

THE KNOWLEDGE OF FAITH

CHAPTER III

Throughout his long life Wesley breathed an atmosphere charged with concern for the problems of certainty and virtue. This climate of concern provided the backdrop for his whole thought and work. It particularly influenced his lifelong wrestling with the nature of the knowledge of God.

The empirical movement, in challenging the great rational monuments of the seventeenth century, was making a magic word out of the term "experience". The mind began as an empty cupboard and reason was dependent upon the "given" in experience, which was understood as one form or another of sensation. Whatever truly is, intrudes itself upon us in experience. What was clear and distinctly perceived to be in or risen out of experience brought both logical and psychological certainty. Here was reality, judging all our conceptions of the real.

Wesley carried this orientation into the area of religious thought and practice. This is, perhaps, the unique contribution of the founder of Methodism to Christian doctrine as several writers have pointed out. It is certainly the keystone of Wesley's thinking and the central emphasis of the whole Revival. In the first half of the eighteenth century, religion was conceived, both by Christian and non-Christian, to be either a mere rational matter or blind acceptance of tradition. From Wesley's perspective, these approaches were equally impotent and he stubbornly opposed both with his view of "experimental religion". Experience was the necessary condition for all genuine religion. What was clearly and distinctly given in our experience and corroborated by the

experience of others brought certainty issuing in far-reaching consequences. This first of the Methodists had imbibed the empirical temper of his day.

Again the almost universal concern in this century with the moral problem -- on the part of Christians, Deists, and atheists alike -- as we have already had occasion to note also dominated the interest of Wesley and significantly shaped his understanding of religious knowledge or faith. His concern for practical virtue did much to lead him to a view of living, transforming faith as over against the popular idea of faith as assent to this or that set of truths which did not and could not, in Wesley's experience of the matter issue in genuine virtuous living. Any conception of faith which was not inseparably joined with moral activity, was not genuine faith at all.

These two concerns Wesley brought together in his theology. Proper Christian faith is experimental in nature and necessarily results in moral revolution. It is "faith that worketh by love". The two emphases could not be divorced. Practical morality follows from experimental knowledge as night the day. The nature of our character and actions proceeds not from the nature of our speculations about reality but from our experience of reality.

The great Creator has so linked together faith -- the experimental knowledge of God and works -- holiness of heart, and practice, that, where one is not found, the other does not exist. And when any man attempts to divorce them or to neglect the one or the other, he is not only perverting true religion but attempting the impossible.

It is our purpose in this chapter to analyze Wesley's view of experimental knowledge of God and to show how it is productive of the life of love and happiness previously described. Perhaps it will add to the clarity to begin with a view of the various ways in which Wesley classifies or understands faith and then proceed to discuss proper Christian faith and the witness

of the spirit. Finally in a section on the faith of a servant and the faith of a Son, the manner in which Wesley relates "knowledge" and "virtue" will be discussed.

I. GENERAL TYPES OF FAITH

Wesley recognized several kinds of faith which he distinguished in terms of the essential nature of "faith" and in terms of the object or content of faith. These primary distinctions are then mixed together creating four different types of faith. By use of these types, Wesley is able to classify men relative to spiritual matters and to plot the stages of development in the spiritual and moral pilgrimage of mankind. We will first attempt to explain the major divisions.

A. General and Particular Faith

In almost every discussion of faith, Wesley distinguishes between what he calls its general and particular form.

Faith is an evidence or conviction of things not seen, of God and of things of God. This is faith in general. More particularly it is a divine evidence or conviction that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. . . ^{383a}

For the most part this distinction has reference to the content of faith or to the conception of the object of faith. General faith is that knowledge of the invisible, eternal and spiritual worlds which is afforded man outside the Christian revelation. It is what can be known of "God and of the things of God" through both natural revelation -- that is, through reason's inferences from the data concerning the natural world presented to the mind by the physical senses -- and through the special historical revelation given to the Jews and, in some rare cases, to others.

Particular faith, in this sense, refers to what God has accomplished through and disclosed of Himself in the event of Christ. In this action alone, God has uniquely and finally unveiled Himself to man. We behold the true and saving glory of God only in the face of Jesus Christ. At times Wesley refers to all the truths about "God and the things of God", all the truths about the

invisible, eternal and spiritual worlds found in the Bible, as part of general faith and, as over against this, the knowledge of the action of God in Christ as particular faith. He was wholly persuaded that without this event and man's knowledge of it there could be no salvation, no genuine virtue or satisfying happiness.

Perhaps the most significant feature in this distinction between general and particular faith is that in all the former God is known only as a Creator, Lawgiver, and Judge. This image dictates the manner in which one understands his existence and makes his response to life. Particular faith, on the other hand, is the knowledge of God as a loving, forgiving Father who transforms the meaning of existence and, therefore, the whole of our intentions, tempers and conversation in the world.

Both the general and the particular knowledge of God mediated through nature and reason, on the one hand, and the event of Christ, the Scriptures and the Christian community, on the other, played vital roles in the thought of Wesley. Outside these sources no truths of God are known.

B. Speculative and Experimental Faith

The second and by far the most important distinction in Wesley's understanding of faith is that indicated by the terms "speculative faith" and "experimental faith". The first might be called a propositional faith, a "conviction of such or such truths"³⁸⁴ the assent of the mind to propositions or doctrines – "that speculative notional, airy shadow, which lives in the head and not in the heart".^{385a} This Wesley calls a dead faith for "though it may have some small influence upon practice",³⁸⁶ it does not and cannot initiate the spiritual revolution necessary for true virtue. It is, by itself, in no way "saving", unable to expel either vice or ignorance. This is not proper knowledge of God.

Experimental faith, on the other hand, may be designated as personal faith. It is not mere assent of the mind to truths about God although it includes such assent. It is rather the response of the whole person to the personal activity of God involving the feelings and volitions as well as the intellect. This is, in the Christian sense, a knowledge which includes an experimental evidence of "God and the things of God" accompanied by a conviction of the same, especially as this is related to one's own existence and destiny. Such knowledge brings about such a filial confidence in God as to shift the center of gravity of ones whole being which issues in all internal and external holiness. This genuine awareness of God, experimental faith, is the only source of all virtue and happiness, the one means of salvation.

Speaking of speculative faith, Wesley says in one of the most mature statements of his position, "Hitherto faith has been considered chiefly as an evidence and conviction of such and such truths. And this is the sense wherein it is taken this day in every part of the Christian world."³⁸⁷ In this same sermon, he accuses not only Deists and heathens but also most Christians, Protestant as well as Catholic, of accepting faith in this speculative and propositional sense. In his early life, the evangelist himself had similar views about faith. When he first definitely set his course in the direction of the religious life in 1725, he wrote to his mother, "I call faith an assent upon rational grounds. . . Faith must necessarily at length be resolved into reason."^{388a} This is generally the Christian rationalist's point of view. Less than a year later in 1726, he had shifted more to the stand of Protestant orthodoxy, when he again wrote to his mother, "I am therefore, at length come entirely to your opinion that saving faith (including practice)^{389a} is an assent to what God has revealed because He has revealed it and not because the truth of it may be evinced by reason."^{390a} Late in life, Wesley gave an autobiographical statement of the development of his views on justification and saving faith.^{391a} He confesses utter ignorance, at the time he was

ordained a deacon in 1725, about the nature and the conditions of justification. "I was equally ignorant of the nature of saving faith, apprehending it to be no more than a firm assent to all the propositions contained in the Old and New Testaments." Wesley goes on to say, "As soon as, by the great blessing of God, I had a clearer view of these things, I began to declare them to others also." The "clearer view" came after the crisis of 1738. It was then he saw that the Christian relationship conception of faith and that of the Protestant orthodox were in essence the same, bare assent of the mind to truth, and that proper Christian faith was something more than rational assent.

In a letter to "John Smith" in 17145, Wesley points out his opposition to the current and popular understanding of faith. Smith had written: "It is the nature of faith to be a full and practical assent to truth." To this Wesley replies:

. . . surely no. This definition does in nowise express the nature of Christian faith. Christian, saving faith, is a divine conviction of invisible things; a supernatural conviction of the things of God, with a full confidence in His love. Now, a man may have a full assent to the truth of the Bible (probably attained by the slow steps you mention), yea, an assent which has some influence upon his practice, and yet not have one grain of this faith.^{392a}

This well expresses Wesley's stand on the matter and he never changed.

Let us consider briefly the difference between these views of faith. All types of faith -- general, particular, speculative and experimental -- have to do with "knowledge" of the spiritual world, of God and the things of God, His character and methods of dealing with men, and with the nature of man and his relation to God.

Speculative faith is, in some sense, remote or indirect knowledge of God. It is either assent to the inferences of one's own reasoning from sensations of the natural world or the blind acceptance of the tradition of some community, Christian or otherwise, which very well may be based on other men's reasoning or blind acceptance. Such knowledge can offer, at best, not

certainty but bare probability. Reason is radically limited in regard to matters of the spirit and the evidence of tradition is dim due to distance. Naked intellectual probability has little propelling force. On the other hand, experimental faith is immediate knowledge, direct encounter with the "other" world. It is present living experience of "God and the things of God" which brings with it clear and distinct certainty, emotional conviction that cannot help but produce significant consequences.

Second, speculative faith tends to be impersonal, concerned with the abstract and universal. God is the God of all men; His will is for mankind; His justice and mercy are directed toward every soul. In experimental faith the emphasis is upon the individual, the particular and personal. God's will is directed toward me. He is my Judge or He is my Savior. I see Him as over against me personally and understand myself as related to Him. I am His rebellious creature or His child who must seek to please Him and none other in the response of life. Experimental faith means being confronted personally by God and standing naked before Him, as this unique unrepeatable self.

Third, and this is implied in the above, theoretical knowledge of God is a dead faith, without life-transforming powers. It cannot alter the center of a man's being; it is not productive of Christian virtue; it cannot save. Experimental faith, however, is a living principle which issues in a radical spiritual revolution. In writing to a follower, Wesley says

True faith is not a lifeless principle, as your adversaries seem to understand it. They and you mean quite another thing by faith. They mean a bare believing that Jesus is the Christ. You mean a living, growing, purifying principle which is the root of both inward and outward holiness; both of purity and good works, without which no man can have faith -- at least no other than a dead faith.

Experimental faith is a personal encounter with God of such clear and compelling certainty that man's total orientation is changed and with this an alteration of all internal and external

actions. Indeed where such transformation of heart and conduct does not follow, this faith does not exist. This idea of the intimate union of true faith and works kept Wesley in theological controversy. It would appear that what he was attempting to indicate is that a man's practical responses were the necessary fruit of what he personally experienced and relied upon and that genuine Christian faith could in nowise be disjoined from Christian action. Their separation was a psychological impossibility.

Wesley was saying to this age of reason and orthodoxy "You wish true certain knowledge, satisfying lasting happiness, sincere genuine virtue? One thing thou lackest; 'the experimental knowledge of God'." Mere theoretical knowledge or speculative faith will not avail. It cannot save one either "from sin or from hell"^{393a}

Finally, although Wesley was consistently and almost vehemently opposed to mere rational faith, it must be remembered that it was the "mere" he was fighting. For assent to truths was an important aspect of all degrees of experimental faith. Only those who reduced saving faith merely to this attracted his fire. He was certain that rational faith was but a part of the matter, a small part, he sometimes said. Nonetheless "it is a step toward it not to be despised."^{394a} After an evening with "one who had reasoned himself out of all his Christianity", a theoretical as well as a practical atheist, Wesley said, "Surely speculative faith is the gift of God. . ." Wesley had too high a regard for reason and for the Scriptures to depreciate these except before those who trusted them entirely. Indeed, they are an essential ingredient in saving faith. Without the truths of reason and/or the Bible, experimental faith would be impossible

C. The Four Types of Faith

As has been suggested above, the elements in these two general classifications of faith are compounded to form four specific types of faith which Wesley never tires of describing. All men

are committed to one or the other and they include all stages in the development of the spiritual life. These four types may be designated: (1) general speculative, faith of a heathen; (2) particular speculative, the faith of a devil; (3) general experimental, the faith of a servant, (4) particular experimental, the faith of a son.

What Wesley called the faith of a heathen was mere rational belief in the general truths about spiritual things which can be known outside the Christian revelation. "To believe in the being and attributes of God is the faith of an heathen."^{395a} Although the faith of a heathen must not be confused with experimental faith of any kind, for it could not make holy or save, it had its place and was a part of the presuppositions of the higher faith. Wesley shared in the appreciation of the power of reason so significant in his century. He never doubted that one could know by discursive reasoning that God is, and something of the nature of God. He agreed with the Deists; by reason we could know that there is a God, that He is due the worship of man, that His moral laws are unveiled in nature for the rational creature to read, and that these laws must be obeyed under the sanction of reward and punishment. Speaking of saving faith over against this kind of belief Wesley says,

This is not barely the faith of a heathen: namely, a belief that "there is a God" and that He is gracious and just, and consequently, "a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"^{396a}

The assent of the mind to or the "embracing of such and such truths" about things of the spirit, as can be inferred from the natural world, is the faith of "a Mohammedan or a heathen; yea, of a deist or materialist."^{397a}

The second type of propositional faith is the particular type which Wesley labels the faith of a devil. It is the position of a Christian Rationalist or a Christian deist; it is the faith of most Catholics and Protestants today, that of the Anglicans and orthodox in England. It is the same as

the faith of a heathen except it includes the doctrines and creeds of Christianity. It is assent to what the heathen affirms plus the truths contained in the Bible, especially the New Testament, and/or, more specifically, an assent that Jesus is the Christ. This is still mere rational faith, "the faith of a devil, the faith of a Judas, that speculative notional, airy shadow, which lives in the head and not in the heart."^{398a}

Wesley not only agreed with the Deists, as long as their view was not seen as synonymous with faith as a living principle of the heart, he also believed with most people of his day that the Bible was the revelation of God. He was not a literalist nor did he take the Book, in some respects, as an infallible record. But he, with the people about him, found it impossible to doubt that the Bible was the Word of God. Indeed, on occasions, he pointed out that one had a just, rational basis for accepting it as the Word of God. Again, however, this is not to be confused with proper Christian faith. In speaking of Christian faith, and having already distinguished it from the faith of a heathen, he says:

Neither is it barely the faith of a devil; though this goes much farther than the former: for the devil believes, and cannot but believe, all that is written both in the Old and New Testament, to be true."^{399a}

Many Christian people surrounding Wesley, especially the Calvinists, were equating faith with acceptance of the Bible as true. In 1768, Wesley wrote to the Countess of Huntington

Yet I have been lately surprised to observe how many who affirm salvation by faith have lately run into this; they have run full into Mr. Sandeman's notion that faith is merely an assent to the Bible, and not only undervaluing but often ridiculing the whole experience of the children of God."^{400a}

Wesley understood that such an assent to those truths which are given in the Christian revelation is necessary and a part of Christian faith, but they are not the essence thereof. In 1746, Wesley wrote to Thomas Church:

Concerning the gate of religion. . . the true, Christian, saving faith -- we believe it implies abundantly more than assent to the truths of the Bible. "Even the devils believe that Christ was born of a Virgin, that He wrought all kind of miracles, that for our sakes He suffered a most painful death to redeem us from death everlasting." These articles of our faith the very devils believe, and so they believe all that is written in the Old and New Testament. And yet, for all this faith, they be but devils. They remain still in their damnable states lacking the very true Christian faith. The right and true Christian Faith is, not only to believe that the Holy Scriptures and the articles of our faith are true, but also to have a sure trust and confidence to be saved from everlasting damnation through Christ.^{401a}

Both the faith of a heathen and the faith of a devil are the low types of speculative faith which does not produce virtue. Wesley's concern with the problem of how man becomes holy, centered his interest in experimental faith which is the source of both the controlling fear of God when God is "experienced" as judge, and the love of God when God is seen as merciful father. Such responses were called the faith of a servant and the faith of a Son, which are the general and particular aspects of experimental faith. The discussion of these two kinds of faith will be postponed until the general idea of saving faith has been examined in more detail.

II . The Nature of Saving Faith

Saving Faith is that personal knowledge of God which issues in a revolution in the life of love. In describing saving faith, Wesley consistently used the Hebrews 11 text; "Now faith is the substance (Wesley frequently translates it "subsistence") of things hoped for, the evidence (Wesley often adds "and/or conviction") of things not seen." Much of his life was spent directly or indirectly expounding this text. Yet this is only the "first branch" of faith from the experience of evidence and conviction necessarily flows the second branch of faith, "filial trust", a "sure trust and confidence" in God.

Taking the word in a more particular sense, faith is a divine "evidence" and "conviction" not only that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," but also that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. . . . This faith necessarily implies an assurance (which is here only another word for evidence, it being hard to tell the difference between them) that Christ loved me, and gave Himself for me: For "he that believeth" with the true living

faith "hath the witness in himself": "the spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God." "Because he is a son, God has sent forth the spirit of His Son into his heart, crying, Abba, Father"; giving him an assurance that he is so, and a childlike confidence in Him. But let it be observed, that, in the very nature of the thing, the assurance goes before the confidence. For a man cannot have childlike confidence in God 'till he knows he is a child of God. Therefore, confidence, trust, reliance, adherence, or whatever else it be called, is not the first, as some have supposed, but the second, branch or act of faith.^{401a}

Saving faith, then is a supernatural evidence and conviction of the love of God plus what is inseparable from it and is made possible by it; named, reliance on the love of God and God of love.

In saving faith, there are several ingredients intimately associated and in a particular and psychologically necessary order. The experience nevertheless is a unity, a person cannot experience one aspect of it without the rest. Wesley says, in speaking of this faith, that one

might first apprehend, then assent, then confide, then love, and yet receive faith in a moment; in that moment wherein their general confidence is so that they can say "My Lord and my God."^{403a}

In the following pages we will deal with experimental faith: first as divine evidence and conviction and, second, as trust and confidence. The problem of faith as the witness of the spirit and assurance will be treated separately at the end of this section.

A. Faith as Divine Evidence and Conviction

We have had occasion to see, in Chapter One, that Wesley was influenced both by the sensational psychology of his times and the illuminationism of the seventeenth century Platonists. The mind is an empty cabinet at birth; there are no innate ideas of God^{404a} or anything else. All ideas originate in experience. The understanding "can give us no information of anything, but what is first presented to the senses".^{405a} "But there is a great difference between our senses considered as the avenues of our knowledge."^{406a} The external senses can only mediate objects of

the temporal order. They are not capable of furnishing the mind with ideas of things of the spiritual world. For such sensations we must look elsewhere, and this, Wesley says, is the role of faith.

Faith is that divine evidence whereby spiritual man discerneth God, and the things of God. It is with regard to the spiritual world what sense is with regard to the natural. It is the spiritual sensation of every soul which is born of God.^{407a}

Men have a direct, immediate consciousness of a distinct spiritual nature by which simple ideas are apprehended by the mind so clearly and distinctly that consent is elicited. This consciousness, since it is simple and not mediate, the fruit of discursive reasoning, is thought of as sensation.

Wesley also accepted the current faculty psychology: for every operation there must be a corresponding power or faculty.

Faith implies both the perceptive faculty itself and the act of perceiving God and the things of God. And the expression "seeing God" may include both, the act and the faculty of seeing Him.^{408a}

Whether or not one speaks of special "inlets of knowledge"^{409a} or "spiritual senses"^{410a} through which impressions of the "other world" are made upon the soul and apprehended by the mind to indicate the unique Christian experience of "God and the things of God", it is a phenomenon that is just there and there with far-reaching consequences. Wesley finally said he cared little what terms were employed to point to it. He used many phrases himself: internal sensation or feeling; inward consciousness; immediate impressions or impulses in the soul; experimental assurance; illumination of the mind and heart; interior revelation.

Man has powers which make this experience possible. Sometimes Wesley talks as if some "actual" men do not possess such powers or senses.^{411a} Most of the time, however, he is certain

that all men, as we know them, have this "capacity for God" but that they are not functioning; they are unopened, asleep or dead. The average man

“has scarce any [knowledge of the invisible world]. . . . He has scarce any intercourse with it. Not that it is afar off; no: he is in the midst of it; it encompasses him round about. The other world, as we usually term it, is not far from every one of us: it is above, and beneath, and on every side. Only the natural man discerneth it not. . . .”^{412a}

God is constantly present acting upon man, calling unto him but these "make no impression on his soul. . . he heareth not. . . He seeth not the things of the spirit of God. . . utter darkness covering his whole soul, surrounding him on every side.”^{413a} There is nothing man can do to open the spiritual senses or to penetrate the “thick veil” which obscures this other world. Wesley says that as the external senses of new-born babes are opened, made active by the external object, so only God can by His action bring to life the spiritual senses. Whatever else these views may indicate, it is certain that they testify that Wesley meant that faith is a given and God was the causal agent in it all.

Now what is the object of this faith? What does it evidence? In sermon on faith, written in 1791, Wesley makes a distinction between faith as a "divine conviction of God and the things of God" and as a divine conviction of the invisible and eternal world.”^{414a} The invisible world refers to spiritual entities: our own souls; the souls of other men; disembodied spirits, both good and bad, angels and demons; and God who is a spirit. Faith is the evidence or consciousness of the existence and reality of these beings. The eternal world has to do with the realm and incidents lying beyond death, as heaven and hell and the last judgment. Wesley, in the same sermon, says that evidence of these, the invisible and eternal worlds, is "nearly related to, yet not altogether the same" as the evidence of God and the things of God. In another sermon,^{415a} this evidence of God he calls the spiritual world or the inner kingdom. By this he means knowledge of the nature and

action of God relative to man, and a knowledge of the nature and actions of man relative to God. It is in particular a knowledge of "ourselves as we are known of Him".^{416a} It has to do with the image of God in our minds whether it be that of an "angry judge" or a "loving father" and of our relatedness to God as we so conceive Him. It is this latter class of the objects of faith - "the spiritual world" or "God and the things of God", the relation of man and God, or more especially, God's relation to me and mine to Him - about which Wesley is overwhelmingly concerned and it will be the major concern of this essay.^{417a}

Does Wesley mean to imply by this understanding of faith that one gets ideas of God and the things of God by some kind of supernatural infusion? Is this some form of mystical intuition? I think not. Wesley was no mystic. Such tendencies were in him but he repudiated the mystical view. It did not fit into his thought.^{416a} Supernaturally infused ideas belonged to the realm of enthusiasm and, although he was constantly accused of this, he as persistently denied it. The chief fault he found with the mystics was their unmediated union with God; their neglect of any means of transmission of the ideas of sensation and reason, particularly of the historical revelation in Christ, and their neglect of the historical Christian community.

God has spoken in nature and in history and man receives no other ideas about God and man and the relations between them than he does through these mediums. We possess these ideas either by reasoning about the simple ideas of natural world (the effects of God) apprehended through external sensation or by the process of education which is again through the medium of the outer senses.^{419a} The content of this education is the tradition passed on by "natural" communities which comes from the revelation in nature; or it is the record of the revelation of God in history particularly his action in Christ as it is recorded in the Scriptures and passed from one generation to another by the Christian community along with records of their own experience

with that revelation and the God behind it. Religion, especially the Christian religion, could not be a mere individual or isolated matter. It was social in its very nature. Without the Christian community, without knowledge of the Scriptures, without God's action in Christ, there is no Christian experience, no proper knowledge of God.

That aspect of experimental faith, with which we are now concerned, is not a means whereby we apprehend new ideas which never existed before or, for that matter, old ideas, new to us, "magically" impressed upon our mind. It is rather the "illumination" of the ideas that we already possess, through inference or education, in such a fashion that they become living realities for us; realities in which we are personally involved, with which our destiny is inexorably bound, arousing feelings, directing intentions, building virtues and controlling actions.⁴²⁰ This is what Wesley means when he speaks of God's revelation in Christ and His revelation in the heart of man, and the latter could not happen had the former never been. The truths revealed in the oracles of God are revealed in our hearts; the law is impressed on our hearts. Christian faith is the evidence (the personal illumination) of the "invisible world: of all those invisible things which are revealed in the oracles of God. But, indeed, they reveal nothing, they are a mere dead letter, if they are not mixed with faith in those who hear them".⁴²¹ Again, in writing to William Law

Faith is . . . an ελεγχος an "evidence" or "conviction" . . . "of things not seen", a supernatural, a divine evidence and conviction of the things which God hath revealed in His Word; of this in particular, that the Son of God hath loved me and given himself for me.⁴²²

It is a conviction of the truths which God has revealed; or, more particularly, a divine conviction that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself."⁴²³ As we have suggested, we shall see more fully as this chapter continues that this experimental evidence of the spiritual world applies both to the heathen and the Christian; the difference is in the ideas of God.

This illumination is not the enlightening of some innate idea within, not an idea which is simply the fruit of ratiocination, but it is the illumination of God's external historical revelation mediated to us through the Christian community.⁴²⁴ We could not experience God's love for us if God had not revealed His love in the person and work of Christ. There is no doubt but that Wesley was influenced by the Cambridge Platonists at this point and particularly by John Smith, (although he read many of them) who talked widely of illumination and of spiritual sense. Wesley viewed the matter in a similar fashion, with some very important exceptions. For example, for these Platonists or Neo-Platonists, reason was illuminated and this enlightened reason judged the Scriptures. In these thoughts they were in harmony with the rationalistic temper of the times. For Wesley, the truths of the Scriptures, embodying the unique revelation of God in Christ, are what are illuminated and the judge of all illuminations. Here the orthodox background of Wesley prevailed over the influence of Christian rationalism upon him. All of this makes clear what we have earlier insisted upon: that faith as assent to truths has a place in Wesley's view of the proper knowledge of God. What Wesley objected to was anyone making this the whole of Christian faith. Faith is assent in this sense, but not only this. It is also such an experimental, personal, practical, effective involvement as to revolutionize one's total existence.

What we have been attempting to describe is the ingredient of evidence in the idea of faith. We have seen that Wesley spoke of it as sensation and as illumination, of the invisible and eternal and, in particular, the spiritual kingdom. We have seen that all such "evidence" is dependent upon the revelation of God in nature and in Christ; private, novel impressions or impulses or imaginings have no status except they be judged by right reason and the Scriptures. This "evidence" is an experience, a consciousness, an awareness, an impression, in which what is known of God becomes a living reality for the person. It is an experience in which one understands himself to be

personally confronted by the final "upagainstness" (which he can only speak about in categories presented to the mind by the senses, nature and the Scriptures); that is, by God -- God as judge seen in the revelation in nature, God as Father seen in the revelation in Christ. Such an evidence makes possible the assent of the mind, (called conviction) and calls forth a childlike confidence in God and a sense of dependence upon him. All of these taken together contribute a proper saving faith which issues in a radical revolution of man's nature, and which is also reflected in his character and actions. Only so long as such a knowledge of God remains does the revolution exist and grow. If the knowledge continues to the end, the revolution shall some day be complete. This is our hope. Faith is the response of the whole man -- mind and will, feelings and desires to the action of God in Christ.

We have been discussing in the above paragraphs the manner in which the part evidence plays in the idea of faith is deeply personal and effective. Now we shall turn our attention to evidence as it is seen to be given. Evidence suggests that something happens to us in which we are passive. Wesley calls this a "supernatural and divine evidence". Perhaps Wesley uses "divine" to point to the content of the evidence and "supernatural" to indicate the causal agent. Certainly Wesley never doubted that God was the cause of the experience. His critics picked this up and asked, How do you know? His language made it seem as if immediate knowledge of the agent was included some way in the experience itself and maybe at times he thought this. But his final answer to this question, repeated over and again, was that the only things we can know immediate are the effects of the spirit, not the spirit itself. That God or this spirit is the cause, we learn from the Bible and only from the Bible. All we can know are the fruits of the spirit and never the spirit himself.

This is sensation in the Lockean sense: we are first of all passive in the matter; later there is an active element. When he calls it supernatural, he means it is not natural. It is not a matter of our own efforts or of our own powers of reasoning. There is an inescapable givenness here. The only thing I know, he wrote to Samuel, is that whereas I was blind now I see. What was "dark", now is "light". Where there was a veil, now no veil intervenes. The given apprehension is present to the mind with such clarity and distinctiveness that assent is compelled. This brings us to the next step in our understanding of faith, which is conviction. Conviction has to do with the assent of the person to the evidence. In Wesley's view of knowledge there was not only a passive element, the given in sensation, but an active element, the assent in apprehension. On the passive side, like Locke, he felt that sensation originated by the action of an external object. But, like the Stoics, he held that the mind assented to this idea presented to it by the senses. An element of judgment is in apprehension. First is the "sensation", the given, the evidence, and secondly the assent of the man or the conviction or acceptance. One meshes his gears with the evidence. The sensation is clear and distinct and, Because of this, the assent is called forth. The assent or consent of the mind is conviction but this conviction points to feeling as well as intellectual assent. Actually, this consent cannot be separated from either what comes before it, evidence, or what comes after it, confidence; the three are one. Indeed, Wesley speaks of conviction as including evidence and sometimes as including confidence. Sometimes he translates the Greek word (ελεγχος) in the Hebrews 11 text simply is conviction; at other times, as evidence or conviction; and still other times, as evidence and conviction, saying the term implies both. And this is the way he usually uses it.

But what is faith? It is a divine "evidence and conviction of things not seen;" of things which are not seen now, whether they are visible or invisible in their own nature. Particularly, it is a divine evidence and conviction of God, and of things of God.⁴²⁵

This evidence brings with it certitude in the highest degree which is conviction. Certitude has to do with the clearness and distinctness of the evidence and of the attitude called forth. Wesley calls this faith a divine conviction. Evidence has to do with apprehension, and conviction has to do with assent to this apprehension, which assent involves more than just the mind. This faith is an inner light, an illumination, an intuition. It is an immediate impression on the soul of man by God. Wesley likes to speak of it in terms of inner senses which hitherto have been asleep but which are now awakened by an action of God to apprehend God. Man assents to this evidence. But the source of this evidence is God. Evidence for Wesley is a givenness. When it is a clear and distinct sensation, whether it be of objects of the world mediated by external sense, or things of the spiritual world mediated by the religious sense, it compels assent. This is the meaning of evidence and conviction in Wesley and when they pertain to matter of the spirit realm they constitute one aspect of faith which Wesley called the first branch.

B. Faith as Trust and Confidence.

Wesley consistently holds that a saving knowledge of God includes, as one essential part, "a true trust and confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ".⁴²⁶ This is not only "an act of the understanding; but a disposition" of the total man. Christian faith is "convincing evidence" as we have seen; it is also "filial confidence" It is not one nor the other, but both. Neither can one be present without the other; it is psychologically impossible although one may logically separate them in analysis. Evidence and trust are two sides of the same coin: the given and the reaction to the given; the action upon us and the response called forth by the action. Faith is, first, the evidence and conviction that the God in Christ is love and loves me and, secondly, a sure reliance upon, a trust in, an adherence to that love of God and God of love.

And it is to be observed that in the very nature of the thing, assurance goes before confidence. For a man cannot have childlike confidence in God until he "knows" he is a child of God. Therefore, confidence, trust, reliance, adherence, or whatever else it be called, is not the first, as some have supposed, but the second branch or act of faith.⁴²⁷

Faith is the compelling idea of God as love and as loving me, which is the action of God that enables, yes, compels one, to shift from confidence in the self or the world to a childlike reliance upon God. Allis and nothing else is the author of faith. This slight overcomes the essential man.

Heavenly, healing light now breaks in upon his soul. He "looks on Him whom he had pierced, and God, who out of darkness commanded light to shine, shineth in his heart." He sees the light in the face of Jesus Christ. He hath a divine "evidence of things not seen" by sense, even of "the deep things of God"; more particularly of the love of God, of His pardoning love to him that believes in Jesus. Overpowered with the sight, his soul cries out, "My Lord, and My God!"⁴²⁶

Perhaps it would help to give once again the whole picture of Wesley's view of faith. In Sermon 13, Wesley says faith

is not only an unshaken assent to all that God hath revealed in Scripture -- and in particular to those important truths, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners", "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree", "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world".⁴²⁹

Here Wesley is including assent to the Bible and in particular the heart of the Bible, God's action in Christ, as a part of the Christian faith. These truths are illuminated in such a fashion as to call forth our assent. But this isn't the core of the matter. He goes on.

... but likewise the revelation of Christ in our hearts; a divine evidence or conviction of His love, His unmerited love to me a sinner.

This is the first part of Christian faith proper. Note it is the awareness of God's love and personally applied to me, a sinner. This we know in the experience of faith as a Servant, in which I am until the Christian experience takes place and which necessarily must precede this Christian experience. Now comes the second part of Christian faith which cannot be divorced from the first and which follows necessarily from the evidence and conviction that God loves me personally:

a sure confidence in His pardoning mercy, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost; a confidence, whereby every true believer is enabled to bear witness, "I know that my Redeemer liveth", and that I have "an advocate with the Father, and that Jesus Christ the righteous is my Lord," and "I know that he hath loved me" and "given Himself for me". He has reconciled me, even me, to God and I "have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins".

He have seen how a convincing evidence of God's love in Christ, particularly applied to me, calls forth in me a confidence in, a reliance on, an adherence to, a sense of dependence upon this God. Put what exactly does such a trust in God mean? It can only be understood in the context of the preceding experience. Trust only comes to one who has hitherto been a "servant of God". Trust comes to one who has known God as his own Creator, Lawgiver and Judge and as One who makes demands and before Whom he is responsible; who understands his present and future destiny in being oriented toward God (he is said to fear God in the sense that the "fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"); who sees the meaning of his existence in obeying His will and in being well-pleasing in His sight. Further, he is one who has seen this destiny frustrated. God's demands hopelessly outrun his obedience. Aware of his sinfulness, his guilt and his absolute helplessness, the light of meaning has gone out; fear, horror, and despair consume his heart.

For all this is no more than a dead faith. The true, living Christian faith, which whosoever hath is born of God, is not only assent, an act of the understanding; but a disposition, which God hath wrought in his heart; "a sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God." This implies, that a man first renounce himself; that, in order to be "found in Christ", to be accepted through Him, he totally rejects all "confidence in the flesh"; that, "having nothing to pay", having no trust in his own works or righteousness of any kind he comes to God as a lost, miserable, self-destroyed, self-condemned, undone, helpless sinner; as one whose mouth is utterly stopped, and who is altogether "guilty before God". Such a sense of sin (commonly called "despair" by those who speak evil of the things they know not), together with a full conviction, such as no words can express, that of Christ only cometh our salvation, and an earnest desire of that salvation, must precede a living faith, a trust in Him, who "for us paid our ransom by His death, and [for us] fulfilled the law in His life." This faith then, whereby we are born of God., is "not only a belief of all the articles of our faith but also a true confidence of the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴³⁰

This is the context in which the experience of Christian faith is given; the firmly convincing evidence that God loves me now, just as I am; that I am forgiven, accepted of God; that I am His child reconciled to God. It is this love that calls forth my trust. I trust this love, this God who loves me. I entrust to Him my destiny, present and future. I trust him for salvation and accept my forgiveness, accept my sonship in such a way that I go about endeavoring to be His son. As a matter of fact, in Wesley it is difficult to distinguish between trust and the first fruit of trust which is the love of God. It is when we are conscious of God's love for us and only when we are so conscious, that we are enabled to love God. This includes, as we have previously seen in Chapter 2, a sense of dependence upon God, a warm affection for or a desire of and delight in God, a sense of gratitude for His benefits and an earnest inclination to please and obey Him as a son. When Wesley says love and not faith is the heart of religion or that love is never done away with, that it is the end of religion while faith is the means and will be done away with, he is not talking about the whole of Christian faith but only the first branch as evidence; trust which moves into the idea of love will remain always. Our destiny will be realized. We will ever be dependent upon Him. This never changes.

Wesley calls this second branch of faith, filial confidence. He expresses this confidence by speaking about how the consciousness of God's love calls forth from the depth of our souls such cries as "Abba, Father" and "My Lord and My God" and enables us to testify: "The life that I now live I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." He uses for the most part, though he also employs others, these three biblical expressions, and he repeats them over and over.

The "Abba, Father" cry is pulled from us when we see God as love and loving me as a son or child. The abstract idea of the fatherhood of God has become personal; God has become my

father and I have become his son. This is confidence, this is trust which is the second "branch" of saving faith. And it is this confidence, born of an immediate awareness of God's love, which initiates the radical re-direction of the basic thrust of the human soul from love of the world to love of God.

C. Faith as Witness and Assurance

Wesley's famous doctrine of assurance is intimately connected with faith. Indeed assurance is faith or a degree of faith. The particular form of this idea was called forth by the spirit of the times. He was concerned with the problem of certainty in reference to things of the spirit -- to God and the things of God and, in particular, to God's love for us. He was persuaded that where clear certainty existed something happened, a revolution in heart and practice. In his day, the Deists spoke of right reason as the ground of our assurance, but Butler pointed out that this gave only high probability and was not sufficient for producing true virtue as Wesley thought the times demonstrated. The Traditionalists held to the Scriptures as the only sufficient witness, or added thereto the doctrines and creed of the church, but Wesley saw that assent to these testimonies did not bring the kind of certainty that reformed character and actions. In fact, Wesley told Dr. Middleton that if churchmen in England continued relying on "traditional evidence" alone, they would finally "one after the other give up the external, and (in heart at least) go over to those whom they are now contending with,"⁴³¹ that is, the Deists, The kind of certainty which did initiate such a change was to be found in immediate and direct experience -the internal evidence or witness.⁴³² However, this could never be separated from right reason or the testimony of the Bible and, in a secondary way, the church. But, as we have seen, Wesley had given up his early rationalism and orthodoxy. Assurance of God's love for us enabled us to love God, and this was

the source of all inner and outer holiness. Wesley refers to this in the New Testament as "experimental assurance".⁴³³

This doctrine of the "witness of the spirit" or assurance in Wesley, which is the keystone in his whole understanding of the Christian faith, caused much controversy in his time and, indeed, ever since. First of all, Wesley was not clear in the matter himself and, if he ever got it straightened out in his own mind, it was not until some twenty years after he first proclaimed it. Again, the age was particularly afraid of and opposed to anything which savored of enthusiasm and much in the Revival that did just that was connected with this doctrine. But when Wesley was able to state it in a more mature fashion, one could see that he was perhaps right when he said it was nothing more than the position stated in the Scriptures and held by the Early Church, the Reformers and the Church of England.

In the doctrine of assurance, there are two witnesses: "a direct as well as a remote witness..... first, by an inward consciousness; and then, by love, joy, and peace."⁴³⁴ To these, Wesley also adds external practice. The primary or direct testimony is the witness of God's spirit to man's soul, an immediate awareness of God's love for man such as calls forth his reliance upon it. This is of the very essence of proper faith as we shall presently see. The secondary or indirect witness proceeds from the first and is wholly dependent upon it. It is the testimony of our own spirit. Through the reflective sense or power of perceiving the inner workings of the soul, man is aware of the fruits of the spirit -- feelings of love, joy, and peace. The mind relates these emotional awarenesses with its apprehension of the truths of the Bible and draws the inference of God's love for us. Another branch of the secondary witness has to do with actions rather than feelings and the same reasoning process is involved. To be sure, these two are not separated, but serve as checks on one another.

Wesley often confused these two witnesses, mixing them together and giving priority to the secondary one. Furthermore, his idea of the direct testimony underwent a rather radical alteration. He was not straightened out on these matters until the late 50's. We'll look at these two witnesses more carefully and then draw some conclusions relative to their place in his understanding of Christianity.

1. The Direct Witness

From what we have seen of Wesley's conception of saving faith, we need only an illustration or two taken from a sermon written in 1767, to see that his view of the direct testimony of the spirit amounted to virtually the same thing.

...by the testimony of the Spirit, I mean, an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus hath loved me, and given Himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."⁴³⁵

In the same sermon, commenting on the "Abba, Father" texts in Romans and Galatians, Wesley points out that, as soon as we are aware of God's love for us (evidence and conviction), we utter the cry "Abba, father" (confidence).

Is not this something immediate and direct, not the result of reflection or argumentation? Does not this Spirit cry, "Abba, Father", in our hearts, the moment it is given, antecedently to any reflection upon our sincerity; yea, to any reasoning whatsoever?⁴³⁶

This, he says, describes "a direct testimony of the Spirit".

Wesley is saying, that, under certain circumstances, we become immediately conscious of the love of God toward ourselves; that we are personally forgiven of our sins and personally reconciled to God in such a fashion that we are enabled to trust and rely upon God, to cry "Abba, Father". From this respond flows our love of God which transforms our character and actions. This I suggest is the very essence of proper Christian faith and indeed Wesley came to refer to it

as such. When this was questioned by a correspondent in 1756, Wesley replied: "The assurance in question . . . cannot be a distinct thing from faith but only . . . a high degree of faith." This is Wesley's mature and final view of the matter.

He did not, however, always see it this way. In 1738, he wrote to Arthur Bedford,

. . . the assurance of faith . . . I believe is not of the essence of faith, but a distinct gift of the Holy Ghost, whereby God shines upon his own work and shows us that we are justified through faith in Christ.⁴³⁷

This indicates that an important shift in Wesley's thinking took place through the years. It appears that both his understanding of justification and assurance changed and that these changes were intimately connected.

From the very beginning of his evangelical ministry, in 1738, Wesley saw that the assurance of God's love, that is the immediate awareness of his mercy particularly applied to me, brought with it a shift of orientation and a life of virtue. Without this there was no genuine love or obedience to God. This was his chief and greatest insight and he never lost or altered it. If the label "Christian" is used to point to one who loves and obeys God, then a man could not be a Christian who did not have the experience of assurance for this was proper Christian saving faith, although there are various degrees of it.

Wesley learned of this experimental faith or assurance from the Moravians, but it was tied to a view of justification with which it was not compatible. This resulted in confused thinking for some ten to twenty years. This idea of justification by faith was legalistic in nature although it intended quite the opposite. It savored of a market place transaction and a very artificial type of that. The Anselmic view of the atonement was the basis of it. Man because of his sin was not only alienated from God but God was also, by that sin, estranged from man. God had made legal pardon a possibility through the death of His son. Yet this reconciliation becomes an actuality

only when man believes in this atonement God has provided. His belief was intellectual in nature, an assent of the mind to the doctrine of atonement. On the basis of such faith offered to God, God then accepted a man. He becomes reconciled to man and gives man pardon. Here is a bargaining activity: you offer this and I'll give that; you believe me and I'll justify you. To be sure, the use of faith here was an attempt to get around justification by works and to be loyal to the idea of faith alone, but it was a misinterpretation of Luther and faith simply now became a "work". Right belief, rather than good works, became the price exacted. To make sure this was all a matter of grace, a wooden doctrine of election was employed which made the trading activity a farce. God was seen as electing some to believe. Into these he supernaturally infused the power to behave, so that he could, in turn, be reconciled to them and hence pardon their sins. In this way, justification was entirely of God. Although Wesley rejected part of this from the start, especially the doctrine of election, it was generally his view early in the revival period.

It was in some such framework that Wesley at first attempted to set the experience of assurance. He seems to have had two ways of stating the doctrine of assurance at that time. In the first instance, he held that the justifying transaction did not actually take place until one had the experimental knowledge or assurance of it. This means that one is not in God's favor until he has a "sense" of forgiveness; or, God's acceptance of a man was brought about by that man's sense of acceptance. One could not be saved from the wrath of God without a sense of being saved or, in other words, the direct witness. The objective was made dependent upon the subjective. Wesley for years argued fervently for this view. He called this justifying faith, meaning that the witness brought our justification or favor with God. Closely associated with this was what Wesley called regenerating faith. But justifying and regenerating faith, except for purposes of analysis, were the same thing; if not, regenerating faith becomes a simultaneous consciousness of immediate

awareness of forgiveness, a consciousness which is the product of immediate awareness of forgiveness. As Wesley came to see, this whole view of assurance and justification was artificial and absurd. Much of the opposition to the doctrine of immediate witness was aimed in this direction and was merited.

The second way of understanding this doctrine is similar, yet with differences, to the foregoing conception. This view is suggested in the above quotation where Wesley calls the sense of pardon “a distinct gift of the Holy Ghost, whereby God shines upon His own work and shows us that we are justified through faith in Christ.”⁴³⁸ There are several steps set forth here relative to justification and regeneration. (1) An estranged God provides the means of His acceptance of and reconciliation to man in the death of Christ. (2) The condition for this becoming an actuality is, as the Scriptures say, man’s belief that God has acted in Christ. This belief is not practical saving faith but a rational assent to a doctrine above the power of reason on the basis of the testimony of the Word of God. (3) God then directly discloses to the man who so assents that he is accepted of Him and is in a state of justification. This disclosure is the sense of pardon or the witness of the spirit. (4) Finally, the assurance of his acceptance before God releases man's trust and confidence, which transforms his total life. Here the sense of pardon is the regenerating faith. Man is justified by belief in the atonement; God, then supernaturally lets man in on the secret which is the witness that transforms his basic love. To see assurance in this second fashion, as an addition to justification, is still not Wesley's mature view. Here the witness is primarily to man's state and not to God’s love.

These two views were apparently held simultaneously. Both were vague and mixed together. It was not until the mid-forties that Wesley begins to disentangle them. In 1747, he wrote an important letter to Charles in which he indicated that the time had come for a clear and

concise statement upon this issue. At this time, he clarifies some of the ambiguity in and between these two views, admitting that the ideas of justifying faith and the sense of pardon came to him in his early days and that there has been confusion.

In this letter to his brother, John admits that, he had believed justifying faith to be "that faith which whosoever hath not is under the wrath and curse of God"⁴³⁹ and that this faith was synonymous with a "sense of pardon". One was not accepted of God without this sense of forgiveness. But now in 1747, Wesley has changed his mind. These two, our acceptance and the witness, are clearly separated. Justifying faith, whatever its nature, is different from and prior to the sense of pardon. "I cannot allow", he goes on to say, "that justifying faith is such an assurance or necessarily connected with it." He bases this shift, as usual, upon the Scriptures, experience, and reason. Concerning the latter, he says "the assertion that justifying faith is a sense of pardon is contrary to reason; it is flatly absurd. For how can a sense of our having received pardon be the condition of our receiving it?"⁴⁴⁰ A sense of pardon has nothing to do with altering God's attitudes but is "a distinct, explicit assurance that my sins are forgiven." Wesley says it is a reality that "is the common privilege of real Christians,"⁴⁴¹ not necessary for present justification, and "is the proper Christian faith, which purifies the heart and overcomes the world."⁴⁴² Notice that Wesley here makes the immediate witness the same as proper saving faith. There is, however, confusion remaining for he also refers to it as the privilege of some, as if all Christians did not have at least some awareness of God's love for them.

In summary: the Doctrine of assurance, as expressed in this letter, meant that, after God had been reconciled to man and forgiven him because of man's faith, there was the awareness that this transaction had taken place and man was now in a state of favor with God. It was the immediate consciousness that, through justifying faith, God has reconciled to men. A man is

objectively forgiven by God because of his faith in the merits of Christ, and then man is given the divine witness that he is justified. One thing Wesley was clear on from the beginning was that the Christian revolution and the holiness of Heart and life which follows, does not stem from any objective transaction but from an assurance of being loved by God.

Wesley's thought continued to change or develop in reference to faith. As time went on he talked less of justifying faith or used less frequently the distinction between justifying and regenerating faith. Oftimes the first was made synonymous with or used instead of the latter. "Justifying faith is a divine evidence that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me."⁴⁴³ In 1749, Wesley wrote that "Every truly believer hath the witness or evidence in himself." The true Christian has the evidence of God's love for him personally which changes his life. And this evidence means assurance. This appears as if Wesley is reverting to his earliest opinions upon this matter. Such is not the case, however. What happened is that his views on justification as well as other theological conceptions, underwent at least some modification which altered and brought to maturity his thoughts on assurance, and saving faith. The market place image of justification tended to fall into the background. God to Wesley became less of a trader in souls and more of a great Physician. Even the servant of God was accepted by Him. God's action in Christ flowed out of His forgiving heart and Christ was the disclosure of that forgiveness. The stress was more and more placed upon man's need for reconciliation rather than upon God's. The focus was placed upon man's problem of whether or not God is a loving father and forgives us our trespasses. This enabled Wesley to more freely deal with his central concern: the healing which takes place in the human heart when man becomes immediately aware that God does love him. Now the objective side of the atonement was, so to speak, God's business. Wesley was now fundamentally interested in the subjective side; that is, man's consciousness of the objective reality and the fruits which

flow from such consciousness, "holiness of heart and life." From the overwhelming sense that "I, even I, was forgiven, pardoned, reconciled," from an immediate and direct impression that the great God of Love, loves me, is called forth a personal, whole-hearted trust, reliance, adherence to God which enables me -- even compels me to cry "Abba, Father". From such an impression nothing less than true genuine Christian virtue and happiness flows. As we have seen this is proper Christian saving faith. Experimental faith and "experimental assurance" as a direct witness come to the same thing. Instead of being something unnecessarily added, or something which can be entirely dispensed with, the direct witness and testimony of the Spirit stands at the very heart of Wesley's thought. It is the point of real and necessary connection between the knowledge of faith and the virtue of holiness with its accompanying lasting happiness.

At least, one or two other important ideas of Wesley's, relative to the problem of the direct witness, ought to be mentioned. First of all Wesley maintained that there were many degrees of faith or assurance in opposition to those who held to the belief that either you had faith or you did not. The faith which works by love Wesley felt must be a matter of almost infinite levels. Although all saving faith or Christian assurance was the same, he distinguished several different degrees of it. Against those who opposed such an idea he insisted

(1) That faith is one thing, the full assurance of faith another. (2) That even the full assurance of faith does not imply the full assurance of perseverance; this hears another names being styled by St. Paul "the full assurance of hope." (3) Some Christians have only the first of these; they have faith, but mixed with doubts and fears. Some have also the full assurance of faith, a full conviction of present pardon; and yet not the full assurance of hope, not a full conviction of their future perseverance, (4) The faith which we preach as necessary to all Christians is the first of these, and no other. Therefore (5) It is no evasion at all to say, "This (the faith which we preach as necessary to all Christians) is not properly an assurance of what is future."⁴⁴⁵

Wesley more and more made a distinction between faith and full faith, assurance and full assurance which corresponded to his meaning of the Christian life in terms of definite stages.

. . .there may be faith without full assurance. And these lower degrees of faith do not exclude doubts, which frequently mingle therewith, more or less.⁴⁴⁶

"The full plerophory (or full assurance of faith) is such a divine testimony that we are reconciled to God as excludes all doubt apt fear concerning it. This refers only to what is present.⁴⁴⁷

Wesley came to see, from experience and observation that, shortly after the regeneration in which one finds new health, a deeper awareness of sin or sickness occurs, challenging one's faith. In 1745, Thomas Church asked Wesley the difference between his terms "clear assurance" and "full assurance" Wesley replied

Sir, I will tell you. The one is an assurance that by sins are forgiven, clear at first, but soon clouded with doubt or fear' the other is such a plerophory or full assurance that I am forgiven, and so clear a perception that Christ abideth in me, as utterly excludes all doubt and fear, and leaves them no place -- no, not for an hour. So that the difference between them is as great as the difference between the light of the morning and that of the midday sun.⁴⁴⁸

In the stage when we pass from babes in Christ to young men in Christ, faith is weak, mixed with doubt and fear, and assurance is dim. "By weak faith I understand", says Wesley,

(1) that which is mixed with fear, particularly of not enduring to the end, (2) that which is mixed with doubt, whether we have not deceived ourselves, and Whether our sins be indeed forgiven, (3) that which is not yet glorified the heart fully, not from all its idols. And thus weak I find the faith of almost all believers to be within a short time after they have first peace with God.⁴⁴⁹

Wesley doggedly held to his view of degrees of faith, against the assaults of opponents. There was another battle in which he was engaged which throws light on his stand on assurance, and, and further demonstrates that he meant, by this experience, proper Christian faith. There were those who spoke of assurance as a certainty regarding their future and eternal standing before God. For Wesley the direct witness was present faith in God's love. In speaking about an

opponent, Wesley says "We speak of an assurance of our present pardon; not as he does, of our final perseverance."⁴⁵⁰ Wesley did hold to a view of assurance about the future but this was not the doctrine of the assurance of faith. He called this the "full assurance of hope" or the "plerophory of hope" which is "a divine testimony that we shall endure to the end; or more directly, that we shall enjoy God in glory."⁴⁵¹ In 1768, Wesley said, "I believe a few, but a very few, Christians have an assurance from God of everlasting salvation . . . or full assurance of hope."⁴⁵²

It has not been our intention to suggest that Wesley ever clearly thought through what he meant by the direct witness. His thought to the end abounded in contradictions on this idea. Our contention is that it was for him an immediate awareness that God loves us personally and that this is the faith of evidence and conviction which is the proper Christian faith that issues in a moral and spiritual revolution.

2. The Indirect Witness

The indirect or remote witness is an important but secondary aspect of Wesley's view of Christian experience. This does not mean that he always kept it a secondary matter. Indeed he apparently was never able to clearly state and distinguish between the two witnesses and oftentimes the dependent one enjoyed most of his attention. The indirect testimony or witness of our own spirit is the assurance that we are accepted of God, possess divine grace, have Christ in our heart, love both man and God, keep the commandments, are generally virtuous in heart and life, or are in a state of salvation. It is based on an awareness of the fruits of the spirit in our lives plus a knowledge of the Scriptures' description of a holy life, and their disclosure that such a life is well-pleasing before God. The practical judgment, then, determines the agreement between our

lives and the Biblical requirements, and reason concludes, therefore, that we are in a state of grace.

The emphasis here is on the fact of our own virtue, while the immediate witness of God's spirit, on the other hand, is, at its best, at least, the direct awareness of God's love for me. Wesley held these two testimonies closely together, referring to them as a "joint testimony."⁴⁵³ Yet he is perfectly clear that the one is dependent upon the other. Without the direct testimony of God's love for me, there can be no indirect testimony, for only from the fruit of the former can there be a remote witness. "We assert," says he, "that the fruit of the spirit immediately springs from this testimony." Indeed, if the fruit does not appear, there has been, Wesley believed, no genuine witness of God's spirit, or we are not living in faith. The relationship here is like that between faith and love. Where love is not present in a man's life, there is no faith in that man. So where there is no indirect witness there is no immediate awareness of God's love. In this sense, the second witness plays a confirming role but one of no little significance.

The fruit of the spirit includes, as we have seen, both the internal tempers and the "outward and more distant effect", external practice. It has earlier been pointed out how Christian actions flow from the Christian tempers which result from the consciousness of God's love. So this witness based upon the effect of faith has two aspects: one having to do with feelings through which we are aware of internal tempers; and the other, with awareness of our own deeds or practices, which are dependent on the tempers as they are known by the feelings.

We . . . allow that outward actions are one way of satisfying us that we have grace in our hearts. But we cannot possibly allow that "the only way to be satisfied of this is to appeal to outward actions and not our inward feeling. On the contrary, we believe that love, Joy, peace are inwardly felt, or they have no being, and that men are satisfied they have grace, first by feeling these, and afterward by their outer actions."⁴⁵⁵

Wesley found some folk stressing practice to the neglect of feeling, such as the orthodox Christians, and some folk who did just the opposite, such as the Quietists or Antinomians in general. These parties, he felt, perverted religion which for him properly includes both the inner and outer aspects of life. "What God hath joined together", he said in reference to this problem, let not man put asunder." Works without feelings, as well as feelings without works, are equally suspect. This remote witness must and does include both. Nonetheless Wesley himself appears to have placed generally more stress on internal feelings.

I would rather say, faith is "productive of all Christian holiness rather than of all Christian practice: because men are so exceeding apt to rest in practice so-called -I mean in outside religion whereas true religion is imminently seated in the heart."⁴⁵⁶

Fear of fanaticism or enthusiasm made Wesley's contemporaries unusually suspicious of his concern with inner feelings. Wesley's answer to such criticism was that all Christians agreed that such phenomena of love, peace and joy had an important Place in the Christian life. But the only way we have to obtain ideas of such realities is through internal sensation. It is in the very nature of things that these should be perceived⁴⁵⁸ by the mind through the internal sense of reflection or consciousness by which we are aware of all activities of our soul such as thinking, believing, feeling. "We must be inwardly sensible of divine peace, joy, love, otherwise we cannot know that they are."⁴⁵⁹ These objects of this internal sense are as clearly apprehended by the mind as external objects presented by the outer senses.⁴⁶⁰ One perceives these "as clearly as he does the light of the sun."⁴⁶¹ In brief, these "fruits, effects, are inseparable properties of faith"⁴⁶² and must be felt or they have no being.⁴⁶³ He who feels them not has them not.⁴⁶⁴ The conclusion of the whole matter is: ". . . all, therefore, who condemn inward feelings in the Holy Ghost, leave no

room for love, joy, peace in a religion; consequently reduce it to a dry and dead carcass.⁴⁶⁵ "The very thing Mr. Sinstra calls fanaticism is no other than heart religion."⁴⁶⁶

Furthermore Wesley insisted that it is only the effects of faith that are feel. We do not feel the final effect of them; that is God or the Holy Spirit. Wesley often spoke as if we did, but when, this was pointed out to him, he was quick to change his expressions, and explain himself more clearly. "By feeling, I mean, being inwardly conscious of not the operating of the Holy Ghost but the graces he operates in the Christian."⁴⁶⁷ Love, joy and peace are realities and "whoever has these, inwardly feels them."⁴⁶⁸ "But", continues Wesley, "observe, what he inwardly feels is the fruits themselves"; that is, he does not feel the spirit of God; he connects the spirit with the giver of proper faith, whose activity we know about from the written revelation. "Whence they (the fruits) come he learns from the Bible. This is my doctrine concerning inward feelings, and has been for above these forty years."⁴⁶⁹

All of this further indicates that this is an indirect and mediate witness as distinguished from the immediacy of the first witness. One is not directly aware through this witness that he is a "child of God". He, rather, arrives at this assurance indirectly. It is a rational conclusion based on the evidence of the Scriptures and may be the first witness plus his internal sensations of the fruit of the spirit. The remote witness is:

the result of reason, or reflection of what we feel in our own souls. Strictly speaking, it is the conclusion drawn partly from the Word of God, and partly from our own experience. The Word of God says, everyone who has the fruit of the Spirit is a child of God; experience, or inward consciousness, tells me, that I have the fruit of the Spirit; and hence I rationally conclude, "Therefore, I am a child of God."⁴⁷⁰

The same process takes place relative to the second part of the indirect witness, that is relative to external actions. It is perceived by the mind that the Bible specifically indicates the kind

of actions to be performed by a Christian. The mind also perceives the actual actions of a man. Reason comparing these together makes a judgment as to their agreement or disagreement. The Bible also declares that such practical fruit flows from a justified state, Therefore reason concludes that we are in the favor of God. The witness of works supplements the witness of feelings; they serve as a further check. For true love and joy and peace issue, as we have seen, in like activities. When the outer works are not present one is deceived if he imagines he possesses the internal fruit or confesses to have experienced saving faith or pretends to have assurance of God's favor. Feelings can no more stand alone than can works. The two parts of this fitness belong together, supplementing and checking one another.

Wesley says of this assurance that it "is nearly, if not exactly, the same with a testimony of a good conscience toward God."⁴⁷¹ As we have seen in Chapter One, the conscience is a term applied to the function performed by several faculties. By the power of internal reflection, we perceive our tempers and intentions; by external sensation we know the rule of life from the Scriptures without which the mind is helpless to judge; the perception of the agreement and disagreement of the two is the function of the practical reason; and an innate sense of pleasure or remorse accompanies such a judgment concerning our virtue. This is generally the process described above and brings out distinctly that the object of this assurance is our own state of righteousness and that the final concern is with an inner Peace of conscience. The following rather long quotation underlines this even more fully:

. . . how does it appear to you, that you are alive, and that you are now in ease, and not in pain, Are you not immediately conscious of it ? By the same immediate consciousness you will know if your soul is alive to God; if you are saved from enmity and have the ease of a meek and quiet spirit. By the same means you cannot but perceive if you love, rejoice, and delight in God. By the same you must be directly assured that you love your neighbor as yourself; if you are truly affectioned to all mankind, and full of gentleness and long suffering. With regard to the outward mark of the children of God, which is, according to

St. John, the keeping of His commandments, you undoubtedly know in your own breast, if, by the grace of God, it belongs to you. Your conscience informs you from day to day, if you do not take the name of God on your lips, unless with seriousness and devotion, with reverence and godly fear; if you remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; if you honor your father and mother; if you do all as you would they should do unto you; and if you are temperate therein, and do all to the glory of God. Now this is properly the testimony of our own spirit; even the testimony of our own conscience, that God hath given us to be holy of heart, and holy and outward in conversation. It is a consciousness of our having received in and by the spirit of adoption, the tempers mentioned in the word of God, as belonging to His adopted children; having a loving heart toward God, and toward all mankind; hanging with childlike confidence on God our Father, desiring nothing but Him, casting all our care upon Him, and embracing every child of man with earnest tender affection, (so as to be ready to lay down our life for our brother, as Christ laid down his life for us), -- a consciousness that we are inwardly conformed, by the Spirit of God, to the image of His Son, and that we walk before Him in justice, mercy, and truth, doing the things which are pleasing in His sight.

In summary: the remote witness is an assurance of being in God's favor based on an awareness of our feelings and actions; compared with a knowledge of God's word. The important part for our purpose is its dependence upon the experience of immediate awareness of God's love, which is true knowledge of God and proper Christian faith. This witness is not in anywise the same thing as saving faith but it necessarily flows from it and in turn re-enforces it.

III. THE ORIGIN AND CONSEQUENCE OF FAITH.

When Wesley spoke of being called to bring knowledge, virtue and happiness to an age mixed in ignorance, vice and misery, he meant by knowledge that saving or experimental faith which has just been described. This "faith of a son" was found to be a divine evidence and conviction, an immediate awareness or assurance that God in Christ loves me personally, which inspires a sure trust and confidence in Him. Two questions remain: first, how or under what circumstances does this faith come to be; second, and this is the final issue in this treatise, how is this faith related to love and happiness as they were analyzed in Chapter Two.

A. Faith of a Servant.

In his sermon, On the Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption, Wesley offers what he calls a "plain account of the threefold state of man, the natural, the legal and the evangelical." These are the stages on the journey of the soul or the ways in which men are present to God. The man in the evangelical state loves God. The ruling principle of his soul is grateful delight in the Creator. The faith from which it springs is that of a Son. The legal state is distinguished by the controlling principle of the fear of God. The practical knowledge upon which this rests is termed faith of a Servant. In the natural state, man neither fears nor loves God. He is without experimental knowledge of God and his whole soul is directed away from God toward the world.

These are broad categories and overlap. No man exists completely in the last mode; that is, the natural state. In its pure sense it is indeed a "fictional abstraction," but so are the others. At any rate, there is no man who has a wholly negative relation to God.

For allowing that all the souls of men are dead by nature, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a mere state of nature;...⁴⁷³

We have seen that Wesley believed that all men have some theoretical knowledge of God and His will through conscience, natural reason and education. He went further than this, however. Every man also has some practical knowledge of, some sense of personal involvement with, God. There is 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. These are the beginnings of the faith of a Servant, and hence of the legal state or that first positive mode of being related to the Creator. It is the beginning of the fear of God which Wesley defines as:

having, at least, such a degree of that "evidence of things not seen", as to aim "not at the things which are seen, which are temporal, but at those things which are not seen, which are eternal"; such faith as produces a steady fear of God, with the lasting resolution, by his grace, to abstain from all that he has forbidden, and to do all that he commanded.⁴⁷⁴

In the broad sense the faith of a Servant is the counter part of the faith of a heathen that was described in the beginning of this chapter as the theoretical speculative knowledge of, or mere rational assent to, the truths about God and the things of God which can be known by natural revelation. The faith of a servant is the immediate awareness of these realities. It is a type of direct evidence and conviction or inner assurance of God. It involves a kind of reliance or trust in God which might be designated as servile or fearful confidence as over against the filial and loving confidence present in Christian faith. The faith of a servant is a consciousness of God personally applied. Here God is seen only as Creator, Lawgiver and Judge, but this is not an abstract matter. He is my Creator, my Lawgiver, my Judge. In brief, the faith of a servant is a low form of saving faith.

Such knowledge of God, as we saw in Chapter Two, alters the spiritual core of man. It is the first shift from our accepting love of the world as our manner of living. The thrust of the soul is redirected and a corresponding alteration in the total moral life occurs. This faith, as all experimental knowledge, is an active principle which cannot be divorced from practice. The one who has this faith fears God, and he that "feareth God" also "worketh righteousness. In commenting upon this text Wesley describes the servant of God as

He that first, reverences God, as great, wise, good, the cause, end, governor of all things; and secondly, from this awful regard to Him, not only avoids all known evil, but endeavors, according to the best light he has, to do all things well.⁴⁷⁵

This description represents, of course, a high level of this mode of being. We have already noticed that there are infinite degrees of this legal faith, all the way from the first stirring of the conscience to the state of genuine repentance. What is described here represents more than vague

and momentary visions and desires for God. It is a developed relationship with God which marks a definite turning away from lower things. Such a life is that of the good or moral heathen. At times Wesley berated these characters and natural morality. At other times he had high praise for the pagan moralists and philosophers. After reading the Odyssey Wesley spoke highly of Homer, saying that he found him "On all occasions recommending the fear of God, with justice, mercy and truth."⁴⁷⁶ A still higher stage in the legal state was, of course, open to those in the Jewish tradition who were recipients of a special revelation of God and His will.

Wesley's views on the fear of God and the faith of a servant were never fully worked out. But they did clarify late in his ministry when his thoughts upon justification underwent alteration. The man who has the faith which enables him to fear God, resulting in a desire to do His will, is accepted of God "through Christ, though he knows him not."⁴⁷⁷ "Let it be well observed," says Wesley, "that 'the wrath of God' no longer abideth on Him."⁴⁷⁸

What has been said about this way of life does not mean that only those outside of Christendom exist in this fashion. The man who lives in a Christian culture may and does at one time, if he finally comes to the experience of the love of God, live in the fear of God. He must not and cannot, however, rest there for he has heard with his mind the Word. To remain in the legal state would be for him to dwell in the category described earlier as the faith of the devil. The faith of the servant or the fear of God, for the man within the hearing of the Gospel, finally reached it's height which is really a depth. Awarenesses come to him which are not given to the Pagan, but it is the end of the road for this manner of life. Wesley describes it as follows:

"By some awful providence, or by his word applied with the demonstration of his spirits God touches the heart of him that lies asleep in darkness and in the shadow of death. He is terribly shaken out of his sleep, and awakes into a consciousness of his danger. Perhaps in a moment, perhaps by degrees, the eyes of his understanding are opened, and now first (the veil being in art removed) discern the real state he is in. Horrid light breaks in upon

his soul: such light, as may be conceived to gleam from the bottomless pit..... He at last sees the loving, the merciful God, is also "a consuming fire;" that he is a just God and a terrible, rendering to every man according to his works, entering into Judgment with the ungodly. . . . He now clearly perceives, that the great and holy God . . . is an avenger of every one who rebelleth against him...."⁴⁷⁹

B. The Experience of Repentance.

Repentance, in the sense that it is being used here, is for Wesley another stage on the way of salvation. It is the last stage in the fear of God and the first in the love of God. It is a transition state from faith of a servant to faith of a son. Repentance is the experience in which man is brought to his final extremity, where his rebellious will is wholly broken. It is an experience in which his soul is consumed by despair - by the despair that is the gateway to an experimental saving faith in the love of God in Christ. Here man is brought to an awareness of his inability "either to remove the power, or to atone for the guilt of sin (called by the world despair); in which properly consists that poverty of spirit, and mourning which are the gate to Christian blessedness."⁴⁸⁰ How does one come to this state?

The Servant of God is, as observed above, one who in living faith discerns God as a Lawgiver and Judge before whom he is personally responsible, as the One who holds in his power his total destiny, present and future. This generates as a controlling principle in his soul the disposition termed fear of God. This awakens his conscience to some degree with a desire to do God's will. Yet this principle shares the heart with another previous and more powerful principle: the love of the world. Man's inner being is torn in warfare, with love of the world conquering. He has identified himself with God, but he is ever being defeated. He endeavors to please God to the best of his understanding, to live up to the dictates of his conscience, but the more he tries the less

he is able to succeed, so set is his character in habitual love of the world. This hopeless situation is gradually intensified:

He resolves against sin, but yet sins on; he sees the snare, and abhors, and runs into it....
And the more he frets against it, the more it prevails; he may bite but he cannot break his chain. Thus he toils without end, repenting and sinning.. till at length the poor, sinful, helpless wretch, is even at his wits ends.⁴⁸¹

Man, acutely aware of his sin and guilt and helplessness, is now in a condition of "fear, horror and despair".⁴⁸² The experience of the fear of God has run its course. Wesley promises that "unless the Servants of God halt by the way, they will receive the adoption of sons. They will receive the faith of children of God, by this revealing His only begotten Son in their hearts."⁴⁸³ The fear of God leads them to trust in the love of God, but the journey goes through the valley of the shadow.

This whole process is also seen through Wesley's view of the law as the schoolmaster, which leads us through the abyss to the love of Christ. One of the uses of the Law, he says,

is to bring him unto life, unto Christ, that he may live. It is true, in performing both these offices, it acts the part of a severe schoolmaster. It drives us by force, rather than draws us by love. And yet love is the spring of all. It is the spirit of love which, by this painful means, tears away our confidence in the flesh, which leaves us no broken reed whereon to trust, and so constrains the sinner, stripped of all, to cry out in the bitterness of his soul, or groan in the depth of his heart,

I give up every plea beside, --
Lord, I am damn'd; but thou hast died.

We are undone through the severity of the law in order that we might have the experience of the love of God in our hearts.⁴⁸⁴

It is in this crisis situation that the self-will of man is broken. He is left with nothing on which to rely. As one writer has put it, the will of Man is in this experience "reduced to zero". The love of self, of pleasure, of objects of sense, which is love of the world involves a hidden

rejection of and rebellion against God. This negative thrust of the spirit is nakedly exposed and is reduced to nothing, so that a man must first

renounce himself . . . [and come] to God as a lost, miserable, self-destroyed, self-condemned, undone, helpless sinner; as one whose mouth is utterly stopped, and who is altogether guilty before God." Such a sense of sin (commonly called "despair" by those who sneak evil of the things they know not), together with a firm conviction, such as no words can express, that of Christ only cometh our salvation, and an earnest desire of that salvation, must precede a living faith, a trust in Him.⁴⁸⁵

Repentance, in Wesley's scheme, is no simple matter of changing opinions or feeling sorry for misguided actions. Rather, it is a soul-shaking experience which leaves one "naked, indigent and undone."⁴⁸⁶ False peace and joy fade away turning to misery, sorrow and remorse. Any sense of virtue and righteousness is replaced by a feeling of guilt, fear and helplessness. God, the Lawgiver and Judge, has become in the imagination the great Enemy.⁴⁸⁷ Life has become death. Freedom has become bondage.

This is the experience without which there is no Christian faith. Repentance is a horrible sickness which not to have is a greater horror. It is a great gift of God initiated by the holy Spirit and flowing from his infinite love and mercy. Wesley captures the terror and wonder of it all, the severity and mercy manifest in it, in a discussion upon the faith of a servant the highest and lowest stage of which is found in repentance.

The Holy Spirit prepares us for his inward kingdoms by removing the veil from our heart, and enabling us to know ourselves as we are known of him; by "convincing us of sin," of our evil nature, our evil tempers, and our evil words and actions; all of which cannot but partake of the corruption of the heart from which they spring. He then convinces us of the desert of our sins; so that our mouth is stopped, and we are constrained to plead guilty before God. At the same time, we "receive the spirit of bondage unto fear;" fear of the wrath of God, fear of the punishment which we have deserved; and, above all, fear of death, lest it should consign us over to eternal death. Souls that are thus convinced feel they are so fast in prison, that they cannot get forth. They feel themselves at once altogether sinful, altogether guilty, and altogether helpless. But all this conviction implies a species of faith; being "an evidence of things not seen;" nor indeed possible to be seen or known, till God reveal them unto us.⁴⁸⁸

Wesley then adds these words:

But still let it be carefully observed, (for it is a point of no small importance,) that this faith is only the faith of a servant, and not the faith of a son.⁴⁸⁹

Repentance is by no means the Christian revolution. It is but the long dark night before the rise of a new day.

C. The Christian Revolution.

The essence of the Christian revolution, in Wesley's opinion, is the shift in the core of the human spirit from love of the world to love of God. As we have seen, this initiates a transformation in all life and practice which brings with it an enduring happiness. It has also been suggested that the basis or ground or condition of this revolution is saving faith.

One might say that the key to the whole Revival and cornerstone of Wesley's over-all scheme after 1738 was the text from I John: "We love him because he first loved us," which he never tired of quoting. In very brief, Christian knowledge, the faith of a son stands in the middle of the text as a mediator. Man desires and delights in God when he is immediately aware of Him in such a fashion that he can personally place his trust in God's love for him.

It is by, and only by, "a sense of the love of God shed abroad in his heart" that a man is "able to love God". "God calls a sinner his own. . . And by this very thing, the consciousness of his favor, he works in him the grateful, filial affection from which spring every good temper, and word and work"⁴⁹⁰ Or again Wesley says, "By faith alone, the love of God and all mankind is shed abroad in their hearts, bringing with it the mind that was in Christ and producing all holiness of conversation."⁴⁹¹ Wesley uses frequently the New Testament figure "shed abroad". God is for Wesley a God of love, but to believe this as an impartial spectator or to merely give the assent of

the mind to this idea has no revolutionary psychological and moral consequences. But when this love is "shed abroad in our hearts, something happens. This phrase "shed abroad" is used synonymously with saving faith understood in both of its branches. It is, first of all, a direct witness or an immediate evidence, which cannot further be explained, that God is love or that the one in Christ is God. But it is more especially an awareness that this God loves me, forgives me, accepts me personally. This impression is given in such a manner that the consent of the mind is compelled. It is a divine evidence or conviction, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their former trespasses:" and, in particular, that the Son of God hath loved me and given himself for me, and that I, even I, am now reconciled to God by the blood of the cross."⁴⁹² Then it is that the deeply personal response of filial trust in God, a firm reliance on His love for us is called forth from the soul, expressed in such cry as "Abba Father" or "My God". This is the second branch of experimental faith. "Christian faith implies a confidence in the love of God, and . . . such confidence has a direct tendency to salvation, to holiness both of heart and life."⁴⁹³ This experience of faith is the fundamental meaning of these phrases such as "the love of God, is shed abroad in our hearts." Then it is that the revolution in the spirit of man occurs. When and only when God's love shines in our heart do we love God. Because he first loved us and revealed that love in our hearts do we gratefully delight in Him. From this flows disinterested benevolence toward all men along with a humble concern for our own holiness which is the essence of the proper moral life.

All of this is what Wesley meant to convey by the perpetually used text "faith that worketh by love". Saving faith for him was an active thing. It caused things to happen. It is by necessity inseparable from love of God and man.

And this love we suppose (according to the Christian scheme) to flow from a sense of God's love to us, which sense and persuasion of God's love of man in Jesus Christ, particularly applied, lie term faith - a thing you seem to be totally unacquainted with. For it is not the faith whereof we speak, unless it be a working by love, a faith 'zealous of good works', careful to maintain, nay, to excel in them. Nor do we acknowledge him to have one grain of faith who is not continually doing good, spend and be spent in doing all good, as he has opportunity to all men."⁴⁹⁴

It is not that love ought to flow from faith. It is, rather, in Wesley's view, that it must, it does.

Where love is not present there saving faith is not present. It is an "unholy, unsaving faith".⁴⁹⁵

That faith which hath not works, which doth not produce both inward and outward holiness, which does not stamp the whole image of God on the heart, and purify us as He is pure, that faith which does not produce the whole of religion . . . is not faith of the gospel, not the Christian faith.⁴⁹⁶

But what are the conditions under which this faith is given in the first instance? This brings us back to where we left off in the last section. This faith is found or given to the one who has the faith of a servant in the highest degree which is the experience of repentance. It is in that situation when a man's inner world is reduced to nothing that Christian faith is born. It is when a man has reached his limits, is helpless and in despair, when God has become his enemy and his final destiny is utterly at stake. It is when he is given to know himself as he is known by the eternal. This is the time in which "his eyes are opened in quite another manner than before, even to see a loving, gracious God . . . He "sees the light of the glorious love of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." He hath a divine "evidence of things not seen" by sense, even of "the deep things of God"; more particularly of the love of God, of his pardoning love to him that believes in Jesus. Overpowered by the sight, his whole soul cries out, "My Lord and my God". For he sees all his iniquities laid on him, who "bare them in his own body on the tree", he beholds the Lamb of God taking away his sins. How clearly now does he discern, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself! . . . And that he himself is reconciled to God, by that blood of the covenant."⁴⁹⁷ In all of

this Wesley is simply a reporter. He reports what happens and how it happens. And this means that if it does not happen it doesn't. This does not mean that Wesley thought that man is without a role in all this. His view of freedom would not allow such a view. It does mean that man's role in faith is an action which is a response to an activity which is not his activity and without which he could not act. Moreover, "every moment"⁴⁹⁸ the Christian is dependent upon God's revealing in our heart his love for us. Although, as we saw in Chapter II, our love for God is strengthened and undergirded by the strengthening of the virtuous habits which flow from love, the Christian can never stand alone. Love in this life at least is ever dependent upon faith. Love cannot live without faith as faith cannot exist without love.

By way of a summary, it might be helpful to have another of the many long statements Wesley made in which he tried to summarize his understanding of the Christian revolution in its totality.

Man cries out of the deep to Him that is able to save, "Lord be merciful unto me, a sinner!" It is not long before he find "redemption in the blood of Jesus, even forgiveness of sins," the Father reveals His Son "in his heart;" and he "calls Jesus, Lord, by the Holy Ghost". And then the love of God is "shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit which is given unto him." From this principle springs real, disinterested benevolence to all mankind; making him humble, meek, gentle to all men, easy to be entreated, -- to be convinced of what is right, and persuaded to what is good; inviolably patient, with a thankful acquiescence in every step of his adorable providence. This is religion, even the whole mind which was also in Christ Jesus, and has any man the insolvency or the stupidity to deny that this is happiness, yes, that it

yields more of happiness below
Than victors in a triumph know?

There can be no doubt but from this love to God and man a suitable conversation will follow. His "communication," that is discourse, will "be always in grace, seasoned with salt, and meat to the ministers, grace to the hearers." He will always "open his mouth with wisdom, and there will be on his tongue the law of kindness." Hence his affectionate words will "distill as the dew and as the rain upon the tender herb" and men will know, it is not he only who speaks, but the spirit of the father that speaketh in him. His actions will spring from the same source with his words, even from the abundance of a loving heart, and while all these aim at the glory of God and tend to this one point, whatever he does, he may truly say, --

end of my action thou
In all things thee I see;
Except my hallowed labor now,
I do it as to thee!

He to whom this character belongs, he alone, is a Christian. To him the one, eternal, omnipresent, all perfect spirit, is the "alpha and omega, the first and the last;" not his creator only, but his sustainer, his preserver, his governor, yea, his father, his saviour, sanctifier, and comforter and his all, in time and eternity. It is the benevolence springing from this root which is Sure and undefiled religion. But if it be built on any other foundation, as it is of no avail in the sight of God, so it brings no real, solid, permanent happiness to nun, but leaves him still a poor, dry, indigent, and dissatisfied creature."⁴⁹⁹

The knowledge of God as Wesley conceived it, the heart of which was experience of and trust in God's love manifested in Christ, is the only source and ground of the true life of love and virtue and hence all genuine happiness. His position here is even stronger. In their very nature, faith and love are inseparable. Where one is found the other is necessarily present.

Notes

Chapter III

383a Letters, IV, p. 116.

384a Works, VII, p. 198.

385a Letters, I, p. 240.

386a Letters, II, p. 48.

387a Works, VII, p. 198.

388a Letters, I, p. 23.

389a Note the phrase "including practice". Wesley had now read Kempis, Taylor, and Law and this practical side of faith was being stressed. Saving faith is a term much used by the orthodox. It was coupled with a legalistic view of the statement which caused Wesley much difficulty and misunderstanding, as we shall see. Wesley kept this term but changed the meaning of it later.

390a Letters, I, p. 25.

391a Works, VIII, pp. 111-12.

392a Letters, II, p. 48.

393a Works, II, p. 384.

394a Journal, V, p. 452.

395a Letters, VI, pp. 361-62. Wesley here and in other places speaks of the faith of a Jew as a type between the heathen and the Christian in both the speculative and experimental classes. He continues the above quotation: "To believe the Old Testament and to trust in Him that was to come was the faith of a Jew."

396a Works, II, p. 385.

397a Loc. cit.

398a Letters, I, p. 240.

399a Works, VI, p. 362.

400a Letters, V, p. 74.

401a Letters, II, p. 269

402a Standard Sermons, II, pp. 449-51.

403a Works, VIII, p. 76.

404a "After all that has been so plausibly written concerning 'the innate idea of God'; after all that has been said, of its being common to all men, in all ages and nations ; it does not appear, that man has naturally any more idea of God, than any of the beasts of the field; he has no knowledge of God at all; no fear of God at all; neither is God in all his thoughts. Whatever change may afterwards be wrought, (whether by the grace of God, or by his own reflection or by education) he is, by nature, a mere atheist." Works, II, p. 309.

405a Works, VII, p. 335.

406a Works, II, p. 406.

407a Works, VII, pp. 4-5.

408a Letters, III, p. 174.

409a Standard Sermons, I, p. 526.

410a Wesley over and over again made a figurative comparison the internal spiritual senses to the external senses of seeing, hearing, and feeling. Sometimes he includes tasting; I don't know that he ever made such use of smelling (See Standard Sermons, pp. 233-34; Works, VIII, pp. 4-5; Standard Sermons, pp. 302-03). We are said to see God, and particularly God's love for us, in such a fashion that we look for and behold this God in all things at every moment from that time on. We are said to hear the Word of God, particularly his word of forgiveness to us, so that from henceforth we are attentive to and willingly obey his word, when and howsoever it is given. These two have to do with faith proper; the next with the effects of that faith. We are said to feel the presence of God -- that is, the fruit of the spirit, particularly our love of God within so that now "his whole soul is now sensible to God".

411a Standard Sermons, I, p. 304.

412a Standard Sermons, I, p. 302.

413a Loc. cit.

414a Works, II, pp. 385-86.

415a Works, II, p. 386.

416a Works, VII, p. 292.

416b Standard Sermons, I, p. 193.

417a Wesley very frequently, in using his favorite text from Hebrews, distinguishes between things hoped for and things not seen but present. Whenever he makes these distinctions, he appears to be referring primarily to the second classification made above, that is, to the spiritual world or to "evidence of God and the things of God". One of the many examples of this is found in New Testament, page 586: "Things hoped for are not so extensive as things not seen -- The former are only things future, and joyful to us; the latter are either future, past, or present, and those either good or evil, whether to us or to others. The subsistence of things hoped for -- giving a kind of present subsistence to the good things which God has promised, the Divine, supernatural evidence exhibited to, the conviction hereby produced in a believer, of things not seen -- Whether past, future, or spiritual, particularly of God, and the things of God."

418a Wesley admits to Charles in a letter that he temperamentally leans toward enthusiasm. He says that the mystics had an early appeal for him, and were almost his ruination (Letters, I, p. 207). Yet he was always interested in and retained a high regard for the mystics.

419 Works, II, p. 310.

420 The most important aspect of all this is personal involvement. Perhaps this is the most important aspect. The spiritual world and God are not just objects which we detachedly contemplate; they are realities with which our destinies are tied up. God is seen to have a personal intention toward us.

But our primary interest now is the nature of this evidence relative to the Christian experience. This is the real contribution of Wesley. It is an evidence that God loves me, that my sins are forgiven, etc., that I--even I--am reconciled to God. Here an idea of a God of love is in my mind or rather that God loves me. This is the key to the whole Christian revolution. This is the fundamental-supernatural evidence that is given, but it follows the experience of the Servant. This is the faith of a Son. This image determines the way I understand my world and controls my response.

421 Works, II, p. 387.

422 Letters, III, p. 359.

423 Journal, V, p. 338.

424 He both opens and enlightens the eyes of our understanding. Out of darkness he commands light to shine and takes away the veil which the "God of this world" had spread over our hearts. And we then see, not by a chain of reasoning, but by a kind of intuition, by a direct view, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. . .", Works, II, p. 72.

425 Works, VII, p. 195.

426 Letters, I, pp. 329-30.

427 Standard Sermons, II, p. 448.

428 Standard Sermons, I, p. 192.

429 Standard Sermons, I, p. 270.

430 Standard Sermons, I, pp. 284-85.

431 Letters, II, pp. 384-5. The whole passage reads: "With out this I cannot but doubt, whether they can long maintain their cause, whether, if they do not obey the loud call of God, and lay far more stress than they have hitherto done on this internal evidence of Christianity, they will not one after another give up the external, and (in heart at least) go over to those whom they are now contending with; so that in a century or two the people of England will be fairly divided into real Deists and real Christians.

And I apprehend this would be no loss at all, but rather an advantage to the Christian cause; nay, perhaps it would be the speediest, yea, the only effectual, way of bringing all reasonable Deists to be Christians.

432 Loc. cit. In writing to Dr. Middleton in 1749, Wesley compares the "internal evidence" to "traditional evidence". The latter is important, he says, and to be honored yet not to be compared with the internal which enable one to say "One thing I know; I was blind, but now I see." The testimony from tradition is so difficult it is only for the learned, it's weak due to the distance, and vague because it has passed through so many hands; whereas the internal is so easy, close, and plain that "a peasant, a woman, and a child may feel all its force".

433 New Testament, p. 433.

434 Standard Sermons, II, p. 355.

435 Standard Sermons, II, p. 345.

436 Standard Sermons, II, p. 349. Cf. Standard Sermons, I, p. 208.

437 Letters, I, pp. 255-56.

438 Loc. cit.

439 Letters, II, pp. 108-09.

440 Loc. cit. Cf. Sugden's note, Standard Sermons, I, p. 210.

441 Letters, II, pp. 108-09.

442 Loc. cit.

443 Works, III, pp. 159-62.

444 Letters, II, p. 384.

445 Letters, III, p. 305.

446 Letters, III, p. 161.

447 Letters, VI, p. 323; V, pp. 358-59.

448 Letters, II, p. 192.

449 Journal, II, p. 355.

450 Journal, I, p. 83. See also his discussion with Arthur Bedford in 1738: Letters, I, pp. 254-55.

451 Letters, VI, p. 323.

452 Letters, V, pp. 358-59.

453 Standard Sermons, II, p. 355.

454 Standard Sermons, II, p. 346.

455 Letters, IV, pp. 331-32.

456 Letters, II, p. 61.

457 Lee, op. cit.

458 Letters, II, p. 64.

459 New Testament, p. 506; Letters, IV, p. 363.

460 Letters, V, p. 365.

461 Letters, II, p. 64.

462 Works, VII, p. 399.

463 Letters, IV, 331-32.

464 Letters, II, p. 64.

465 Journal, V, p. 426.

466 Loc. cit.

467 Works, VIII, p. 106.

468 Letters, V, pp. 364-65.

469 Loc. cit.

470 Standard Sermons, II, p. 346.

471 Standard Sermons, II, pp. 345-46.

472 Works, I, p. 83.

473 Works, III, pp. 3-4.

474 Works, II, pp. 451-470.

475 New Testament, p. 304.

476 Journal, V, pp. 339-40.

477 New Testament, p. 304.

478 Works, VII, pp. 198-200.

479 Works, V, p. 84.

480 Journal, II, p. 278.

481 Works, I, p. 80.

482 Letters, II, p. 342.

483 Works, VII, p. 198.

484 Standard Sermons, II, pp. 52-53.

485 Standard Sermons, I, p. 285.

486 New Testament, p. 184.

487 Standard Sermons, I, pp. 285-89.

488 Works, VII, p. 235.

489 Loc. cit.

490 Works, VII, p. 229.

491 Works, VIII, p. 70.

492 Works, I, p. 67.

493 Works, IV, p. 1.

494 Letters, II, p. 38-39.

495 Standard Sermons, II, p. 34.

496 Standard Sermons, II, pp. 33-34.

497 Works, I, p. 76.

498 New Testament, p. 477.

499 Works, VII, p. 75.