.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 430.

<sup>56</sup>Notes, Luke 17:21, John 3:3

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Matt. 3:2.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., Luke 11:52, James 1:17, I John 5:11.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., Matt. 5:3, Rev. 1:6



The inward kingdom not only includes the sanctifying of the individual but it also includes the gathering of the church.<sup>60</sup> The church also is included in the future state of happiness.<sup>61</sup>

Wesley notes that Christ is called the King of kings and the Lord of lords and that no other man can claim absolute rule with God.<sup>62</sup> Apart from his mediatorial kingship, or kingdom of grace, he rules eternally with the Father. In the last days he will turn the mediatorial kingdom over to the Father who gave it, but he will not cease to reign with the Father. Not only will he reign with the Father but he will continue to reign in his human nature.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, in conclusion, it is evident that Wesley sees an immediate end of providence, that of man's present salvation through the atonement in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he sees an ultimate end of providence that of man's eternal salvation, the culmination of which will be the establishment of the Kingdom of Glory. The kingdom of glory will be in turn the place of eternal happiness for the sanctified where Christ shall rule with the Father forever.

## II. THE OPERATION OF PROVIDENCE

With the end of divine providence established in respect to

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., Matt. 4:17

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., I John 5:11.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., Matt: 21:9, Acts 10:36, Eph. 1:19, Heb. 2:3, Rev. 1:5.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., I Cor. 15:24.

man, and with salvation described, it remains to discover how Wesley sees God's providence operating to bring salvation about. In each phase of the salvation process he has noted providence at work. It is the purpose of this section to take note of some examples of providence indicated by Wesley that operate to bring about a certain phase of the salvation process.

### Present Salvation

That aspect of present salvation known as justification and sanctification will now be discussed to show how providence operates to bring each about. It has already been noted that prevenient grace is the beginning of salvation which includes the "first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him."<sup>64</sup> It shall be noted that providence operates as prevenient grace to bring about the "proper Christian salvation," that of justification and sanctification.<sup>65</sup>

Wesley sees natural disasters as acts of divine providence for God is the "God of nature."<sup>66</sup> In speaking of earthquakes in particular, he says that they are brought upon the earth by God because of sin and are used to punish sin.<sup>67</sup> In this sense providence brings judgment,

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<sup>64</sup>Works, VI, p. 509.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., XI, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., VII, p. 387.

but it does not end here. Though many may die as a result of an earthquake and are thus judged, there yet remains a greater purpose in it, that of warning the sinner and calling him to repentance and salvation. Wesley indicates this idea when he says:

"Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. XVIII. 31) God warns you of the approaching judgment, that ye may take warning, and escape it by timely repentance. He lifts up his hand, and shakes it over you, that ye may see it, and prevent the stroke . . . . "Account that the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation." (2 Pet. III. 15) Harden not your hearts, but turn to Him that smites you; or, rather, threatens to smite, that ye may turn and be spared!<sup>68</sup>

A specific example of a disaster which Wesley regarded as an act of providence operating to save a man is found in his Journals. Abraham Jones, once a member of the society in London and a "witness of the power of God to forgive sins," became wise in his own eyes and renewed his friendship with the world. Upon returning one evening from a parish feast, he fell down at his own doorstep and broke his leg. The break was so serious that the surgeon could not set it. When he realized he could not live, the terror of the Lord came upon him. Wesley said:

I found him in great darkness of soul, owning the just hand of God. We prayed for him, in full confidence that God would return. And He did in part reveal Himself again; he had many gleams of hope and love, till, in two or three days, his soul was required of him.

So awful a providence was immediately known to all the society, and contributed not a little to the awakening them that slept; and stirring up those that were faint in their mind.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., VII, p. 397.

<sup>69</sup>Journals, III, pp. 449-50. Cf. Works, II, p. 423, 480.

Thus Wesley saw providence move a man to return to salvation and awaken Christians from their sleep.

Furthermore, Wesley sees providence operating in the leading of men both Christians and non-Christians to carrying out God's purpose of saving the lost. One aspect of God's providence is that of delivering non-Christians into the hands of believers who in turn can proclaim the gospel to them.<sup>70</sup> A specific instance is sighted by Wesley of a backslider that came to hear his preaching and in turn was convicted.<sup>71</sup> The other aspect of God's providential leading is that which takes place in the lives of Christians. One example out of many that Wesley makes reference to is found in the leading of John Brown. The following are Wesley's words concerning this incident.

I preached at the Lower Span, seven or eight (northern) miles from Newcastle. John Brown had been obliged to remove hither from Lanfield Lea, I believe, by the peculiar providence of God. By his rough and strong, though artless words, many of his neighbors had been much convinced, and began to search the Scriptures as they never had done before; so that they did not seem at all surprised when I declared, 'He that believeth hath everlasting life.'<sup>72</sup>

Concerning persecution of Christians Wesley implies that it is the hand of providence operating with salvation in mind. Among his remarks on the subject he asks the following question:

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 312.

<sup>71</sup>Journals, V, p. 47. cf. Works, III, p. 160.

<sup>72</sup>Journals, III, p. 81. cf. Works, III, p. 236.

Is not an open, general persecution always both penal and medicinal? A punishment of those that will not accept of milder reproofs, as well as a medicine to heal their sickness? and at the same time a means both of purifying and strengthening those whose heart is still right with God.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, says Wesley, persecution is a means of calling the backslider to repentance and faith as well as sanctifying and securing the believer in the faith, so that eternal salvation though never unconditionally guaranteed definitely is more certain.

Two final incidents in Wesley's Letters, indicate specifically the operation of divine providence in leading individuals to sanctification. On one occasion, in writing to Dorothy Turley, he indicates that her illness may be God's way of bringing her to the place where there is nothing in her heart but His pure love.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore he writes to Elizabeth Ritchie concerning her health:

It is an admirable Providence which keeps you thus weak in body till your soul has received more strength. It is good that you should feel how very helpless you are, that you may hang upon Him continually. . . .

. . . . For this is your calling to sink deeper and deeper into Him, out of His fullness to receive more and more, till you know all that love of God that passeth knowledge.<sup>75</sup>

From Wesley, it has been shown how providence operates to bring about man's present salvation. The next step is to show how it operates to establish man's eternal salvation.

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<sup>73</sup>Notes, Acts 6:1.

<sup>74</sup>Letters, IV, p. 55.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., VI, p. 110.

### Eternal Salvation

Before man's eternal salvation can be established, according to Wesley, three events must take place. They are the general resurrection, the final judgment and the establishment of the Kingdom of Glory. These events will occur within God's government as an act of his sovereign will. For Christ, who is the "Lord and Disposer of the whole creation"<sup>76</sup> will, "as the ultimate end of all,"<sup>77</sup> bring the Christian into eternal life.<sup>78</sup> For this reason it is proper to discuss these matters as aspects of Wesley's doctrine of providence.

Man's eternal salvation, says Wesley, will begin in the last day when all the dead shall be raised, both righteous and unrighteous. "All who ever lived and died, since God created man shall be raised incorruptible and immortal."<sup>79</sup> The last day will come abruptly, giving no warning.<sup>80</sup> The time of the general resurrection is known only to Christ's "eternal mind," not to his human nature,<sup>81</sup> and has been delayed only because of the Lord's long-suffering.<sup>82</sup>

Wesley believed that following the resurrection comes the final judgment,<sup>83</sup> at which time Christ will judge all men.<sup>84</sup> The believers

<sup>76</sup>Works, VI, p. 428.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 429.

<sup>78</sup>Notes, I John 5:20

<sup>79</sup>Sermons, II, pp. 402-404. Notes, Mt. 25:46, I Cor. 15:23.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., Rev. 16:15, Matt. 24:27.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., I, Tim. 6:15, Mk. 13:32.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., II Peter 3:16.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., I Cor. 15:24.

<sup>84</sup>Sermons, II, p. 401-404.

will be judged first after which they will become assessors with Christ in judging all the wicked.<sup>85</sup> With the completion of the judgment will come the execution of the sentence. The wicked will be sent away "into eternal punishment and the righteous into eternal life, at which time they will inherit the kingdom of glory."<sup>86</sup>

The kingdom of glory is described by Wesley as an eternal kingdom which will "endure through all ages."<sup>87</sup> It is a kingdom established on a new earth and new heaven more glorious than the present heaven and earth<sup>88</sup> which will be destroyed by fire.<sup>89</sup> It is a place of blessedness for all believers in which their bodies will be transformed "into the most perfect state, and the most beauteous form."<sup>90</sup> Their bodies, however, "will be real bodies" of a spiritual nature which will be incapable of dissolution and decay.<sup>91</sup> Also, the blessed will be fed by the Lamb "with eternal peace and joy; so that they will hunger no more." They will be led to living fountains of water where they will receive "the comforts of the Holy Ghost; so that they shall thirst no more . Neither shall they suffer or grieve any more; for God 'will wipe away all tears from their eyes.'" <sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 405-411; Notes, I Cor. 6:2.

<sup>86</sup>Sermon II, p. 411; Notes, I Peter 1:7, Mt. 25:34.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., Rev. 19:1.

<sup>88</sup>Notes, Mt. 5:5. Rev. 21:22.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., I Peter 3:10.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., Phil. 3:21.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., Rev. 21:15, I. Cor. 15:42-44

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., Rev. 7:17.

Within the Kingdom of Glory, according to Wesley, will be the Holy City. This city is a real city though the descriptions of it given in the Book of Revelation are "undoubtedly figurative expressions."<sup>93</sup> It is built on twelve foundations bearing the names of the apostles, "figuratively showing that the inhabitants of the city had built on that faith which the apostles once delivered to the saints." These foundations are adorned with precious stones which "may express the perfect glory and happiness of all the inhabitants."<sup>94</sup> The city in turn is lighted by the glory of God within it, which also shines outward to the nations who walk by it.<sup>95</sup> Through the city flows the water of life which is "the ever fresh and fruitful efference of the Holy Ghost;" within it grows the tree of life producing the "abundance of the fruits of the Spirit" and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, "for the continuing their health, not the restoring of it; for no sickness is there."<sup>96</sup> "This," says Wesley,

ends the doctrine of the Revelation, in the everlasting happiness of all the faithful. The mysterious ways of Providence are cleared up, and all things issue in an eternal Sabbath, an everlasting state of perfect peace and happiness, reserved for all who endure to the end.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., Rev. 21:15.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., Rev. 21:19.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., Rev. 21:11, 24.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., Rev. 22:1-2.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., Rev. 22:5.



In these events, then, divine providence is operating to establish man's eternal salvation. It raises him to immortality, sets up the final judgment, and creates the Kingdom of Glory in which the blessed will dwell.

#### Summary and Conclusions

Man, said Wesley, was created to know, love, enjoy and serve his creator through all eternity. Furthermore, he was created holy, incorruptible, and immortal. However, man sinned and thus fell from his original state. As a result his fallen state made salvation necessary so that he might regain his original state. To save man God atoned for his sins through the death of Jesus Christ His Son.

This salvation that God provided, is for Wesley, both present and eternal. Present salvation includes both justification and sanctification. Justification is complete pardon from past sins, while sanctification is the cleansing from any defilement. Both justification and sanctification are conditional upon faith. Furthermore, they are preparatory to man's eternal salvation.

Eternal salvation is that fixed state of existence in which man is eternally happy while at the same time he is dwelling in the Kingdom of Glory. The Kingdom of Glory in turn is ruled by God and Christ who call upon the blessed to rule with them.

The part that providence plays in man's salvation is that of bringing it about. This becomes the end for which providence is always working.

In conclusion it can be said that providence with regard to man has both an immediate and an ultimate end. The immediate end is man's present salvation while the ultimate end is man's eternal salvation. Furthermore the immediate end is preparatory for the ultimate end.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### I. SUMMARY

Wesley's source of religious knowledge is God the Creator.

The means by which man can tap the source to gain an understanding of Him are: natural creation, the Bible, Christian tradition and Christian experience. The Bible is the supreme means of knowing God to which Christian tradition gives clarification and Christian experience gives corroboration. Wesley had a high regard for tradition, particularly that of the early church fathers, but all later writings came under his suspicion because they were more liable to corruption with regard to the true gospel. Christian experience was more highly valued than Christian tradition and was the means of verification of the Scripture in the Christian's life.

Reason and faith are given an important place when Wesley approaches the knowledge of God. Reason, he said, is not a means to finding a true knowledge of God, but rather a means of apprehending the true knowledge of God. This apprehension is made possible through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Faith on the other hand, opens the door to the spiritual world so that reason can apprehend it. Without faith reason has no material to work with in coming to a true knowledge God.

Wesley discovered the nature of God in the acts of creation and

providence. As creator, God operated in a sovereign way, creating all things accordingly as it pleased Him. All things that he created were very good, so that the presence of evil was not in the original creation. Evil, which is present both natural and moral is a latter introduction into the universe. As preserver and governor, God operates in a wise and gracious manner for the good of all his creatures. Man, being a spirit endued with understanding, will and liberty will be governed justly rather than according to God's sovereign will. Wesley emphasized the particular providence of God over general providence. He believed that God operated by natural laws but he is not confined to them. He governs also in a manner that introduces miracles into the universe. Concerning Christ, Wesley says he is creator, sustainer and governor of the universe. Wesley also affirms the character of God as holy love, so that God's acts are always in accordance with holiness and love.

Man, says Wesley, is at the center of creation and providence. He is such, because as a moral being endued with understanding, will, and liberty, he is the highest level of creation. His significance is further evident by the fact that Christ, God's only Son, became a man in order to atone for his sin. Wesley affirms that man is both body and spirit, but his essence is that of spirit. As a spirit he is able to reason, direct his own actions, and decide his own destiny. God does not predestine man's salvation, but it is based on the free choice of men to accept or reject Him.

Finally, Wesley believed that salvation was the end of providence. This included both present and eternal salvation. The necessity for salvation results from the fall of Adam whose sinful nature was passed on to all mankind. The means of salvation is the atonement of Christ. Through acceptance of the atonement by faith, man can be both justified and sanctified which is present salvation or supreme happiness. If man remains faithful to the end, continually growing in grace, he will be eternally saved. When man enters into present salvation he becomes a member of the inward kingdom of Christ or Christ's earthly kingdom. Eternal salvation ushers man into the heavenly kingdom where he is eternally happy and dwells with Christ who rules eternally with the Father.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

It was the purpose of this study to investigate Wesley's doctrine of divine providence as to its ultimate end and operation with particular regard to man. On the basis of this study the investigator came to the following conclusions.

1. Divine providence as sovereign action does not use coercive force to bring about man's salvation, but rather it respects man's liberty and seeks to lead him into salvation by persuasion.

2. Divine Providence is an ally of faith, as it operates to engender it.

3. Divine providence works in conjunction with the Holy Spirit in seeking to lead man into salvation.

4. Divine providence remains surrounded by mystery, yet much of this mystery can be cleared up with the recognition that its supreme task is that of leading man into salvation.

Having come to these conclusions, a more comprehensive conclusion was drawn with particular regard to the statement of the problem: that divine providence for Wesley is that wise and gracious operation of God which seeks to help lost mankind fulfill the end of his being, that of knowing, loving, enjoying and serving his Creator, by providing his salvation from sin and eternal death and persuading him to receive it unto eternal life.

Such are the results of the investigator's study of John Wesley's doctrine of divine providence.

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