

What Might Wesley Have Said?

I Am Being JESUS

Alan Rice

“Who are you?”
Leilani Klonk asks
the ten-year-old boy.
He answers,
“I am **being**
Curtis Hammond.”
Though unaware,
Leilani has just begun
a relationship with
an extraterrestrial
that is in the process
of morphing
into a new creature.¹

On his three-hundredth birthday, perhaps a perceptive question for us as United Methodists to ask John Wesley is “Who are you and what does that have to do with us?”

“I am **being** Jesus.” Could that be the most important part of the answer Wesley would give to us? Richard Heitzenrater observes that by 1734 Wesley had already adopted as a central theme “the need to be born again, to be formed anew ... The idea of imitation of Jesus... is a central and persistent theme throughout his ministry... the Christian life is the Christ-like life.” Heitzenrater notes, “For Wesley, ... the gospel was simple, epitomized by and aimed at Christian perfection.” Moreover, Wesley’s message of “full salvation ... as a process of restoration and becoming holy” is unchanging. *Imitatio Christi* and sola scriptura were consistent combinations throughout his life.² For John Wesley the goal is not to “act perfectly; the goal is to be perfect.”³ But who was John Wesley? At a last class of the semester held in the den of Dr. Heitzenrater’s home, I asked the class to help determine Mr. Wesley’s Meyers-Briggs typology. With relative and near unanimous consensus the class agreed he was an **Introverted Sensory Thinker** with a high **Judgment** score. Persons with these natural attributes are often excellent task-oriented administrators. Given a goal, a strategy, and the necessary resources, they would follow their plan, moving step by step toward accomplishing the mission and then evaluating the results.

I suggested to the class that prior to 1738, Wesley’s approach to sanctification or transformation in holiness had largely been through that which was natural to the supposed ISTJ Wesley. Prior to 1738 Wesley’s plan to attain his life goal of *imitatio Christi* was a two-pronged strategy of “Works of Piety” and “Works of Mercy.” One would transform the inner life, the other the outer life. The outcome-based evaluation of becoming a Jesus person would be personal holiness of heart and life that was evidenced in love of God and love of neighbor. Prior to May 24, Wesley’s self-evaluation would be that the plan just wasn’t working.

Framed in Meyers-Briggs terms, on May 24, 1738 Wesley had a transforming “shadow side” experience. The least developed part of his person became the new lens through which the middle-aged Wesley encountered the gospel and Christ. The sensory thinker had an intuitive feeling experience. Wesley says, “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”⁴ Wesley had come to understand that becoming a new creature was not just a matter of desire, nor discipline but also a matter of metamorphosis by grace through faith involving the very heart of our being and the whole of our living.

Perhaps a headline about the impact of Wesley’s Aldersgate experi-

ence upon United Methodists could have read: "Heart religion to reach whole world.... holiness of heart and life, a transformation of the whole world into Jesus persons is the goal of John Wesley for Methodists."⁵

While the original Curtis was sleeping, "The motherless boy had found the used Band-Aid discarded on the nightstand...the dried blood on the gauze pad had provided him with a perfect opportunity..." The Band-Aid provided the blood that would be the DNA blueprint of a new being. So it was that the extraterrestrial had the chance to morph into being Curtis Hammond and thereby continue in his mission to help save the planet.⁶

If we accept transformation into oneness with Christ as Wesley's overarching life's goal, is it too far fetched to see in extraterrestrial transmutation an analogy of John Wesley's intended core of Methodism: scriptural holiness, morphing into Christians, being little Christs? Or is the idea of seeking to morph into a Jesus DNA person as a lived-into-identity, now

in the twenty first century only as useful as a stained cast off Band-Aid?

Our answers may reveal more about who we are *being* than they do about Wesley. Is our mission to help everyone morph into Jesus persons by grace through faith? Is our strategy to individually seek holiness of heart and life so that in Christ we corporately make a difference in the world? Is all of our conferencing; our UMC attention to statistical details of membership, attendance, spending and other self-reflections but a collection of ways to do an outcome-based evaluation of this goal? Are ministerial qualifications of bearing fruit and going on to perfection just quaint relics of an irrelevant and now all but forgotten past quest lead by John Wesley?

Is the mission of the United Methodist Church fully encompassed by *making disciples* of Jesus Christ? Or would John Wesley advocate that it is to *be* disciples, *be* little Christs? And is it that this holiness of heart and life should be evaluated by examining if individually and corporately we are *making disciples* (Matthew 28:19f) and *making a difference* (Matthew 25:31f)?

Could it be that a John Wesley-DNA-

United Methodist mission statement⁷ would read: "To be little Christs in holiness of heart and life so that by being disciples we make disciples and make a difference in the whole world?" □

1 *One Door Away from Heaven* by Dean Koontz, (Bantam, 2002), p. 596

2 Richard Heitzenrater in *The Portion of the Poor* (Abingdon Press, 1995), 57ff

3 *Ibid.*, 60.

4 *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley*, Vol. V, 510.

5 Wesley confirmed this was his life goal in a letter to John Smith. (*Letters to John Smith* Vol. 12, 71).

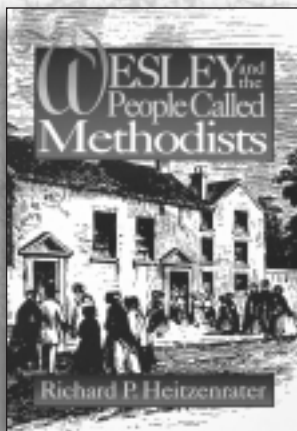
6 Koontz, p. 390

7 Contact the author for a sample copy of such a mission statement.



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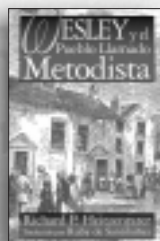
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