CHRISTIAN PERFECTION
AS A VISION
FOR EVANGELISM

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the problem of the fragmentation of conversion and discipleship in the theology and practice of evangelism within the Wesleyan tradition. Fragmentation is understood as the process of splintering or separating elements that were previously united. It is argued that this fragmentation results in large part from the lack of a unifying vision for conversion and discipleship, and that recovering the significance of Christian perfection can present a way forward.

The work of Alisdair MacIntyre is used to interpret the doctrine of Christian perfection as providing a telos and vision for evangelism. The work of Ellen Charry is also drawn upon to show how the doctrine of Christian perfection is sapiential in nature, and shapes the practice of evangelism to that end.

This thesis argues that the renewing of Christian perfection as a vision of evangelism can hold the elements of conversion and discipleship in tension, thus repairing the fragmentation.

On the one hand, evangelism that aims at making disciples who press on to perfection will intentionally seek conversion as a necessary but incomplete goal. On the other hand, spiritual formation that aims at perfection must be rooted in the reality of conversion itself, and cannot proceed without effective evangelism.

Drawing upon evidence from the theology of John Wesley and the early Methodist movement supports the argument, and the problem is further explored by a critical analysis of contemporary scholarship in the Wesleyan tradition.

The implications of the thesis include the need for an evangelistic message that communicates the good news in terms of holy love, capturing both the need for personal conversion and the pursuit of Christian perfection. A second implication is the need for an approach to evangelism that restores the link between conversion and discipleship. A third implication is for a new or renewed set of evangelistic practices that guide persons through the experience of conversion, and on toward the telos of Christian perfection.
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Methodological Outline

Scripture seems clear that God is a holy God and desires a holy people. 1 Peter 1:14-16 states, ‘As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”’ (1 Peter 1:14-16)

Scripture also declares that God is capable of such a transformation: ‘Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.’ (Philippians 2:11–13) John Wesley stressed that this transformation continued on to Christian perfection as exemplified in Matthew 5:48, ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.’ (Matthew 5:48) In Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament, he comments on this passage:

Therefore ye shall be perfect; as your Father who is in heaven is perfect—So the original runs, referring to all that holiness which is described in the foregoing verses, which our Lord in the beginning of the chapter recommends as happiness, and in the close of it as perfection. And how wise and gracious is this, to sum up, and, as it were, seal all his commandments with a promise! Even the proper promise of the Gospel! That he will put those laws in our minds, and write them in our hearts! He well knew how ready our unbelief would be to cry out, this is impossible! And therefore stakes upon it all the power, truth, and faithfulness of him to whom all things are possible. 1

Wesley speaks of Christian perfection here as both a call and a promise available to followers of Christ. Yet, perhaps out of a reaction to excesses or distortions, the doctrine of Christian perfection seems to have been neglected if not abandoned by

the Methodist Church. Additionally, although the doctrine was considered one of the cornerstones of early Methodism, the teaching that, ‘All can be saved to the uttermost,’ seems to be conspicuously absent, or at best given a passing reference in modern Methodist teaching and practice.

This research began with a question that arose in my years as a church pastor. In the Methodist congregations I have served, I have observed and experienced a struggle to motivate persons to grow in their faith and pursue holiness of heart and life. This has been especially true of persons who have been a part of the church for a significant time. This experience has led me to question if the way Wesleyans have practiced evangelism in the past has given individuals the idea that growth was an optional part of the Christian experience. This question was reinforced as a result of research conducted on the Alpha Course. While anecdotal and empirical data attested to the usefulness of Alpha as an evangelism tool, it was also noted that Alpha played a significant role in awakening the faith of those who had been a part of the church. Of these persons, it was noted: ‘As evidenced by the overall positive change in love of God and neighbour, these individuals seem to have grown, as Wesley describes, from “faith to faith.”’

Growth was certainly not viewed as optional for the early Methodists. As Robert Coleman has stated, ‘Evangelism for Wesley did not end when people made professions of faith. Conversion was only the first step in an on-going life of

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discipleship.\textsuperscript{5} Wesley expressed his concern for the lack of on-going discipleship in his journal:

\begin{quote}
I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching there has been for these twenty years all over Pembrookshire. But no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection, and the consequence is that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever.\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Wesley was convinced that those responding to evangelistic preaching needed to be ‘trained up’ by incorporating persons into societies, classes and bands so that they could receive sound doctrinal teaching as well as spiritual direction aimed toward Christian perfection. In this way, persons were invited to be disciples even before they had experienced conversion. In his charge to his preachers, Wesley stated, ‘It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.’\textsuperscript{7} (Hebrews 12:14). Wesley saw holiness as a matter of growth and perfection as a gift of God and a goal for the Christian life.

The evidence of this aim can be seen in many of the letters written to Charles Wesley from early Methodist laypersons giving personal accounts of conversion. In one letter, Catherine Gilbert writes, ‘My soul longeth to become more and more in purity of heart and to receive greater measure of the love of God shed abroad in my heart. I humbly desire you[r] prayers at the throne of grace [that] God in Christ

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would perfect and compleat [sic] my salvation.'\(^8\) Gilbert expresses a deep desire for God to complete her salvation. She sees Christian perfection as both a promise and a gift of God.

As the Methodist Church was in its infancy, the importance of Christian perfection continued to be emphasized. In *The Duties of the Minister of the Gospel*, Thomas Coke extends Wesley’s call to lead people into a life of holiness:

> But, above all, and in all, and through all, let us press upon every one the necessity of holiness. Let us never forget our calling — that we were called and sent forth to raise a holy people. Let all your doctrines, and all your discipline, all your labors, and all your conversation, center in this. Let this be the grand burden of your testimony — ‘Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.’\(^9\)

The call echoed by Coke continued throughout the early years of Methodism and although deviations occurred as the movement aged, it is still a timely call given the current state of the church.

Dr W. E. Sangster was a theologian and significant British Methodist leader in the early twentieth century. In the preface to his classic book on Christian perfection, S, states:

> This is sure. There is an experience of God the Holy Spirit, available for all who will seek it with importunity, which imparts spiritual power far above the level enjoyed by the average Christian: which inspires a caring God-like love different in kind and degree from the affections of normal nature: which communicates to the eager soul the penetrating power of holiness. No book can give this experience. It belongs to the secret intercourse of the soul with God. It lies at the very heart of personal religion. Its wide reception would transform the Church and shake the world.\(^10\)

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\(^8\) C. Gilbert, ‘Catherine Gilbert to Charles Wesley’, Early Methodist Volume, (Manchester, 1740).


Sangster casts a vision that goes beyond nominal Christianity. It is a vision for growth in holiness and of the ultimate *telos* of Christian perfection, which if pursued would not only result in God transforming the person, but also the world. In juxtaposition to Sangster’s vision beyond nominal Christianity, George Barna’s research has identified a trend toward nominalism:

> In one recent nationwide survey we asked people to describe their goals in life. Almost nine out of ten adults described themselves as “Christian.” Four out of ten said they were personally committed to Jesus Christ, have confessed their sins and believed they were going to Heaven after they died because of God’s grace provided through Jesus’ death and resurrection. And not one of the adults we interviewed said that their goal in life was to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ or to make disciples of the entire world – or even of their entire block.\(^\text{11}\)

It seems that the Christian world has not changed much since Sangster’s writing in the early twentieth century to the time of Barna’s research in 2001. There is still a struggle to help persons of the Christian faith see beyond a nominal Christian life to a life of holiness. With data continuing to indicate an alarming decline of Christianity in the West, the need for the transformation that Sangster speaks to, could not be more urgent.\(^\text{12}\)

This emphasis on growth in holiness is not in any way to minimize the necessity and urgency that people make a faith commitment to Jesus Christ. The hypothesis of this thesis is that the doctrine of Christian perfection could be a vision employed in the process of evangelism that would encourage persons to grow into a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

It seems clear that Wesley’s burning passion throughout much of his adult life was to be a ‘real Christian.’ Wesley not only desired this for himself, but for all who would hear the message. A reading of Wesley and his biographers indicates that this ‘real Christianity’ for Wesley was a pursuit shaped by, as well as, culminating in a person’s perfection in love – Christian perfection. This central doctrine appears throughout Wesley’s life in his preaching, writing and practice. It seems logical that a thoroughly Wesleyan view of evangelism would need to be seen through this dominant lens. As Richard Heitzenrater has observed, ‘evangelism itself takes on a different form when holiness is the goal.’ If for Wesley, the telos, or ultimate goal, of evangelism was Christian perfection and the resultant transformed life, then a comprehensive view of Wesley’s understanding of Christian perfection is the logical starting point for this research. Christian perfection as a telos is also significant for re-thinking the theology and practice of evangelism. This connection seems to be missing in general scholarship and it is the hypothesis of this thesis that the recovery of Christian perfection as a telos of evangelism would help persons pursue a life beyond nominal Christianity.

1.1 Methodology

This thesis argues that the theology and practice of evangelism of the Wesleyan movement has become fragmented due to the loss of the telos that was operative in early Methodism. Through John Wesley’s thinking and early Methodist practice, this research has discovered Christian perfection to be the telos of evangelism in early Methodism. While Wesley did not use the term evangelism, he was deeply concerned for training people up ‘in the ways of God’ and ensuring that

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13 Wesley defines this term as ‘those perfected in love’, in Some Remarks on Mr Hill’s ‘Farrago Double-Distilled.’ Jackson, v. 10, p. 441.
persons experienced the full range of salvation from justification to Christian perfection.\textsuperscript{15} This connection has been largely missed by contemporary scholarship and with the loss of Christian perfection as the central doctrine and thus the telos of evangelism; the focus of evangelism has tended to fall upon two broad trajectories. On the one hand, the telos has been focused upon justification and initial conversion versus the transformative vision of Wesley’s soteriology. On the other hand, the focus has been upon discipleship as the telos. It might be said that much of modern theology and practice of evangelism focuses upon ‘decisions’ rather than making disciples.\textsuperscript{16} Still, for others the reality may be discipleship without a decision.

The work of Alasdair MacIntyre on telos and practice will be drawn upon to see the value of a telos as well as the loss when a telos is disconnected from the practices connected with that telos. The work of Ellen Charry to recover the sapiential character of doctrine will be used to demonstrate the sapiential nature of Christian perfection as a doctrine. Building on MacIntyre and Charry, Philip R. Meadows’ paradigmatic framework of evangel, telos and ethos will be drawn upon to analyse Wesley’s approach to evangelism as well as a significant stream of contemporary evangelism scholarship in the Methodist tradition. The method of this thesis is to demonstrate the logic that exists between these three scholars, and apply their insights to the theology and practice of evangelism.

\textit{Telos and Vision}

At the outset, it is important to reflect upon the connection between telos and vision as the terms are used in this thesis. The connection between telos and vision can be seen through the definitions of the terms. While telos is defined as a

\textsuperscript{15} Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, v. 3, p. 144.

\textsuperscript{16} See McKnight in S. McKnight, \textit{The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited} (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).
destination or goal, vision is defined as the picture of that goal. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *telos* as ‘end, purpose, ultimate object or aim.’ The concept of *telos* is rooted in both the New Testament and the ancient Greco-Roman world. In the Greek world, meanings of the term *telos* include ‘achievement’, ‘fulfilment’, or ‘completion’. In the New Testament the word has a dynamic character and may be rendered as ‘fulfilment’ among other terms. *Telos* is rendered as ‘fulfilment’ in Luke 22:37: ‘For the time has come for this prophecy about me to be fulfilled: “He was counted among the rebels.” Yes, everything written about me by the prophets will come true.’ In Colossians 1:28, Paul uses the adjective form, *téléios*, to describe the maturity of believers. The NIV renders *téleios* in this passage as ‘perfect’: ‘We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.’ Kittel, Friedrich and Bromiley observe:

> The NT never seems to use *téléios* for a gradual advance to Christian perfection or for a two-graded ideal of ethical perfection. It plainly means “whole” or “entire” in Matthew, Paul, and the Catholic Epistles, and it also has the sense of “mature” in some passages in Paul.”

The idea of ‘mature’ or ‘whole’ is a strong biblical image for the goal or aim presented in the New Testament, which Paul and others call believers to pursue.

MacIntyre’s recovery of the significance of *teleology* in ethics has also had an impact on theology. This thesis draws upon MacIntyre’s understanding to connect the idea of *telos* with growth and evangelism. MacIntyre’s understanding of *telos* is rooted in an Aristotelian model. Following Aristotle, MacIntyre suggests: ‘Human beings, like

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the members of all other species, have a specific nature; and that nature is such that they have certain aims and goal, such that they move by nature towards a specific *telos*.\footnote{\textit{A.C. MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory} (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p. 148.} MacIntyre sees *telos* as ‘any view of man as having an essence which defines his true end.’\footnote{MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory}, p. 54.}

The concept of *telos* should be distinguished from the concept of goal. While it could be argued that *telos* is, at least in a sense, a goal. However, in the MacIntyrian sense, there may be many goals but the *telos* is an ultimate goal. The *telos* is a ‘true end’ and not simply one goal among many.

Peter Northouse provides the ‘industry standard’ definition of vision in his book, *Introduction to Leadership*.\footnote{Correspondence with Colwill D. (13 May, 2014). Deborah A. Colwill, PhD, Associate Professor of Educational & Leadership Studies, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.} Northouse develops a definition and then names several characteristics of vision that help clarify the definition. Northouse states:

…a vision is a mental model of an ideal future state. It offers a picture of what could be. Visions imply change and can challenge people to reach a higher standard of excellence. At the same time, visions are like a guiding philosophy that provides people with meaning and purpose.\footnote{P.G. Northouse, \textit{Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice} (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), p. 109.}

He continues by describing the characteristics of vision that include, a mental picture, a change, values, a map, and a challenge.\footnote{Northouse, \textit{Introduction to Leadership: Concepts and Practice}, p. 109.} Northouse’s definition could be seen as having a formative role, not allowing a person to be settled but calling them to a new life.

Given the established definition of vision, it can be argued that a vision is another way of describing the *telos*. As Northouse defines it, ‘vision is a mental
model of an ideal future state’. In the Greek world and in the Biblical narrative, *telos* is often understood as fulfilment or completion. A vision gives the picture of this completion or fulfilment. Without a clear picture of the *telos*, it would be challenging at best to pursue it. Conceptualising the *telos* requires vision, but not all visions are of the *telos*. In fact, vision can be applied to sub-goals as well as concluding *telos*. *Telos* cannot be ultimately and completely captured by a single concrete vision, but might require multiple angles of vision as this thesis explores.

**MacIntyre**

In order to show how the central *telos* of evangelism has been lost, the work of MacIntyre will be drawn upon. MacIntyre analyses the decline of virtue in modern times in his book, *After Virtue*. He begins his argument by describing the fragmentation of virtue through history, but especially as a product of the ‘Enlightenment Project’ and the attempts to make ‘a rational justification for morality’. A similar critique could be made for the attempt to reduce evangelism to a program or formula focused on an individual decision. MacIntyre argues for the loss of the *telos* that he identifies as the Aristotelian concept of ‘the good.’ MacIntyre uses a parable to illustrate the problem he identifies:

Imagine that the natural sciences were to suffer the effects of a catastrophe. A series of environmental disasters are blamed by the general public on the scientists. Widespread riots occur, laboratories are burnt down, physicists are lynched, books and instruments are destroyed. Finally, a Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all they possess are fragments; a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated either to the other bits and

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pieces of theory which they possess or to experiment; instruments whose use has been forgotten; half-chapters from books, single pages from articles, not always fully legible because torn or charred. None the less all these fragments are re-embodied in a set of practices which go under the revived names of physics, chemistry, and biology. Adults argue with each other about the respective merits of relativity theory, evolutionary theory, and phlogiston theory, although they possess only a very partial knowledge of each. Children learn by heart the surviving portions of the periodic table and recite as incantations some of the theorems of Euclid. Nobody, or almost nobody, realizes that what they are doing is not natural science in any proper sense at all. For everything that they do and say conforms to certain canons of consistency and coherence and those contexts which would be needed to understand what they are doing have been lost, perhaps irretrievably.  

In this parable, the sciences have been blamed for ‘a series of environmental disasters’ and the field of science has been virtually eradicated by the enraged public. As time passes, a few persons rise up and attempt to revive the field of science, but with only fragmentary knowledge left, what they are able to retrieve is marginal at best. MacIntyre comments, ‘We may describe it as a world in which the language of natural science, or parts of it at least, continues to be used, but is in a grave state of disorder.’ Applying his parable to the current state of the world, MacIntyre continues, ‘The hypothesis which I wish to advance is that in the actual world which we inhabit the language of morality is in the same state of grave disorder as the language of natural science in the imaginary world which I described.’ MacIntyre goes on to argue that the loss of Aristotle’s teleology and the rise of emotivism have resulted in a world in which virtue is fragmented.  

33 MacIntyre is using the term emotivism here to mean, ‘the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.’ in MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, pp. 11-12.
MacIntyre’s methodology, more than his specific thesis will be used to analyse the competing and partial theologies of evangelism in the Wesleyan tradition that have resulted from a loss of the true telos of perfection. This will be accomplished by showing the methodological parallel between MacIntyre’s claim about ethics and a critique of contemporary Wesleyan evangelism. Following MacIntyre, one may observe that people desire to talk about doing good, but with no clear vision of ‘the good’ to guide the conversation, it ends up an incoherent discussion. Similarly, people want to talk about the theology and practice of evangelism, but without a clear vision of the telos, the result is an incoherent diversity of understandings and activities. Without the telos, many goals may be pursued, but they may not be the ultimate goal. In addition, those goals themselves may be diminished or distorted.

MacIntyre’s approach to and definition of practice should also prove helpful as he defines ‘practice’ as that which is oriented towards a telos, both internally and externally:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, and so is the work of the historian, and so are painting and music.\[35\]

MacIntyre’s idea of practice emphasizes how the ‘ends’ and ‘goods’ are achieved in the performing of the activity. MacIntyre’s observation also implies a warning that

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34 MacIntyre develops the core of his thesis in Chapter 9, entitled, “Nietzsche or Aristotle?”
35 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p. 187.
when the ‘end’ of the practice or the internal ‘good’ becomes disconnected from the practice, fragmentation occurs.

Basing his argument on MacIntyre, Jonathan Wilson states in his book *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World*, ‘Western culture is fragmented, not pluralistic. It is incoherent; our lives are lived piecemeal, not whole. The disagreements that we have are difficult to resolve because we cannot locate them within some coherent position or community. We do not live in a world filled with competing outlooks; we live in a world that has fallen apart.’ Wilson goes on to suggest that the reason for this fragmentation is that most of our communities (religious or otherwise) have lost their *telos* (the end goal) and have replaced the *telos* with other aims. A *telos* in this sense can be equated as an aim with sub-goals along the way. The problem for evangelism is substituting the aim for what should be a goal. So, in the argument of this thesis, conversion is a goal, not the aim or *telos* of evangelism.

One example given by Wilson is worship. When we lose the *telos* of worship, which he defines as to ‘glorify and enjoy God,’ then we end up with ‘pseudo worship.’ Wilson states, ‘When this *telos* is lost and (pseudo) worship continues, then our practice of worship may appear healthy, but be ordered by the wrong end.’ Further, he observes that this phenomenon has occurred in the area of evangelism where, ‘the church’s attempt to commend the gospel on grounds that have nothing to do with the gospel itself.’ Following Wilson, it might be said that without a clear

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37 Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from Macintyre's after Virtue*, p. 32.
telos, evangelism ends up being about making converts or filling churches with people.

Charry

The work of Charry is helpful in building a bridge between MacIntyre (as well as Wilson’s application) and evangelism as a practice. In her work, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine*, Charry argues for a recovery of the ‘aretegenic’ and sapiential functions of doctrine. Charry defines ‘aretegenic’ as virtue producing\(^{39}\) and sapience as ‘engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower to the known.’\(^{40}\) She argues that these roles have been lost and the result is a fragmentation of Christian doctrine from its pastoral function. Her stated purpose is to examine ‘primary Christian doctrines and teachings from the Apostolic era through the Reformation in order to argue that a central theological task is to assist people to come to God.’\(^{41}\) Further, Charry states:

I am persuaded that over the course of centuries of action and reaction to the ups and downs of theological practice, theology has lost its ability to address questions of happiness and perhaps even goodness. Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed this out for moral philosophy, and Charles Taylor has chronicled the career of this loss since the Enlightenment (MacIntyre 1984; Taylor 1989). Their narratives can be paralleled in theology.\(^ {42}\)

Charry is modelling an approach to pastoral theology using MacIntyre as an example that can be followed with respect to evangelism as well as providing a framework for understanding the role of the doctrine of Christian perfection. Charry goes on to note that a survey of classic theologians and their pedagogies can provide ‘grounds for reclaiming a genuine pastoral Christian psychology that grounds human excellence

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\(^{40}\) Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 4.

\(^{41}\) Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 5.

\(^{42}\) Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 17.
in knowing and loving God.’\textsuperscript{43} She approaches this task by looking to representative theologians in the New Testament, the Patristics, Medieval piety and the Reformation. She laments that, ‘Theology today lives on the margins of the secular culture, the margins of the academy, and the margins of the church.’\textsuperscript{44} Charry is describing a situation where a combination of a ‘desacralized’ world and an academy out of touch with that world has led to theology having little or no impact on the daily lives of Christians (or non-Christians). As Wesley observed in his \textit{Thoughts Upon Methodism}:

\begin{quote}
I do not fear that the people called Methodist shall ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. I only fear that they shall exist as a dead sect having the form of religion, but not the power thereof, and that undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast to the doctrine, discipline and spirit with which they first set out.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

The loss that Charry describes could also be ascribed to the current Methodist movement and the loss of the pastoral or evangelistic function of central doctrines like Christian perfection. In many ways, the loss that Charry describes mirrors Wesley’s concern that Methodism would exist only with the form of religion, but without the power.

As already observed, it can be argued that the \textit{telos} of the process of making disciples (evangelism) for early Methodists was Christian perfection. As Stanley Hauerwas has observed, ‘Christianity for Wesley, is about changed lives and any belief that does not serve that end held little interest for him.’\textsuperscript{46} In his description of the process of salvation, John Wesley describes a journey that does not end with initial conversion. For example, in the preface to the 1740 edition of \textit{Hymns and}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[43] Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. 18.
\item[44] Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. 245.
\end{footnotes}
Sacred Poems, Wesley uses the language of ‘full salvation’ to emphasize that salvation was not completed once a person had received remission of sins. Wesley states:

Neither, therefore, dare we affirm (as some have done) that this full salvation is at once given to true believers. There is indeed, an instantaneous (as well as a gradual) work of God in the souls of his children; and there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received, in one moment, either a clear sense of the forgiveness of their sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person's receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart.

This is but one example where Wesley emphasized that salvation was not complete at justification or initial salvation.

The loss of this telos has been noted by scholars including Albert C. Outler, who noted the loss of this central doctrine within the context of Methodism in a 1974 address:

The doctrine of holiness of heart and life that had been the keystone in the arch of Wesley’s doctrine, but by the turn of the century had become a pebble in the shoe of the standard bred Methodists. And presently they took off the shoe, threw out the pebble, put the shoe back on and kept walking, with the same labels but without the same equipment. And this has been an uncomprehended and immense tragedy for all who claim John Wesley as their father in God.

As demonstrated by MacIntyre and Wilson, the loss of the telos can have catastrophic results. In addition, as observed by Charry, when Christian doctrine loses its pastoral function and is pushed to the margins, the church loses a significant tool for helping persons to be renewed in the image of God.

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49 Wesley did not consider this conclusion (or telos) to be unique to the Methodists, but rather saw the Methodist movement in line with the early church and the best of Christian tradition.
Drawing upon both Charry’s and MacIntyre’s methodologies, it will be argued that the current streams, schools or movements of evangelism that are present in Wesleyan evangelism have lost the telos of the earlier movement, namely Christian perfection. It will further be argued that the loss of this telos has led to the fragmentation of evangelism as a coherent practice and that in order to have a truly Wesleyan theology and practice of evangelism, the concept of ‘salvation to the uttermost’ needs to be recovered. In addition, it will be contended that in order to recover the telos of evangelism as Christian perfection, the sapiential, pastoral role of the doctrine must also be recovered.

Meadows

In his article, ‘Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism’, Meadows introduces a paradigmatic framework to contrast different paradigms of evangelism with the early Methodist movement through the lenses of evangel, telos and ethos. Meadows begins by describing the ‘inherited-conversionist paradigm’ identified by the evangel of personal salvation, the telos of conversion and the ethos of proclamation. While acknowledging the roots of the paradigm are planted in the eighteenth century revival and in early Methodism, Meadows identifies individualism, anthropocentrism and pragmatism as concerns with this paradigm. He then describes an ‘emerging-missional paradigm’ marked by an evangel of the eschatological kingdom, telos of discipleship, and ethos of initiation. A life-long process of transformation, sought through a ‘complex process of spiritual, moral and intellectual catechesis,’ rather than a ‘transformative

moment,’ characterizes this paradigm. With this paradigm, Meadows identifies four potential pitfalls. First, there is the potential displacement of the ‘personal reality of each one’s relationship to God’ by an emphasis on the ‘social reality of the church.’ Second, there is the possible reduction of experiences associated with evangelical conversion to ‘some generalized process of catechesis.’ Third, this paradigm may not emphasize the need to ‘surrender one’s whole life to the lordship of Christ’ and thus leave a person’s decision to be a disciple incomplete. Finally, there is a concern that this paradigm tends to reduce evangelism to ‘the implicit character’ of ecclesial practice or ‘the faithful witness of a community in its life together.’ Again, Meadows sees the first two paradigms as present in the Wesleyan movement, but proposes that a more comprehensive paradigm for Wesley is identified by an evangel of holy love, a telos of communion with God and an ethos of spiritual direction.

This paradigmatic framework will be used to assess scholarship in the area of evangelism for its particular evangel, telos and ethos. The interrelationship of these dimensions will be examined as well as the gain or loss, which results from particular emphases. This paradigmatic approach also connects with MacIntyre and Charry, by providing an interpretive framework for analysing the fragmented understandings, aims and practices of contemporary evangelism.

1.2 Structure

The overall structure for the thesis will be organized as follows:

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 introduces MacIntyre’s understanding of telos and fragmentation as well as Charry’s view of sapience as methodological frameworks from which to

view the relationship between Christian perfection and evangelism. This chapter also introduces Meadows’ paradigmatic framework that will be used to analyse approaches to evangelism and demonstrate the fragmentation and loss, which are present in the representative stream of evangelism. Meadows’ framework builds upon MacIntyre and Charry to provide an interpretative framework for analysing contemporary approaches as well as a tool for interpreting Wesley’s approach to evangelism in Chapter Four.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 builds upon MacIntyre’s formulation of fragmentation and telos and how Christian perfection may be identified as a telos of early Methodism. This chapter will seek to establish Christian perfection as the central doctrine and telos of early Methodism through the use of a typological approach. The doctrine of Christian perfection as presented in the Wesleyan corpus will be viewed through the various terms used for the doctrine by John Wesley. These facets will provide insights into Wesley’s understanding and the complexity of Christian perfection. Charry will provide a lens for identifying the sapiential (engaged knowledge) nature of Christian doctrine thus further establishing the role of Christian perfection as a defining doctrine for the movement. This chapter will draw upon primary sources from John and Charles Wesley as well as letters from the Methodist Archives in Manchester. Secondary sources will include scholars such as Collins, W.E. Sangster, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop and Harald Lindström.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 explores the hymns as well as Methodism’s hymn writer, Charles Wesley in order to examine the connections between hymnody and discipleship as well as drawing on primary and secondary sources to demonstrate the constitutive
nature of the doctrine. Charry’s view of sapience (engaged knowledge) will be applied to Christian perfection to demonstrate the doctrine’s role in guiding persons toward full salvation. This chapter will continue to draw upon primary sources in the Wesleyan corpus as well as secondary sources such as John Tyson, Bernard Manning, and David Lowes Watson.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 seeks to establish the connection between the central doctrine of Christian perfection in the early Methodist movement and the work of evangelism. Using Meadows’ paradigmatic framework of evangel, telos and ethos, John Wesley’s approach to evangelism will be analysed to see how the telos and vision of Christian perfection guided the early Methodists as they went about the work of ‘training up’ persons in the ‘ways of God’. This chapter will use primary sources in the Wesleyan corpus as well as secondary sources such as MacIntyre, Charry and Meadows to provide the framework for analysis. Other sources will be drawn upon such as Skevington Wood, Albert Outler, Robert Tuttle, Kenneth Collins and Randy Maddox to provide insight into Wesley’s view of evangelism.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 explores the loss of Christian perfection in contemporary Wesleyan evangelism scholarship by focusing on a particular stream of the scholarship identified with a missional approach to evangelism. Using Meadows framework, as well as insights from MacIntyre and Charry, each representative scholar will be explored to identify the evangel, telos and ethos operative in each approach as well as the fragmentation and loss which occurs when following the arguments. From this analysis emerges the importance of the sub-goals, how they need to be reconnected,

and their need to be re-fashioned in the light of perfection. The stream of scholarship identified includes Outler, William Abraham, Scott Jones and Elaine Heath. In addition, other scholars will be used to interact with this stream such as Stone and Mortimer Arias.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 will identify the implications of a recovery of Christian perfection as the telos of evangelism as well as the relationship of the evangel and ethos to a telos of Christian perfection. The work done in the first five chapters will be drawn together to demonstrate that the loss of Christian perfection as a telos for evangelism has created a situation where churches are ill equipped to help persons to grow in faith. Implications will be explored including the impact to the message, the vision and the practices of evangelism.

1.3 Original Contribution

The original contribution of this thesis is the renewing of Christian perfection as a vision of evangelism in order to hold elements of conversion and discipleship in tension, thus repairing the fragmentation present in contemporary evangelism scholarship. This proposed link between Christian perfection and evangelism is observed through MacIntyre’s view of telos, Charry’s view of sapience and Meadows’ paradigmatic framework. Scholars have addressed the need for continued discipleship after initial conversion or have focused the telos on the process of initiation. In particular they do not present a vision of evangelism that matches the telos presented by the early Methodists of that era. This thesis moves towards a more coherent theology of evangelism, and one that might have significance for contemporary practice. Minor contributions include the typological analysis of Wesley’s view of Christian perfection, the analysis of Wesley’s way of evangelism
and the use of unpublished primary sources to demonstrate the constitutive nature of Christian perfection for early Methodism.

1.4 Scope – foci and limitations

The scope of the thesis includes the disciplines of Wesley studies and evangelism. Within Wesley studies the scope is limited to the ministry of John Wesley (1729-1791) and primarily focuses on the doctrine of Christian perfection and the theology and practice of evangelism among the early Methodists of that era. The historical development of the doctrine after the death of Wesley will not be analysed since the purpose of this thesis is not to examine the historical development as such, but rather the understanding that was operative within Wesley’s lifetime. Within the discipline of evangelism, the thesis focuses on literature that is linked with the modern Wesleyan/Methodist movement and particularly a school of evangelism that is representative of the emerging-missional paradigm identified by Meadows. This thesis will not engage significantly with the inherited-conversionist paradigm, since much of the material related to the emerging-missional paradigm is focused upon the critique of the paradigm.
Chapter 2: Christian Perfection as a Constitutive Doctrine

2.1 Introduction

Building on MacIntyre’s formulation of fragmentation and telos, this chapter will establish Christian perfection as the central doctrine and telos of early Methodism. ChARRY will provide a way of interpreting the sapiential nature of Christian doctrine thus establishing the formative role of Christian perfection in the movement. To establish the centrality of Christian perfection, this chapter will begin by exploring the doctrine of Christian perfection through a typological approach. This approach identifies several facets or terms, which were used by Wesley and the early Methodists to describe Christian perfection. In addition, following MacIntyre’s view of telos and the concept of vision, this chapter argues that as the constitutive doctrine of early Methodism, Christian perfection could also be viewed as the telos of evangelism. Rather than seeing the doctrine of Christian perfection as a speculative theological concept, ChARRY’s view of the sapiential nature of doctrine, will demonstrate the role of Christian perfection as spiritually formative. The typological approach that follows connects with MacIntyre by demonstrating the centrality of Christian perfection and providing evidence for the doctrine’s role as a telos in early Methodism. The various terms explored also demonstrate the sapience of the doctrine and how it performs a formative role in the early Methodist movement. Together, the two approaches work towards a vision for practice by demonstrating how the doctrine functioned within the movement.

2.2 A Typological Approach to Wesley's Doctrine

Modern Wesley scholarship has focused primarily on the broader view of John Wesley’s theology in an attempt to analyse the doctrines therein or to embark on a new era of Wesley scholarship sometimes referred to as ‘Wesley’s theology for
Today, some methods tend to either show a historical development or attempt to systematize Wesley’s theology and compress it into a single concept. For example, when the doctrine of Christian perfection has been approached by scholars, it has many times, been viewed through a single lens. Recently, in his work, *Perfecting Grace*, Mark Mann examines the doctrine through the lens of anthropology and human science (using non-native language outside of the Wesleyan corpus). Mann states his purpose as ‘spelling out a constructive theory of holiness that is built upon an anthropology that draws upon the human sciences and therefore has avoided the pitfalls and shortcomings of previous theologies.’ Some researchers, including Brendlinger and Mueller, have analysed the doctrine and Wesley’s view through the discipline of psychology:

> Because of our awareness that many Christians, particularly those who consider themselves heirs of Wesley, experience confusion and have misunderstandings of this Wesley doctrine we decided to revisit Wesley's eighteenth century problem and explore what Christians from Wesley's tradition NOW perceived about Christian Perfection. We wanted to examine their understandings in light of psychological issues.

Still, other scholars, such as Christensen, have used Wesley’s roots in patristic Christianity as their primary approach. In his contribution to *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, Christensen states, ‘I seek to articulate a distinctly Wesleyan understanding of the doctrine of Christian perfection in relation to *theosis* and its possible theological antecedents in Greek patristic Christianity.’ In his article, 'Christian Perfection as Love for God,' Stanley Johnson’s goal is to demonstrate that ‘love of

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God’ is the central idea in Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection. Johnson states, ‘The following material represents an attempt to clarify the nature and central role of the concept of love for God in Christian perfection according to Wesley's vision.’

Outler voiced his concern for attempts to oversimplify Wesley’s theology in an address to the students and faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary in 1974. Outler states: ‘A tendency that has become a tradition: Namely to oversimplify theology. To oversimplify the full dynamic range of the Wesleyan vision of the Christian life, or to fragment it one way or the other and identify the fragment with the source.’

The purpose of this chapter is not to take issue with these approaches or their conclusions, but rather to offer a multi-faceted approach to looking at Christian perfection, one of the significant, yet seemingly neglected, doctrines of the Wesleyan corpus. What is proposed is not particularly new concerning the details of the doctrine, but rather a new way of viewing the material, which helps demonstrate the centrality of the doctrine in early Methodist theology and practice.

The purpose of this chapter is also not to provide an historical account of the development of Wesley’s theology concerning the doctrine of Christian perfection. However, it is important to note one of the major transitions in Wesley’s life as well as a transition in his thinking about Christian perfection. On 24 May 1738 Wesley records in his journal:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me,

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58 Outler, Whither Wesleyan Theology?
that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.\textsuperscript{59}

Scholars continue to debate the underlying meaning of Wesley’s Aldersgate experience, but one thing seems clear that is relevant to this thesis. As Boraine observes, Christian perfection or holiness was always central to the theology of John Wesley, but after that significant encounter with God in 1738, holiness was now ‘the goal, not the basis of the Christian life.’\textsuperscript{60}

A method of viewing the doctrine from different angles actually reflects John Wesley’s own approach. In \textit{A Plain Account}, Wesley writes:

\begin{quote}
Look at it again; survey it on every side, and that with the closest attention. In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. Now, take it in which of these views you please, (for there is no material difference,) and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

In this paragraph, Wesley appears to be using a faceting approach by emphasizing the various ‘views’ of Christian perfection while also maintaining the interrelatedness of the different facets. In addition to \textit{A Plain Account}, Wesley’s writings provide evidence of a multi-faceted approach through his use of multiple terms for the doctrine of perfection. While the facets are not contradictory, and more or less clearly interrelated, they cannot easily be reduced or systematised in a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, v. 1, p. 103.}
\footnote{J. Wesley, \textit{A Plain Account of Christian Perfection: As Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, from the Year 1725, to the Year 1777} (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), pp. 117-118.}
\end{footnotes}
conclusive way. Wesley could have simplified and chosen to use fewer terms. However, it seems that as Wesley was seeking to be scriptural in his theology and ministry, he was compelled to embrace the full range of terms that he encountered in the biblical narrative.

An attempt to understand the doctrine of Christian perfection necessarily includes an investigation into the various descriptions of the nature of the doctrine. This chapter proposes a view of Christian perfection that takes into account the various facets of the doctrine. A facet is defined as ‘one of the small cut and polished faces of a diamond or other gem’ or ‘a particular side or aspect of something’.

When viewed closely a gem reveals many colours and features depending upon the angle from which it is viewed. The particular facet in view reveals unique features of the one gem. Although the features of the facet may be unique, the facet is still only a part of the larger gem and its beauty is incomplete without taking all the facets into account. A jeweller studies all of the facets of a gem to determine the value and quality of the one stone. Similarly, this essay, will explore how the terms most widely used for Christian perfection in the Wesley corpus can be used to represent the various ‘facets’ of the single doctrine. An attempt will be made to identify Wesley’s definition for each facet. The facets will be examined for their unique contribution to the overall view of the doctrine while also analysing their interrelatedness to bring into focus an overall picture of Christian perfection, the

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‘grand depositum’ of Wesleyan theology. Where possible, the analysis will also examine the chronological and contextual evidence related to each term.

Rather than follow the reductionist tendency in larger Wesley studies and for particular doctrines, this typology will be used to examine the facets of Christian perfection represented by each term. Many would consider Wesley’s lack of consistency in the terminology of Christian perfection as a problem that needs to be solved. This essay proposes to look at Wesley in another light, namely non-reductionist. Because a reductionist approach is one that Wesley seems to have explicitly and implicitly sought to avoid, this method may prove applicable to other areas of Wesley studies.

As previously noted, John Wesley used various terms throughout his life and ministry to refer to the doctrine of Christian perfection. In fact, Wesley seems to have paid special attention to the use of terms for Christian perfection. In the opening words of his sermon *Christian Perfection*, Wesley states, ‘The word ‘perfect’ is what many cannot bear. The very sound of it is an abomination to them. And whosoever ‘preaches perfection’ (as the phrase is), asserts that it is attainable in this life, runs great hazard of being accounted by them worse than a heathen man or a publican.’ In the defence of the use of the term ‘perfect,’ Wesley goes on to state: ‘We may not therefore lay these expressions aside, seeing they are the words of God, and not of man. But we may and ought to explain the meaning of them, that those who are sincere of heart may not err to the right hand or to the left from the mark of the prize of their high calling.’

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Some of the most common terms used for Christian perfection by Wesley include: holiness, entire sanctification, full salvation, second blessing, perfect love and renewal of the image of God. These terms and others have also been used down through the ages in reference to the doctrine. The use of each of these terms by Wesley and the Methodists can give insight into the doctrine itself.

2.2.1 Holiness

The term holiness in the Wesleyan corpus does not always point to Christian perfection. However, it is a key term used by Wesley and is heavily linked with the doctrine of Christian perfection. According to *A Plain Account*, Wesley read Taylor’s *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living* in the year 1725 and a’ Kempis’ *Christian’s Pattern* in 1726. These classic texts seemed to plant the seed of Wesley’s focus on holiness. The term holiness appears in Wesley’s writings as early as 1730 in a letter to his mother concerning Taylor's *Rules*:

What I so much like is his account of the pardon of sins, which is the clearest I ever met with: 'Pardon of sins in the gospel is sanctification. Christ came to take away our sins, by turning every one of us from our iniquities (Acts iii. 26). And there is not in the nature of the thing any expectation of pardon, or sign or signification of it, but so far as the thing itself discovers itself. As we hate sin, grow in grace, and arrive 'at the state of holiness, which is also a state of repentance and imperfection, but yet of sincerity of heart and diligent endeavor; in the same degree we are to judge concerning the forgiveness of sins. For, indeed, that is the evangelical forgiveness, and it signifies our pardon, because it effects it, or rather it is in the nature of the thing, so that we are to inquire into no hidden records. Forgiveness of sins is not a secret sentence, a word, or a record, but it is a state of change effected upon us; and upon ourselves we are to look for it, to read it and understand it.' [Holy Dying, chap. v. sect. 5.] In all this he appears to steer in the middle road exactly, to give assurance of pardon to the penitent, but to no one else.65

As Wesley wrestles with Taylor’s writing, he is beginning to form his view of Christian perfection. Wesley is drawn to Taylor’s description of the pardon of sins as well as the effect of forgiveness that Taylor describes.

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In 1734, Wesley used the term when writing to his Father concerning his lack of interest in the pastoral duties at Epworth and Wroote:

By holiness I mean not fasting (as you seem to suppose), or bodily austerity, or any other external means of improvement, but the inward temper, to which all these are subservient, a renewal of the soul in the image of God. I mean a complex habit of lowliness, meekness, purity, faith, hope, and the love of God and man. And I therefore believe that, in the state wherein I am, I can most promote this holiness in myself, because I now enjoy several advantages, which are almost peculiar to it.\(^66\)

Even in these early years, Wesley is careful to define the facet, holiness, not as an external form, but an inward transformation that exhibits itself outwardly in the life of the believer.

The term ‘holiness’ is picked up by Wesley’s followers and used to describe conversion experiences. In a letter written to Charles Wesley, Hannah Hancock writes: ‘the Lord have deeply convinced [sic] me of the necessity [sic] of inward holiness and I believe without holiness no man can see the Lord Sir I begg [sic] your continual prayer as my first desire was to know my [illegible] in Christ it is my earnest desire to know Christ living in me the hope of glory.’\(^67\) The sapiential nature of the doctrine is apparent in this and other accounts as persons sought to experience the fullness of what God desired to do in their lives. As Charry notes, the sapiential nature of doctrine plays a formative role in the lives of Christians as doctrine enables persons to come to know God in both cognitive and relational ways.\(^68\)

A prevalent biblical term, Wesley referred to several scriptures when writing about ‘holiness,’ including: Leviticus 20:8, 26; Deuteronomy 30:6; and Luke 10:27. A key verse often quoted by Wesley is from Hebrews: ‘Make every effort to live in

\(^{67}\) H. Hancock, 'Hannah Hancock to Charles Wesley', Early Methodist Volume, (Manchester, 1742).
\(^{68}\) Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 16.
peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.’

(Hebrews 12:14) Wesley considered this term a synonym of Christian perfection:
‘Christian perfection, therefore, does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance or mistake, or infirmities or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness.’

69 Here it is ambiguous as to whether Wesley meant that holiness is perfection, or that perfection is holiness made complete.

Holiness is both an ethical/moral statement as well as a description of the person’s inner life. Wesley often associates this inner and outer condition with Luke 10:27: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”; and, “Love your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10:27) Using this term in The Character of a Methodist, Wesley seems to sum up a Methodist: ‘His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.’

70 At times, Wesley modified the term ‘holiness’ to ‘scriptural holiness’ to emphasize the doctrine’s root in the scriptures. When responding to a question concerning God’s purpose for the Methodists, Wesley replied, ‘Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.’ 71 For the purpose of this thesis, it is revealing that Wesley did not claim that Methodism was raised up to make converts, but rather to spread holiness. It is the argument of this thesis that conversion is a means to that end not the end itself.

69 Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, v. 6, p. 5.
In his sermon, *The Circumcision of the Heart*, Wesley focuses on this term in such a way that Outler states, ‘It is one of Wesley’s most careful and complete statements on his doctrine of holiness.’ In the first part of his sermon, Wesley begins to define the circumcision of the heart in terms of holiness, which he explains to mean, ‘the being cleansed from sin, ‘from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus, the being so ‘renewed in the image of our mind’ as to be ‘perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.’’ He further expands his definition of circumcision of the heart through the virtues of humility, faith, hope and charity. This language provides a link to Charry who argues, ‘When doctrines are stripped of their practical entailments, as they have been in modern times, they become irrelevant. Reclothing them in flesh and blood so that minds may be renewed is what this book is all about.’ Christian perfection was not ‘stripped’ of its ‘practical entailments’ in the early Methodist movement, but rather its sapience was realized in the doctrine’s formative role including the context of evangelism. Christian perfection, in its various facets has practical implications in Methodism. Wesley drew upon the sapiential nature of the doctrine to help persons pursue Christian perfection.

In his sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Wesley explicitly uses holiness to define Christian perfection: ‘Indeed, it [Christian perfection] is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus everyone that is perfect is holy, and everyone that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect.’ In this same sermon, Wesley emphasizes the fact that holiness or Christian perfection in no way

74 Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. xiii.
75 Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 6, p. 5.
implies a kind of supreme perfection. Rather, he stresses that Christian perfection does not mean ‘exemption either from ignorance or mistake, or infirmities or temptations.’

While Wesley sees this term as a synonym of Christian perfection, it also possesses its own unique contribution to the overall understanding of the doctrine. The unique contribution of ‘holiness’ is the emphasis it brings to the facet of Christian perfection pertaining to the renewal of Christ-like virtues in the life of the believer. ‘Holiness’ appears to be rooted early in Wesley’s life through his experience with writers such as Law, a’ Kempis and others. It is a facet of Christian perfection that Wesley observed in the biblical narrative and is a facet that Wesley, along with other Methodists, continued to emphasize throughout his life and ministry.

2.2.2 Entire Sanctification

The facet ‘entire sanctification’ appears by 1745, seven years after Aldersgate and six years after Wesley distances himself from the Moravians (1740) over the issues of degrees of faith, the means of grace, stillness as well as the Moravian belief (voiced by Zinzendorf) that at the moment of justification a believer was fully sanctified. In 1745, in response to a question concerning the depreciation of justification in order to emphasize Christian perfection, Wesley answers, ‘When we are going to speak of entire sanctification, let us first describe the blessings of a justified state, as strongly as possible.’

In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, John Wesley cites several biblical passages in defence of the doctrine of Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Concerning the question of whether there is a promise of entire sanctification,

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76 Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 6, p. 5.
Wesley responds with Psalm 130:8; Ezekiel 36:25, 29; and 2 Corinthians 7:1. From the New Testament, Wesley appeals to 1 John 3:8; Ephesians 5:25-27; Romans 8:3,4. Wesley also asserts that prayers for entire sanctification are revealed in John 17:20-23; Eph. 3:14; and 1 Thess. 5:23. Finally, Wesley appeals to Matthew 5:48 and Matthew 12:37 as instances where entire sanctification is commanded. It is clear that Wesley saw the facet of entire sanctification as a biblical concept.79

Wesley uses the term or facet of ‘entire sanctification’ interchangeably with Christian perfection. In a section of A Plain Account that refers to the first conference on 27 May 1744, Wesley states, ‘The next morning we seriously considered the doctrine of sanctification, or perfection.’80 In a letter written to Walter Churchey, dated 21 February, 1771, Wesley writes: ‘Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love; love expelling sin, and governing both the heart and life of a child of God.’81 Given Wesley’s practice of using the term ‘entire sanctification’ interchangeably with Christian perfection, here and elsewhere in the Wesleyan corpus, it seems that ‘entire sanctification’ was regarded as a synonym of Christian perfection.

Wesley seems to define ‘entire sanctification’ when he writes, ‘he experiences a total death to sin, and an entire renewal in the love and image of God, so as to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks.’82

In A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Wesley states:

We grant, (1.) That many of those who have died in the faith, yea, the greater part of those we have known, were not perfected in love till a little before their death. (2.) That the term sanctified is continually applied by St. Paul to

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79 Wesley, A Plain Account, pp. 41-47.
80 Wesley, A Plain Account, p. 41.
82 Wesley, A Plain Account, p. 61.
all that were justified. (3.) That by this term alone, he rarely, if ever, means 'saved from all sin.' (4.) That, consequently, it is not proper to use it in that sense, without adding the word wholly, entirely, or the like. (5.) That the inspired writers almost continually speak of or to those who were justified, but very rarely of or to those who were wholly sanctified. (6.) That, consequently, it behoves us to speak almost continually of the state of justification; but more rarely, 'at least in full and explicit terms, concerning entire sanctification.'

By stating that justification does not mean ‘saved from all sin,’ Wesley is differentiating entire sanctification from justification.

Wesley was cautious not to confuse the initial sanctification that accompanies justification and the new birth with that of Christian perfection. Wesley underscores this facet when he states in his treatise on original sin, ‘the new birth is not, as you suppose, the progress, or the whole, of sanctification, but the beginning of it.’

As Lindström observes, Wesley did not always adhere to this distinction in practice and in his later years would refer to Christian perfection as simply ‘sanctification.’ However, Lindström also points out that although in practice this was the case, in principle, Wesley vehemently maintained the distinction between initial and entire sanctification.

The unique contribution in the facet of ‘entire sanctification’ is Wesley’s use of the term to distinguish Christian perfection from the initial sanctification Wesley identified with the new birth. This term focuses on what MacIntyre terms as a ‘true end’, or in other words, an ultimate goal. Wesley was emphasizing that initial sanctification was not the ‘true end’ but growth in grace continued toward the telos. ‘Entire sanctification’ is a term that is sometimes shunned in modern scholarship perhaps because of the tendency to associate it with the holiness movement and the

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86 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p. 54.
legalistic connotations it sometimes carries. Never the less, ‘entire sanctification’ is a significant term within the Wesleyan corpus and brings with it an important focus on one of the facets of the doctrine. Its historic emergence as a significant facet so near Wesley’s separation from the Moravians around 1740 and Wesley’s own spiritual awakening in 1738 undergirds the term’s contribution in distinguishing Christian perfection from the initial sanctification accompanying justification.

2.2.3 Full Salvation

Closely related to the terminology of entire sanctification is the facet ‘full salvation.’ This term was evidently a part of the broader Methodist vocabulary as early as 1740. In June 1740 Martha Jones writes to Charles Wesley, ‘the Lord strengthened and confirmed my faith my doubts and fears vanished and the Lord made his way plain before my face and now I believe I shall see his full salvation.’

The term continues to be utilized throughout John Wesley’s ministry and appears to be a facet that he uses to encourage Methodists and Methodist leaders. In ‘Letter to a Member of the Society,’ dated June 27, 1760, John Wesley writes, ‘It is therefore undoubtedly our duty to pray and look for full salvation every day, every hour, every moment, without waiting till we have either done or suffered more.’ Similarly, Wesley writes to Mr Samuel Bardsley, on November 24, 1771, ‘If you desire it should deepen in believers, continually exhort them to go on unto perfection; steadily to use all the grace they have received, and every moment to expect full salvation. The ‘Plain Account of Christian Perfection you should read yourself, more than once, and recommend it to all that are groaning for full redemption.’

87 M. Jones, 'Martha Jones to Charles Wesley', Early Methodist Volume, (Manchester, 1740).
While not appearing explicitly in the biblical narrative, John Wesley seems to have been certain of its consistency with the biblical idea of Christian perfection. In Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, the commentary on Romans 8:24 includes the use of the facet, ‘full salvation,’ *for we are saved by hope*—Our salvation is now only in hope. We do not yet possess this full salvation.\(^90\)

The use of this term gives further insight into Wesley’s soteriology and evidence for Christian perfection as the *telos* of evangelism. As noted in the discussion of ‘entire sanctification’, the notion of ‘full salvation’ calls persons beyond initial salvation or justification to the *telos* or the ‘true end’, using MacIntyre’s definition, of the Christian life.\(^91\) In the ‘Scripture Way of Salvation,’ Wesley uses the term ‘full salvation’ to emphasize that salvation is not complete until Christian perfection. ‘It is thus that we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or, as the Apostle expresses it, “Go unto perfection.”’\(^92\) Here Wesley biblically roots this exhortation by quoting from Hebrews 6:1, ‘Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,’ (Hebrews 6:1 KJV, emphasis mine)

John Wesley’s application of the term ‘full salvation’ seems to indicate that he saw it useful in encouraging Methodist’s to press on to perfection. It could be said that Wesley was casting a vision for evangelism that included Christian perfection as the *telos*. In *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, which was written in 1765, Wesley states, ‘Hence it may likewise appear, that there is no possible danger in thus


\(^91\) MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 54.

\(^92\) Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, v. 6, p. 46.
expecting full salvation. For suppose we were mistaken, suppose no such blessing
ever was or can be attained, yet we lose nothing: Nay, that very expectation quickens
us in using all the talents which God has given us; yea, in improving them all; so that
when our Lord cometh, he will receive his own with increase.\(^93\)

Using the facet of ‘full salvation,’ Wesley insisted that his preachers
encourage believers to ‘press on’ to perfection. On the 8\(^{th}\) of February 1766, John
Wesley writes to George Merryweather:

Where Christian perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached there is
seldom any remarkable blessing from God, and consequently little addition to
the Society and little life in the members of it. Therefore, if Jacob Rowell is
grown faint and says but little about it, do you supply his lack of service.
Speak, and spare not. Let not regard for any man induce you to betray the
truth of God. Till you press the believers to expect full salvation now you
must not look for any revival.\(^94\)

Wood comments on this letter: ‘It was from such a conviction that Wesley
continually exhorted his preachers to emulate him in never failing to press home this
teaching.’\(^95\) In The Scripture Way of Salvation, Wesley encouraged the Methodists
to ‘press on’ not only in his sermons, but also in Methodist hymnody:

Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!\(^96\)

In this hymn often titled, *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*, Charles emphasizes that God’s work is not complete in the believer’s life at initial conversion, but continues in the person’s life all the way to heaven.

In the preface to the 1740 edition of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Wesley uses the language of ‘full salvation’ to emphasize that salvation was not completed once a person had received remission of sins:

Neither, therefore, dare we affirm (as some have done) that this full salvation is at once given to true believers. There is indeed, an instantaneous (as well as a gradual) work of God in the souls of his children; and there wants not, we know, a cloud of witnesses, who have received, in one moment, either a clear sense of the forgiveness of sins, or the abiding witness of the Holy Spirit. But we do not know a single instance, in any place of a person’s receiving, in one moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, clean heart.  

Wesley emphasizes the continuum of salvation as well as the instantaneous nature of the change represented by each successive stage. He is also distancing himself from those that would equate sanctification with justification.

This facet’s contribution to the doctrine of Christian perfection revolves around the term’s focus on the process of salvation and the view that salvation culminates in Christian perfection and yet continues throughout a believer’s life. It emphasizes the aspect of Wesley’s soteriology that is salvation to the uttermost and places the doctrine within his *ordo salutis*.

### 2.2.4 Second Blessing

The term, ‘second blessing,’ is more commonly associated with the holiness movement rather than Wesley himself, yet it is a term that he used on several occasions emphasizing that a second work of grace is required if a believer is to experience Christian perfection. While the facet ‘second blessing’ is infrequently

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used by Wesley, it is never the less a significant term and provides further insight into Wesley understanding of Christian perfection.

‘Second blessing’ could be defined as a second and subsequent work of God’s grace to give a person a ‘new, a clean heart.’ In *A Plain Account*, Wesley states, ‘But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person’s receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart.’\(^98\) Preceding that second work of grace is an evangelical repentance where the believer is convicted of and repents from the original sin that remains. In his sermon, *On Sin in Believers*, Wesley comments on the believer before this second blessing: ‘He is saved from sin; yet not entirely: it remains though it does not reign.’\(^99\) Collins states, ‘Redemption, then, is not accomplished in one grand stroke, nor is it an uninterrupted process of gradual, barely distinguishable changes; instead, a second distinct work of grace is needed.’\(^100\) Wesley writes an assuring word to Mrs Barton: ‘It is exceedingly certain that God did give you the second blessing, properly so called. He delivered you from the root of bitterness, from inbred as well as actual sin.’\(^101\)

Throughout his soteriology, Wesley stresses that human beings are entirely dependent on divine grace for salvation to occur. However, Wesley is also insistent that the person must receive the offer of salvation—there must be a response. A ‘second blessing’ is certainly the product of divine grace in Wesley’s mind, but the blessing is also something that Wesley encouraged his people to pursue. In a letter to Samuel Bardsley, Wesley states: ‘Never be ashamed of the old Methodist doctrine.

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\(^98\) Wesley, *A Plain Account*, p. 31.
Press all believers to go on to perfection. Insist everywhere on the second blessing as receivable in a moment, and receivable now, by simple faith.’¹⁰²

The unique contribution of the facet, ‘second blessing’ can be identified in the way this term emphasizes the on-going work of God’s grace and the instant gift of God in the life of the believer subsequent to justification. This term also gives insight into Wesley’s view of evangelism and soteriology. Salvation is not complete at the ‘first blessing’ but God continues to work in the life of the believer toward a ‘second blessing’ which is Christian perfection. The sapiential, or formative, nature of Christian perfection is evident here as the language of ‘second blessing’ draws a person forward toward the telos. It can also be observed that the ‘first blessing’ is not the ‘true end’ for the believer nor for the work of evangelism.

2.2.5 Perfect Love

Similar to the other facets of the doctrine of perfection, Wesley identified ‘perfect love’ as a biblical term. This fact is demonstrated in Wesley’s frequent use of the book of 1 John as well as several instances of the term’s use in his Notes on the New Testament, including: Colossians 1:23 and 3:8; Hebrews 9:14 and 10:36; 2 Peter 1:9. Wesley frequently used ‘love’ to describe and define the doctrine of Christian perfection as exemplified in Mark 12:30-31: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” The second is this: “‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” There is no commandment greater than these.”’ (Mark 12:30–31) Wesley often uses the facet, ‘perfect love’ synonymously with Christian perfection.

In a letter to Elizabeth Hardy dated 5 April 1758, Wesley writes, ‘By ‘perfection’ I mean ‘perfect love,’ or the loving God with all our heart, so as to

rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks.’ In another letter to Mrs Maitland, 12 May 1763, Wesley again defines perfection as love:

By Christian perfection, I mean (as I have said again and again) the so loving God and our neighbour, as to ‘rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.’ He that experiences this, is scripturally perfect. And if you do not, yet you may experience it: You surely will, if you follow hard after it; for the Scripture cannot be broken.

In this passage from Wesley, it is clear that he is identifying ‘perfect love’ as a scriptural concept by tying it to the Great Commandment. In A Plain Account, when commenting upon the doctrine of Christian perfection, Wesley plainly states, ‘It is perfect love.’ He also maintains in his sermon, Scripture Way of Salvation, ‘But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love.’ In the same sermon, Wesley defines this facet of ‘perfect love’: ‘It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love ‘rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks.’

In Character of a Methodist, John Wesley describes a Methodist and uses the language of love to describe Christian perfection. Wesley begins by stating what are not the ‘distinguishing marks’ of a Methodist. He points out that it is not a Methodist’s ‘opinions,’ manner of communication, or customs that distinguish. Wesley also stresses that Methodists are not characterized by an emphasis on one part of religion over the whole. Wesley then turns to point out the ‘mark’ of a Methodist. He sums this ‘mark’ up in the great commandment: ‘one who ‘loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with

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105 Wesley, A Plain Account, p. 114.
106 Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, v. 6, p. 46.
107 Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, v. 6, p. 46.
all his strength’” – he later writes that the Methodist ‘accordingly loves his neighbour as himself...His heart is full of love to all mankind...’ Methodists are also characterized by a purity of heart, where the love of God has cleansed a person from ‘all revengeful passions, from envy, malice, and wrath, from very unkind temper or malign affection.’ Methodists are also described as being completely in tune with the will of God and producing fruit as evidence. This is an obedience and lifestyle that emerges from an inner transformation of heart by the power and grace of God. It is this inner change that produces the fruit of purity and love for God and neighbour.

Collins characterizes Christian perfection as ‘the second focus of the Wesleyan order of salvation’ and uses the language of love. Collins states, ‘Entire sanctification or Christian perfection describes, in other words, the characteristics of holy love reigning in the human heart, a love that not only embraces the love of God and neighbour, but that also excludes all sin.’

Lindström observes that love is both the beginning and end of the Christian life. He writes: ‘Love, then, will be seen both as the point de départ of the Christian life in new birth and as the object and final goal of this life in the ethical perfection on earth which constitutes the condition for glorification.’ He further observes that love of God and neighbour is the fulfilment of the law of love and that the Christian obeys not in fear but in love. Wesley himself makes this connection between the law and love in his sermon, Circumcision of the Heart:

Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable or honourable; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, they are all comprised in this one word—love. In this is

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110 Collins, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 298.
111 Lindström, Wesley and Sanctification, pp. 178-79.
perfection and glory and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength.'

This emphasis on obedience as the result of love rather than fear or obligation is repeated throughout the Wesley corpus. The believer obeys God because he or she loves God and desires to please their Lord.

Mildred Bangs Wynkoop’s, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* is still the most comprehensive treatment of the facet of perfect love. Wynkoop argues that love is the pervasive in Wesley’s theology and ‘no matter which door one enters into his [Wesley’s] thinking’, love is to be found both explicitly and implicitly. Regarding the relationship of love and Christian perfection Wynkoop observes:

The principle by which to understand Wesley's doctrine [Christian perfection] is love to God and man, in the biblical' sense of love. Love is the dynamic of theology and experience. Love,' structured by holiness, links all that we know of man. Love is the end of the law. It is the goal of every step in grace and the norm of the Christian life in this world.

While Wynkoop privileges love over the other facets, she does acknowledge the danger in focusing upon one term over others:

Following Wesley, the preferable term among holiness theologians for the critical experience which is of most concern to them is perfect love or Christian perfection. Wesley was aware of the danger even in these terms of thinking of perfect in a philosophical way, so he stressed the wholeness of one's love for God-the undivided heart-as describing what he meant. The other terms used by holiness theologians must be understood in the light of this preference.

Wynkoop points out that for Wesley, perfect love or Christian perfection is not to be thought of in a philosophical manner, but as a highly relational concept, loving God wholeheartedly.

The case can be easily made that for John Wesley, the dominating characteristic and description of Christian perfection is love. Christian perfection was not seen as an absolute or sinless state of perfection, but rather a state of perfect love in which the love of God and neighbour dominate the affections and actions of the believer. This is not love as defined by the world, but a radical love that places God and others above self-love that is only made possible by God’s grace working in the life of the believer to perfect them in love.

It is interesting to note that the use of the term ‘perfect love’ seems to have emerged just shortly before 1760 and is used with increasing frequency thereafter. The Maxfield/Bell controversy and the ‘Model Deed’, which was designed to ensure a standard of doctrine, mark this same time period.\textsuperscript{116} ‘Perfect love’ with its focus on the law of love is exemplified in 1 John. A focus on the commandment to ‘love one another’ certainly represents a check to antinomianism as represented by Maxfield/Bell. A person that has experienced Christian perfection will certainly fulfil the ‘law of love’ as the result of a transformed life dominated by love of God and neighbour.

‘Perfect love’ makes a significant contribution as a facet to the doctrine of Christian perfection. Sangster goes as far to say that John Wesley preferred the term, but then acknowledges that other names for perfection had ‘some warrant in his writings and some warrant in the bible.’\textsuperscript{117} The term emphasizes the primary

\textsuperscript{116} Heitzenrater, \textit{Wesley and the People Called Methodists}, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{117} Sangster, \textit{The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley’s Doctrine of Christian Perfection}, p. 27.
character of a person who has experienced Christian perfection – namely love. There is a close connection with this term and the idea that early Methodism’s *evangel* was that of ‘holy love’ identified in Meadows’ framework, which will be further explored in Chapter 4. As part of the *evangel*, love communicates a picture of the kind of life that a person is being called to pursue as well as the defining characteristic of the relationship between God and human beings. Charry points to an Augustinian idea that, ‘we need to know and love God in order to become our best selves.’ This captures both the sapiential nature of doctrine (as doctrine enables us to know God) as well as the *telos* or becoming ‘our best selves.’ ‘Perfect love’ emphasizes both the substantive and relational aspects of perfection represented by the transformation of one’s character as well as one’s relationships (love of God and neighbour).

2.2.6 Sinless Perfection

Sinless perfection is a term that Wesley struggled with and in fact, it was a term surrounded by controversy. In his sermon, *Christian Perfection*, Wesley contends for such a facet, although he does not use the explicit term: ‘In conformity therefore both to the doctrine of St. John, and to the whole tenor of the New Testament, we fix this conclusion: ‘A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin.’ In the accompanying hymn to this sermon, Charles Wesley wrote (emphasis added):

> Thy sanctifying Spirit pour  
> To quench my thirst, and *wash me clean*;  
> Now, Father, let the gracious shower  
> Descend, and *make me pure from sin*.  

**From all remaining filth within**  
Let me in thee salvation have:  
**From actual and inbred sin**

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118 Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 137.  
My ransom’d soul persist to save.\textsuperscript{120}

Charles clearly wrote in conjunction with John’s position that by the grace of God persons are not only cleansed from the sins they commit, but also from the inward disposition toward sin.

Concerning the term ‘sinless perfection,’ Collins writes:

Wesley nevertheless avoided the term ‘sinless perfection’ not only because it was unscriptural, but also because it might lead some to believe that those who were entirely sanctified were free from involuntary transgressions of the law of love, a clear impossibility in this life. That is, those who love God with all their hearts, who have the mind which was in Christ Jesus, are free from willfully violating a known law of God—as are all the sons and daughters of God—but beyond this they are free from the being of sin, the carnal nature, as well. Despite such liberty, those whose hearts are pure are not and can never be free from involuntary transgressions of the law of love as well as from the infirmities (dullness of mind, confusion of judgment, etc.) which ever pertain to the human condition.\textsuperscript{121}

Collins is correct if he allows that John Wesley saw the common understanding of ‘sinless perfection’ as unscriptural. In fact, there is no apparent evidence that Wesley ever employed the term in describing the doctrine of Christian perfection. However, a close reading of Wesley shows him wrestling with this term on several occasions.

When writing \textit{The Principles of a Methodist} in response to a tract called \textit{A Brief History of the Principles of Methodism}, Wesley includes the charge that he believes in sinless perfection as one of the author’s ‘mistakes.’ However, when he addresses ‘sinless perfection’ he never denies it, but instead defines what he means by perfection. He states: ‘The Second thing laid to my charge is, that I believe sinless perfection. I will simply declare what I do believe concerning this also, and leave unprejudiced men to judge.’\textsuperscript{122} Additionally, in ‘Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection,’ Wesley writes: ‘And I do not contend for the term sinless, though I do

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, v. 6, pp. 20-21.
\item[\textsuperscript{122}] Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, v. 8, p. 363.
\end{footnotes}
not object against it.” In *A Plain Account*, Wesley writes: ‘Is it sinless? It is not worth while to contend for a term. It is 'salvation from sin.’”

By 1784, Wesley seemed to have come to terms with ‘sinless perfection’ through his definition of sin. In the sermon, *On Perfection*, Wesley defines sin as a deliberate act. He writes:

Why should any man of reason and religion be either afraid of, or averse to, salvation from all sin? Is not sin the greatest evil on this side hell? And if so, does it not naturally follow that an entire deliverance from it is one of the greatest blessings on this side heaven? How earnestly then should it be prayed for by all the children of God! By sin I mean 'a voluntary transgression of a known law'. Are you averse to being delivered from this? Are you afraid of such a deliverance? Do you then love sin, that you are so unwilling to part with it? Surely no. You do not love either the devil or his works. You rather wish to be totally delivered from them, to have sin rooted out both of your life and your heart.

With this definition of sin, Wesley argues, one could be seen as free from sin or having a ‘sinless perfection.’ Yet, Wesley does not employ the term perhaps demonstrating his concern about the extreme connotations that may arise from its use.

Wesley seems to have been aware of the inherent dangers from the use of this term, including antinomianism and self righteousness, yet he maintained that Christian perfection was the work of God in the life of the believer giving them liberty from the being, as well as the power of sin. Similar to the historical timing of ‘perfect love,’ Wesley’s wrestling with this term seems to appear in the same time period as the Maxfield/Bell controversy, which noted earlier involved the problem of antinomianism as well as a low view of justification. Despite the controversy, perhaps Wesley did not want to completely deny this term in order to avoid diminishing the contribution of this facet of perfection—freedom from sin.

2.2.7 Renewal of the Image of God

One of John Wesley’s soteriological perspectives was the distortion of the *imago Dei* resulting from the fall of humanity. Although human beings were created in the image of God, that image was broken at the fall. It is only through God’s grace that the image can be renewed. As Phil Meadows notes,

Human beings are created in the divine image, which means having the capacity for personal relationship with God, so that the likeness of God may be reproduced in their lives. The image of God can only subsist in this communion of love, and is marred by sin through the brokenness of that relationship. The ability to know, desire, and choose a life of communion with God is dissipated by the sinful nature and its attachment to false ends. This corruption of the divine image lies at the root of human unhappiness, and is manifest in a general state of dissatisfaction and restlessness. Wesley follows in the spirit of Augustine, by arguing that we are made for a communion of love with God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him.¹²⁶

The restlessness described is only remedied by entering into communion with the living God. Meadows connects the idea of the renewal of God’s image with evangelism as the term emphasizes the *telos* of Christian perfection.

The restoration of the image of God is further significant terminology for Christian perfection in the Wesley corpus. The connection between Christian perfection and the restoration of the image of God is noted in *A Plain Account*:

This great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped on our hearts. It is a ‘renewal of believers in the spirit of their minds, after the likeness of Him that created them.’ God hath now laid ‘the axe unto the root of the tree, purifying their hearts by faith,’ and ‘cleansing all the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.’ Having this hope, that they shall see God as he is, they ‘purify themselves even as he is pure,’ and are ‘holy, as he that hath called them is holy, in all manner of conversation.’ Not that they have already attained all that they shall attain, either are already in this sense perfect. But they daily ‘go on from strength to strength; beholding’ now, ‘as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.’¹²⁷

One of the unique contributions of this terminology is demonstrated in this quote from *A Plain Account*. Here, Wesley emphasizes the continued growth of being renewed, i.e. daily going on from ‘strength to strength’ and ‘from glory to glory.’ There is also an emphasis here on the work of the Holy Spirit. Wesley states this connection even more explicitly at the first conference of Methodist preachers when he defines Christian perfection, ‘To be renewed in the image of God, “in righteousness and true holiness.”’ 128 As will be noted in Chapter 3, this is also Charles Wesley’s preferred terminology for Christian perfection and appears in his sermon, *The One Thing Needful*.129

2.3 The Facets of Perfection

Although each of these facets of Christian perfection can be thought of as synonyms of the doctrine, they never the less represent unique viewpoints or angles from which to view perfection. The term Christian perfection may be considered the ‘proper’ term for the historic doctrine, yet Wesley saw fit to use various terms to illustrate, define, clarify and emphasize various aspects of this complex concept. An attempt to distil Christian perfection to one term does illuminate the unique contribution of that facet, but also risks losing the multi-dimensional richness of the doctrine. This typology also seems to be congruent with Wesley’s own conjunctive theological method. As Kenneth Kinghorn has observed, John Wesley’s theology was noted for its conjunctive nature demonstrated by his practice of ‘combining and balancing aspects of Biblical teaching that seem paradoxical: faith and works; divine sovereignty and human freedom; heart and head; word and table; personal and social

religion. This essay has attempted to avoid the pitfalls of distillation or reductionist thinking by holding the various facets of perfection in tension with one another highlighting each term’s unique contribution while also demonstrating the close interrelation of the whole. Why is Wesley content to work with this dizzying array of terms? This chapter proposes several reasons. First, he saw each of these terms as having biblical foundations and therefore was unwilling to completely abandon even the most controversial of the terms. Second, Wesley saw that each term had a unique contribution—represented a unique facet. Third, this methodology was in keeping with John Wesley’s overall ‘conjunctive’ approach to theology.

Each of these terms represents a unique facet of Christian perfection, which may or may not be implicit in one of the other terms. ‘Holiness’ sheds light on the Christ-like virtues that result from the transformed person through Christian perfection. It is a term that is not only rooted in the biblical narrative, but also in the classical writings of a’ Kempis, Taylor and Law. ‘Holiness’ appears early in Wesley’s writings and continues to be used throughout his life. In addition, this facet demonstrates that Wesley drew upon the sapiential nature of the doctrine to help persons pursue Christian perfection.

‘Entire sanctification’ contributes to the overall view of the doctrine by distinguishing Christian perfection from the initial sanctifying work of God that occurs subsequently to justification. John Wesley also viewed this term as biblically founded and its initial use interestingly follows a time period where Wesley was distancing himself from the Moravians who saw no such distinction. In addition,

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131 See the introductory chapter, ‘John Wesley’s Practical Divinity: A Theology of Holy Love’ in Collins, The Theology of John Wesley, pp. 4-5.
Wesley was emphasizing that initial sanctification was not the ‘true end’ but growth in grace continued toward the telos of Christian perfection.

The facet of ‘full salvation’ places the doctrine of Christian perfection within Wesley’s ordo salutis and emphasizes that salvation is not completed in justification or initial sanctification, but rather continues throughout a Christian’s life. This term seems to have been one that was favoured by Wesley when exhorting his preachers and other Methodists to ‘go onto perfection.’ The use of this term gives further insight into Wesley’s soteriology and evidence for Christian perfection as the telos or ‘true end’ of evangelism.

‘Second blessing,’ while closely related to ‘entire sanctification’ and ‘full salvation’ in its emphasis on a further work of grace, seems to further emphasize a facet focused on the instantaneous nature of the gift of God in Christian perfection. The sapiential, or formative, nature of Christian perfection is evident in this term as the language of ‘second blessing’ draws a person forward toward the telos.

‘Perfect love’ seems to represent a facet of Christian perfection that presents love as the dominant characteristic of a person who has experienced perfection. This term also has a dual focus of a substantive, transformational change of the person’s character as well as their relationships. Historically, it is intriguing that this term seems to emerge in the Wesley corpus subsequent to the Maxfield/Bell controversy. With its focus upon love fulfilling the law, ‘perfect love’ could certainly be considered as a check to the antinomianism of Maxfield and Bell. ‘Perfect love’ captures both the sapiential nature of doctrine (as doctrine enables us to know God) as well as the telos or becoming ‘our best selves.’

132 Charry, By the Renewing of Your Minds, p. 137.
Although ‘sinless perfection’ is not a term that Wesley explicitly used, he seems to avoid its condemnation, perhaps in order to retain the facet of perfection that is freedom from sin. Wesley’s refusal to completely deny this term speaks to his conviction that a person who had experienced Christian perfection was free from the guilt, power and being of sin.

Another key component of this faceting methodology is that each of these terms representing the various facets of Christian perfection is interrelated to one another. Each individual facet reveals a unique dimension of the doctrine, but as in a rare gem, it is only when the facets are taken together as a whole that a complete picture emerges. Each of the terms analysed in this essay appear in Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* and are used interchangeably when discussing the dimensions of the doctrine. At times, Wesley uses a single term, such as holiness, to define Christian perfection, yet he does not exclude the other terms in other writings. Additionally, these terms appear to be interrelated based upon the biblical texts with which they are linked. For example, Wesley interchangeably uses the term ‘entire sanctification’ along with other terms such as ‘perfect love,’ and ‘full salvation’ while citing many of the same biblical passages, 1 John 2-3 for example. These passages not only ground these facets in scripture, but also point to the interrelation of the terms as they represent that various facets.

Each of these facets represents a significant view of the doctrine of Christian perfection, yet not one by itself can present a full picture. The attempts to systematize Wesley’s theology and simplify his view of Christian perfection result in the loss of the rich complexity that is present in the doctrine. It seems clear that Wesley himself never proclaimed one term as all encapsulating because he recognized the inherent loss that would result. This conviction is demonstrated in
Wesley’s refusal to reject one of the most problematic terms, ‘sinless perfection.’ Further development of this methodology including the exploration of additional terms may yield even more of a complete picture of the multi-faceted doctrine of Christian perfection. In addition, this methodology of viewing the various facets of a doctrine through the use of multiple terms may prove useful in the study of additional Christian doctrines. Further study of secondary sources which would track the particular facet of Christian perfection that each historical tradition has privileged might yield fruitful data regarding how reductionist thinking may have played a part in each of these movements. This typological analysis demonstrates that the use of a variety of terms does not prevent a coherent telos, but rather helps to clarify it. Fragmentation is not inevitable if the terms are sufficiently linked. However, for the limitations and focus of this thesis it is most critical to demonstrate the complex and pervasive nature of Christian perfection in the Wesleyan corpus as well as its centrality.

2.4 Conclusion

Constitutive refers to that which ‘makes a thing what it is; forming an essential part or element.’\(^{133}\) It could be said that there would be no solar system without the sun and in fact the sun creates the solar system around itself. Similarly and for the purpose of this thesis, a constitutive doctrine forms such an essential element and helps to constitute a theology. There have been many attempts to postulate an axial theme or constitutive doctrine that forms a framework for Wesley’s theology. Outler focused on the doctrine of grace (and all of its nuances) as such a framework. More recently, Maddox has modified Outler’s position with what

he calls responsible grace. Most recently, Collins has used the conjunctive formulation of Holy love and grace as the ‘axial theme’ for Wesley.

While many of the observations in *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* build upon Collins’ work in *A Theological Journey* there are some unique contributions to the study of Christian perfection. The underlying theme of ‘holy love’ is indicated in the title. Collins seeks to establish holy love and grace as an ‘axial theme’ or systematic framework for the theology of John Wesley. Love and holiness combined with grace form this framework in Collins’ thinking. Collins contrasts his theme with Outler’s focus on grace itself and Maddox’s focus on ‘responsible grace.’

Collins’ observations on the axial theme of holy love and grace call on his previous conviction concerning Wesley’s conjunctive theology. In terms of holy love, Collins observes that ‘love apart from holiness is soft, naively wishful, and likely self-indulgent. Holiness apart from love is a consuming fire.’

In terms of grace, Collins observes several conjunctions at work: the work of God alone/synergism (human cooperation); divine favour/empowerment; receiving/responding; and instantaneous/process. Collins makes a significant contribution to my research in his argument for holy love and grace. He argues that for Wesley, holiness was the end or telos of the Christian life and that holiness for Wesley could be defined as ‘holy love.’ If this is the case, then Christian perfection could be seen as a vision for evangelism. Collins makes a convincing case for the axial theme of holy love and grace. Overall, this theme is a helpful framework in which to view Wesley’s theology and a useful tool to see the role of Christian perfection within the larger Wesley corpus.

However, is it possible that the constitutive doctrine for Wesley was what he called Methodism’s ‘grand depositum’ – Christian perfection? Is Christian perfection for Wesley systematically central to his understanding of the Christian faith, rather than simply a significant component? Can Christian perfection be viewed as a vision that shapes the whole of Wesleyan theology and therefore a vision that shapes our understanding of the theology and practice of evangelism?

Eric Baker, in his book, *The Faith of a Methodist*, proposes such a prominent role for Christian perfection when he quotes the former president of Drew University, John McClintock:

Methodism takes the old theology of the Christian Church, but it takes one element which no other Christian Church has dared to put forward as a prominent feature of theology. In ours it is the very point from which we view all theology. Now listen; I want to be understood. Knowing exactly what I say, and taking full responsibility of it, I repeat, we are the only Church in history, from the apostles’ time until now, that has put forward as its very elemental thought—the great central pervading idea of the whole Book of God from the beginning to the end—the holiness of the human soul, heart, mind and will. Go through all the confessions of all the churches, and you will find this in no other. You will find even some of them that blame us in their books and writings. It may be called fanaticism, but dear friends, that is our mission. If we keep to that, the next century is ours; if we keep to that, the triumphs of the next century shall throw those that are past far into the shade. Our work is a moral work—that is to say, the work of making men holy. Our preaching is for that, our church agencies are for that, our schools, colleges, universities, and theological seminaries are for that. There is our mission—there is our glory—there is our power, and there shall be the ground of our triumph. God keep us true.

McClintock argues that Christian perfection is that constitutive doctrine which forms and informs Wesleyan theology. He argues that it is the unique and essential characteristic of the Methodist movement. Baker further comments:

If that be true, and such has been the whole contention of this book so far, there is a need for Methodist theologians to set forth the implications of the doctrine of Christian Perfection for that whole range of doctrines enshrined in

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the historic creeds which form part of our common Christian heritage…The doctrine of Christian perfection is for us in our tradition a vantage ground from which we survey the whole field of Christian truth, and there would seem to be few, if any, of our cherished beliefs which do not shine with some new light when viewed from this standpoint.\textsuperscript{138}

Baker calls for a renewal of Christian perfection as the constitutive doctrine of Methodism and argues that such renewal of doctrine would have practical implications on every aspect of faith. This sentiment aligns with Charry’s contention that the sapiential nature of a doctrine goes beyond mental assent and has transformative and formative value.

In Collins’ work, \textit{A Theological Journey}, he provides a broad picture of Wesley’s life and theology that is helpful in understanding Wesley’s development as a theologian and as a Christian. Additionally, Collins presents the consistency that was present in John Wesley’s theology throughout his life, particularly, his focus on Christian perfection. Collins maintains (with good evidence) that the ‘basic \textit{ethos and substance}’ of Methodism was already in place by 1729 – prior to the development of the infrastructure of class meetings, bands & societies\textsuperscript{139} – and this core of Methodism included the dominating theme of Christian perfection.

Albert C. Outler noted the loss of this central doctrine within the context of Methodism in a 1974 address:

\begin{quote}
The doctrine of holiness of heart and life that had been the keystone in the arch of Wesley’s doctrine, but by the turn of the century had become a pebble in the shoe of the standard bred Methodists. And presently they took off the shoe, threw out the pebble, put the shoe back on and kept walking, with the same labels but without the same equipment. And this has been an un-comprehended and immense tragedy for all who claim John Wesley as their father in God.\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{138} Baker, \textit{The Faith of a Methodist}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{139} Collins, \textit{A Theological Journey}, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{140} Outler, \textit{Whither Wesleyan Theology?}
Reflecting on Outler’s observation and specifically addressing the United Methodist Church, Steve Seamands notes, ‘As a result the majority of United Methodists today have little or no awareness of our original purpose and mission. Holiness of heart and life has become the lost treasure of Methodism.’

Lindström’s work, *Wesley and Sanctification*, is a thorough overview of the doctrine of Christian perfection from Wesley’s point of view. Lindström’s stated goal is to ‘provide such a systematic-theological analysis of the function and significance of sanctification in Wesley’s conception of salvation’. Although Lindström does not explicitly identify Christian perfection as constitutive, his method treats the doctrine as such and involves viewing classic doctrines of the Christian faith through the lens of perfection. He begins on what he considers the foundation for understanding an interpretation of Christianity—Wesley’s view of the nature of humanity. Lindström maintains that Wesley viewed humanity as totally corrupt with inward and outward evil. This corruption was the result of the fall, which stripped humanity of holiness and the image of God. From this foundation, Lindström demonstrates that Wesley’s conception of sin begins with original sin and the inherent corruption and guilt that it represents. Out of this understanding of original sin emerges Wesley’s definition of prevenient grace. It is this grace that allows the possibility of human beings to seek God. The fallen state of humanity, viewed through the lens of Christian perfection, reveals the potential change and transformation that is possible when a person responds to God’s grace.

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142 Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 16.
144 Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 46.
In his own terms, Lindström describes the constitutive nature of the doctrine of Christian perfection for Wesley:

…it is the idea of sanctification that dominates his whole theology. The conception of salvation is determined by the idea of sanctification, because salvation is seen as a process directed to the perfect, real change of the individual. And this process is the necessary condition for final salvation, which is the ultimate goal of the Christian life.145

Lindström’s observation points to both the constitutive nature of Christian perfection in early Methodism as well as the role of the doctrine as a *telos* or ‘ultimate goal’.

In his conclusion to *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology*, Newton Flew writes:

It [perfection] is essential to the corporate life of the Church that this principle should be enshrined at the heart of its doctrines, its hymns, its confessions of faith, its institutions. It is essential for the individual Christian that the goal set before him should be not merely conversion, not merely a life of service, but perfection. Or if the term is disliked, let it be Wesley’s phrase—‘perfect love’, or ‘sanctity’, or ‘holiness’. ‘If we have no hunger and thirst after that righteousness which is Christ, we are not Christians…at all.’ Christianity is not Christianity unless it is aiming at Perfection.146

Flew, although writing from the perspective of the greater Christian context, never the less identifies Christian perfection as essential to Christian theology. He acknowledges the need for conversion but insists that it is only the beginning. He also describes a ‘hunger and thirst’ that connect with Charry’s idea of sapience where the sapiential nature of doctrine may create a desire within a person to know more of God.147

Similarly, Sangster points out the importance of the doctrine in Wesley’s life and ministry:

147 Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 22.
The doctrine…occupied his [Wesley] mind from the year 1725. He preached on it before the University of Oxford on the first day of 1733, before he was thirty years of age. It remained one of his chief theological preoccupations till he died on March 2nd, 1791. With passing time, his conviction of its importance grew. He regarded it as the ‘grand depositum’ which God had committed to his followers. It involved him in more controversy and odium than anything else he taught. Yet he never wavered.\textsuperscript{148}

While Sangster does not use the term ‘constitutive,’ he does emphasize the centrality of the doctrine as well as the fact that this doctrine captured Wesley’s heart and mind from his Oxford days until his death.

In a letter to Robert Carr Brackenberry in September 1790, Wesley seems to reflect upon his life as well as the life of the movement he began: ‘I am glad brother D— has more light with regard to full sanctification. This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up.’\textsuperscript{149} But as Eric Baker comments, Christian perfection seems to have been the driving vision not only for Wesley’s theology, but for Wesley’s spiritual life as well:

First of all, it should be noticed how John Wesley’s own spiritual history was responsible for his teaching on this matter [Christian perfection]. Methodism was born on 24\textsuperscript{th} May 1738, when John Wesley experienced his evangelical conversion. But that was in fact Wesley’s second conversion. Thirteen years before, in 1725, as a result of reading the works of Jeremy Taylor, Thomas a Kempis, and especially William Law, Wesley had undergone a moral conversion, as a result of which he explicitly resolved to be ‘all devoted to God in body, mind, and spirit.’ He then ‘made a decision’, as Dr Rattenbury says, ‘from which he never deviated and which determined the whole course of his career’…From then on Wesley proclaimed, and bade his followers proclaim, Christian perfection as God’s offer to every believer through faith in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148} Sangster, \textit{The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection}, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{149} Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, v. 13, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{150} Baker, \textit{The Faith of a Methodist}, pp. 22-23.
This course that Wesley set upon seems pervasive throughout his writings, sermons, and practices. A brief survey of Wesley demonstrates the presence of this dominant theme.

In his charge to his preachers, Wesley stated, ‘It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.’\(^{151}\) (Wesley often refers to Hebrews 12:14 as one of the scriptural foundations of Christian perfection.)

In one of John Wesley’s earliest sermons (1733), the prominence of Christian perfection can be readily seen. Writing in, ‘The Circumcision of the Heart’ Wesley states,

Yet lackest thou one thing, whosoever thou art, that to a deep humility and a steadfast faith hast joined a lively hope, and thereby in a good measure cleansed thy heart from its inbred pollution. If thou wilt be perfect, add to all these charity: add love, and thou hast the ‘circumcision of the heart’. ‘Love is the fulfilling of the law,’ ‘the end of the commandment’. Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable or honourable; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, they are all comprised in this one word—love. In this is perfection and glory and happiness. The royal law of heaven and earth is this, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.’\(^{152}\)

This sermon along with many others demonstrates Wesley’s consistent and constant focus upon the doctrine of Christian perfection. Table 1 summarizes a sampling of Wesley’s sermons that demonstrate this constitutive role. It should be noted that a thorough search did not reveal the use of the term ‘sinless perfection’ in the sermons

except in reference to the sinless nature of the human race at creation. It is also worth noting that the terms are scattered chronologically throughout Wesley’s life emphasizing his continuous use of these terms.

Table 1. Christian Perfection Terms in Wesley’s Sermons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sermon Title</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Circumcision of the Heart</td>
<td>Rom 2:29</td>
<td>1733</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Image of God</td>
<td></td>
<td>1730</td>
<td>Renewed in the image of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface of Hymns and Sacred Poems</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>1740</td>
<td>Full salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Perfection</td>
<td>Phil 3:12</td>
<td>1741</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character of a Methodist</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>1742</td>
<td>Perfect love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scriptural Christianity</td>
<td>Acts 4:31</td>
<td>1744</td>
<td>Full salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Means of Grace</td>
<td>Mal 3:7</td>
<td>1746</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon on the Mount, Three</td>
<td>Matt 5:8-12</td>
<td>1748</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon on the Mount, Four</td>
<td>Matt 5:13-16</td>
<td>1748</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon on the Mount, Eight</td>
<td>Matt 6:19-23</td>
<td>1748</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon on the Mount, Ten</td>
<td>Matt 7:1-12</td>
<td>1748</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon on the Mount, Thirteen</td>
<td>Matt 7:21-27</td>
<td>1748</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satan’s Devices</td>
<td>2 Cor 2:11</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripture Way of Salvation</td>
<td>Eph 2:8</td>
<td>1758 (or 1765)</td>
<td>Entire Sanctification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Birth</td>
<td>John 3:7</td>
<td>1760</td>
<td>Renewed in the image of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Sin in Believers</td>
<td>2 Cor 5:17</td>
<td>1763</td>
<td>Entire Sanctification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Plain Account of Christian Perfection</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>1765 (or 1777?)</td>
<td>Perfect love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Perfection</td>
<td>Heb 6:1</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Perfect love (all terms +)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Working out Our Own Salvation</td>
<td>Phil 2:12-13</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>Full salvation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Living without God</td>
<td>Eph 2:12</td>
<td>1790</td>
<td>Holiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An inspection of the Wesley’s hymns also demonstrates the dominance of the theme of Christian perfection. The impact of hymnody will be analysed further in Chapter Three, but here are a few examples:

Hymn 334
O FOR a heart to praise my God,

A heart from sin set free!
A heart that always feels thy blood
So freely spilt for me!

A heart in every thought renewed,
And full of love divine;
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
A copy, Lord, of thine!

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
Come quickly from above;
Write thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of love!154

Charles Wesley expresses the desire for Christian perfection, expressed here as a renewed heart that is full of God’s love and one that reflects God’s holiness.

Hymn 354
Jesus, the gift divine I know,
The gift divine I ask of thee;
That living water now bestow,
Thy Spirit and thyself on me.
Thou, Lord, of life the fountain art:
Now let me find thee in my heart!

Thee let me drink, and thirst no more
For drops of finite happiness;
Spring up, O well, in heavenly power,
In streams of pure, perennial peace,
In peace, that none can take away,
In joy, which shall forever stay.

Father, on me the grace bestow,
Unblameable before thy sight,
Whence all the streams of mercy flow;
Mercy, thy own supreme delight,
To me, for Jesu's sake impart,
And plant thy nature in my heart.

Thus may I show thy Spirit within,
Which purges me from every stain;
Unspotted from the world and sin
My faith's integrity maintain,
The truth of my religion prove
By perfect purity and love.155

In this hymn, also expresses a hunger and thirst for Christian perfection. The role of
the Holy Spirit in perfecting the believer is emphasized including the Spirit’s role in
cleansing the believer.

Hymn 358
Oh God most merciful and true,
Thy nature to my soul impart;
Stablish with me the covenant new
And write perfection on my heart.

To real holiness restored,
O let me gain my Saviour’s mind,
And in the knowledge of my Lord
Fullness of life eternal find.\textsuperscript{156}

This hymn petitions God to ‘impart’ his nature upon the soul of the believer and
‘restore’ the person in Christian perfection.

John Fletcher, arguably John Wesley’s chosen successor before Fletcher’s
untimely death, observed in his ‘First Check to Antinomianism’, ‘The next
fundamental doctrine in Christianity is that of holiness of heart and life.’\textsuperscript{157} He places
the doctrine second only to Christ being the only way to salvation. Fletcher’s
vehement and reasoned defence of Wesley on the doctrine of Christian perfection as
well as his indication of the doctrine’s prominence, point to the constitutive role the
doctrine played in Wesley’s theology.

As a constitutive doctrine, Christian perfection functioned as a formative
vision in the lives of early Methodists. It had the shaping power of \textit{a telos} as
MacIntyre would suggest as well as the sapiential nature which Charry would argue
provides knowledge that not only connects the person to God, but enables
transformation.

\textsuperscript{156} Wesley, Hildebrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works, Hymns}, p. 527.
\textsuperscript{157} J. Fletcher, \textit{First Check to Antinomianism: Or, a Vindication of the Rev. Mr.
Wesley's Last Minutes} (London: G. Parmore, 1795), p. 11.
Chapter 3: Christian Perfection as a Sapiential Doctrine

This chapter will explore the views of Methodism’s hymn writer, Charles Wesley, on the doctrine of Christian perfection as well as the connection between the rich hymnody of the early Methodist movement and discipleship. In addition, controversies surrounding the doctrine of Christian perfection will be examined as well as primary and secondary sources to provide evidence for the constitutive nature of the doctrine. Finally, the discipline of early Methodism will be examined, highlighting the movement’s call to ‘real Christianity.’ While scholars have pointed out the differences between John and Charles, especially in the area of Christian perfection, Tyson suggests that his analysis shows that, ‘Charles Wesley’s view of Christian perfection, while largely in agreement with that of his brother John, was also fundamentally different from it in basic definition, in nature (restoration of the imago Dei), in nature (unqualified versus qualified), and in timing (usually ‘in the article of death’).’ \(^{158}\) For the purpose of this thesis these differences do not negate the doctrine’s role as a telos nor its sapiential nature (engaged knowledge).

3.1 Hymnody: A Bridge Between Doctrine and Discipleship

Charles Wesley was the hymn writer of early Methodism and as such served a crucial role in the early Methodist movement. As such, Charles provides a starting point for exploring the sapiential function of doctrine in conversation with Charry. This approach also highlights why the doctrine was so contentious, that is, because of its life shaping significance. Charles is not given the attention that his brother receives in the literature surrounding the early Methodist movement. However, and perhaps in spite of friction between them, John and Charles had a strong bond. Gareth Lloyd observes, ‘the most important relationship of Charles Wesley’s life

was with his brother John. His bond with his wife Sarah, who he married relatively
technically late in life, was exceptionally strong but in terms of longevity, depth of conflicting
emotion, and impact, the fraternal relationship had singular significance.\textsuperscript{159}

Although Charles and John disagreed about some aspects of Christian perfection, it
seems clear that they agreed this was an orienting doctrine and was central to being a
Christian.\textsuperscript{160} This is evident in both the hymns written by Charles as well as his
sermons. Tyson observes Charles Wesley’s view of Christian perfection as a
constitutive doctrine:

> From the earliest years of his preaching Charles Wesley pointed to Christian
Perfection (the restoration of the \textit{imago Dei}) as the ‘one thing needful’ for
Christians. His sermon by that title made sanctification the constitutive
characteristic of Christian faith, and described perfection in the language of
recapitulation: ‘To recover the first estate form which we are fallen is the \textit{one
thing needful}; to re-exchange the image of Satan for the image of God,
bondage for freed, sickness for health! Our one great business is to erase out
of our souls the likeness of our destroyer, and to be born again, to be formed
anew after the likeness of our Creator.’\textsuperscript{161}

Tyson notes that Charles Wesley’s ‘most constant theological image for describing
Christian perfection was to connect it with the restoration of the paradisiacal \textit{imago
Dei} which had been lost or effaced in the fall…the same image remained the center
pole of Charles’ understanding of sanctification as it was developed in the Wesleyan
revival.\textsuperscript{162} Commenting on the theme of restoration of the \textit{imago Dei} present in the
writing of Basil of Caesarea, the Fourth Century theologian-bishop, Charry notes:
‘Having whetted his reader's appetite for God, Basil lays out a practical prescription

\textsuperscript{159} G. Lloyd, \textit{Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity} (Oxford:
\textsuperscript{160} Tyson argues that the differences between Charles and John regarding Christian
perfection were ‘exaggerated by the heated controversies of the 1760’s.’ Tyson,
\textsuperscript{161} C. Wesley & J.R. Tyson, \textit{Charles Wesley: A Reader} (Oxford: Oxford University
\textsuperscript{162} Tyson, \textit{Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study},
p. 297.
for spiritual direction. He assumes, with the Origenist tradition, that the Christian life is undertaken freely and that transformation is restorative. One must begin by ceasing from evil and "return to his natural beauty" so that the image of God may be restored.\textsuperscript{163} The picture of restoration in the image of God helps to reinforce the sapiential nature of Christian perfection as persons are directed toward transformation.

Regarding Charles’ preaching, Tyson observes, ‘in the fall of 1738 Wesley began to preach “full salvation,” or holiness of heart and life. His evangelism was about being "born again," but it was also about more than that - it encompassed the transformation of the inner person through the creation of new habits of the heart ("religious affections") as well as outer obedience to the Word and commandments of God through holy living.\textsuperscript{164} His focus on Christian perfection was demonstrated in his preaching as well as the hymns for which he is primarily known. The sapiential nature of Christian perfection was therefore being demonstrated in both Charles’ preaching and his hymn writing as he and John led the movement.

The evidence of the centrality of Christian perfection as well as the sapiential nature of the doctrine can be seen in many of the letters written to Charles Wesley giving personal accounts of conversion and transformation. Charles requested that Methodists record their personal testimonies of God’s work in their lives and send the accounts to him.\textsuperscript{165} Many of these letters are preserved in the Methodist Archives at the John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester. The sapiential nature of

\textsuperscript{163} Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{165} See Sarah Barber’s letter to Charles in which she explicitly states that the letter was in response to his request in S. Barber, 'Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley', Early Methodist Volume, (Manchester, 1740).
Christian perfection can be observed as these early Methodists describe the inward and outward transformations wrought in their lives as they pursued full salvation.

In one remarkable letter, Sarah Middleton writes Charles and tells him that she had lived as a Pharisee. She went to church and took the sacraments ‘constantly’ and ‘thought I did very well for I was a strict Pharisee.’ She goes on to explain to Charles how she avoided pleasures for fear of sin. She indicates that she had ‘a form of profession but [?] nothing of the power...’ Then she states that she heard Whitefield preach that: ‘everyone born into this world deserves [?] damnation.’ Afterward, Middleton went to hear John and she states: ‘his words was sharper to me then a two edged sword and I cannot but always honour him as an instrument in Gods hands of shewing me the true way of salvation by Jesus Christ. I heard Mr Wesley take the 1[?]th chap of Acts v 3 the words as follows what must I do to be saved then he explained the ten commandments which wounded me so much that I was hardly able to stand under him for I thought I had kept them...but hearing them explained I felt I had broke all of them.’ Middleton then tells about her struggle and states:

I thought hell was ready to swallow me up but I found Christ’s everlasting arms was under me the 14 of Sep when I was in the greatest agony of soul I heard a voice say unto me daughter be of good cheer thy sins be forgiven thee at the same time I felt so much love in my heart that I could hardly contain my self for I wanted the whole world to feel what I did and I was at the same time restored to my bodily health as well as ever I was in my life but I was much tempted to keep it to my self and not tell Mr Wesley what the Lord had done for me.\textsuperscript{166}

Middleton goes on to write that she remembered the story of the one leper that came back and thanked Jesus and she did go to Wesley and tell him. She states: ‘I was caught as a fire brand out of the fire.’ Middleton goes on to describe her current

\textsuperscript{166} S. Middleton, 'Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley', Early Methodist Volume, (Manchester, 1740).
spiritual condition: ‘I feel a continual peace and love springing up in my heart day by day I know I do not commit in [sin?] for my soul is always hungering and thirsting after righteousness’ She finishes by saying that she used to be afraid to share her faith with her ‘carnal relations’ but that now she felt led to do so. In this letter, we see the evidence of John and Charles Wesley’s influence and spiritual direction in the lives of early Methodists. The sapiential nature of Christian perfection can also be seen in this letter as Middleton expresses the transformation she experienced from being a ‘Pharisee’ to being filled with love. The practices of preaching as well as spiritual direction can also be observed as she describes her experience.

Sarah Barber writes to Charles, ‘blessed be the allmighty [sic] for what he had done but I find there is still a great deal more to do in his good time for there is great corruptions still in me and I doubt not but he that is the author will be the finisher of my faith.’ Samuel Flewit wrote to Charles and explains that it had been fourteen years since, ‘God in a most wonderful manor revealed himself unto me.’ Flewit continues by relating an encounter with John and Charles and how the brothers spoke of being a new creature. He states that many things ‘is done away since I sit under your doctrine.’ Flewit ends his letter by saying, ‘pray for me that I never rest till I fully rest in Christ.’ The faithful statement by Barber that God would complete his work in her, as well as Flewit’s expressed desire to not rest until God’s work was finished, demonstrate the formational, sapiential role of Christian perfection.

167 Middleton, 'Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley'.
168 Barber, 'Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley'.
169 S. Flewit, 'Samuel Flewit to Charles Wesley', Early Methodist Volume, (Manchester, 1741).
170 Flewit, 'Samuel Flewit to Charles Wesley'.
171 Flewit, 'Samuel Flewit to Charles Wesley'.
Mr Southcote wrote to Charles and expressed his desire to be more like Jesus: ‘What I now chiefly want is the spirit of Jesus, that spirit [that] cried "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." How easy to love them who love us, as well as them who do not oppose us; but to embrace them who do, to seek their good, to manifest (not in words) but in deed that spirit [that] was in Jesus, is what I want. I mean to a greater degree.’

Again, another convert, Mary Jane Ramsay, writes concerning her pursuit of Christian perfection: ‘O Dear Sir Reverend father in Christ remember me in your prayers pray that the Lord would cleanse my heart by the inspirations of the Holy Spirit: and that the Lord will be pleased to carry on the work that begun in me: for satan is very busy [the word ‘busy’ is not entirely clear] and would persuade me that this is presumption.’

Ramsay expresses confidence that the Holy Spirit is capable of transforming her heart—a promise that was likely communicated through the sapience of the doctrine of Christian perfection. As a final example, Samuel Webb writes, ‘corruption must be thoroughly purged er'e ..can inherit that glorious Kingdom which I pray God fully and perfectly to accomplish of his full grace for y sake of his only Begotten well beloved son my saviour Jesus Christ.’

Webb expresses the promise of Christian perfection as well as the knowledge that it is a gift of God.

Charles Wesley demonstrates the life shaping, sapiential significance of Christian perfection through his own preaching as well as the testimonies he collected of early Methodist Christians. Moreover, he demonstrates the sapience of Christian perfection through the thousands of hymns he wrote, many of which are

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explicitly focused on Christian perfection and assist Methodists as they travel the Pilgrim road. An exploration of these hymns will provide additional evidence for the sapience of Christian perfection.

The hymns of the early Methodists and especially their arrangement into hymnbooks show additional evidence of a holiness consciousness and trajectory toward Christian perfection that is identified with the movement. While many scholars point out that Wesleyan hymns served to communicate and teach doctrine to the Methodists, this thesis argues that the sapiential nature of doctrine is operative through the singing of hymns in such a way as Charry observes to ‘emotionally connect the knower to the known’. As early Methodists sang hymns written by Charles Wesley and used the hymnbooks arranged by John, they were being formed and encouraged in their pursuit toward Christian perfection. Considering Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, Charry argues, ‘Christian maturation happens by practicing holy living in a worshiping community: “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God” (5.19-20).’ It was the common practise of the early Methodist preachers to begin by singing a hymn thus connecting the doctrines contained in the hymns with those in the sermons, including the pursuit of Christian perfection.

The arrangement of A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodist is organized after such an awareness and trajectory:

- Part I contains hymns exhorting sinners and describing various things such as the ‘Pleasantness of Religion,’ ‘The Goodness of God,’ death, judgment, heaven and hell. Part I concludes with ‘Praying for a Blessing.’

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\(^{175}\) Charry, By the Renewing of Your Minds, p. 4.

\(^{176}\) Charry, By the Renewing of Your Minds, p. 55.
• Part II includes hymns describing both formal religion and inward religion.

• Part III contains hymns focused on ‘Praying for Repentance,’ ‘for Mourners convinced of Sin,’ ‘Convinced of Backsliding,’ and ‘Recovered.’

• Part IV is focused upon ‘Believers’ including hymns focused on believers ‘Rejoicing, Fighting, Praying, Watching, Working, Suffering, Seeking full Redemption, Saved, and Interceding for the World.’

• Part V is for the societies and includes hymns for ‘the Society Meeting,’ for ‘Giving Thanks’ for ‘Praying’ and for ‘Parting.’

It is clear from this table of contents that there is an inherent movement in the hymnbook. This is not a book of hymns for those who wish to remain nominal Christians. The trajectory of the Christian life is clearly pointed toward ‘full redemption’ and in a sense this collection is Methodism’s Pilgrim’s Progress.\(^{177}\) This is reinforced by John Wesley’s preface to the hymnbook, which emphatically links hymns to the pursuit of Christian perfection.

As Manning has written:

Wesley arranged his hymn-book as a spiritual biography of the sort of person whom he called in the Preface a real Christian. There is the introductory section, 'Exhorting sinners to return to God'; followed by a contemplation of the great facts which should induce them to do so: the Pleasantness of Religion, the Goodness of God, and the last four things, Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell. Next, the outlines of religion being sketched for the contemplation of the Exhorted Sinner, Formal Religion is described and distinguished (in Part II) from In ward Religion. With this precaution taken, the real work begins in Part III. Here we have the sinner trying to find the light. He prays for repentance in Section I. In Section II he is already a mourner convinced of sin. He is on the sure way to become a believer. But stay; before we deal with the sinner turned believer, we must glance at

\(^{177}\) Wesley, Hildebrandt & Beckerlegge, The Works, Hymns, p 58.
another class. Not all those who pray for repentance and wish to begin the true life do it now for the first time. Some have been here before, have started well, then have failed, and by this time need to get their second wind, or, it may be, their third or fourth. These are the people delightfully called Backsliders. And so we have the two sections: 'For Persons convinced of Blacksiding', and 'For Backsliders recovered'. Wesley now sees his way clear. He has put the saving facts before sinners; warned them against mistaking false religion for true; and brought them to genuine repentance, whether for the first or a later time. He can now pass on to consider their experience as believers. He contemplates them first rejoicing, then fighting, praying, watching, working, suffering, seeking full redemption—a long and most distinctive section—and then saved; finally interceding for the world. In the last [part] Wesley considers his Society (the Methodist Church, as we should now call it); and we have the hymns of corporate life: For the Society Meeting, Giving Thanks, Praying, and Parting.\textsuperscript{178}

This ‘spiritual biography’ as Manning has termed it, follows Wesley’s Ordo Salutis and seems to provide further evidence that early Methodists operated within a holiness consciousness and trajectory toward Christian perfection. Wesley himself commented in the preface, ‘The hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is in effect a little body of experimental and practical divinity.’\textsuperscript{179}

Further he states:

As but a small part of these hymns are of my composing, I do not think it inconsistent with modesty to declare that I am persuaded no such hymn-book as this has yet been published in the English language. In what other publication of the kind have you so distinct and full an account of scriptural Christianity? Such a declaration of the heights and depths of religion, speculative and practical? So strong cautions against the most plausible errors, particularly those that are now most prevalent? And so clear directions for making our calling and election sure, for perfecting holiness in the fear of God?\textsuperscript{180}

It seems evident that Wesley considered this hymnbook to be a companion for a person on their journey to becoming a real Christian. Candy Gunther Brown notes:

‘Coupled with official and unofficial congregational worship practices, private

\textsuperscript{178} B.L. Manning, \textit{The Hymns of Wesley and Watts} (London: Epworth Press, 1943), p. 11.
\textsuperscript{179} Wesley, Hildebrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works, Hymns}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{180} Wesley, Hildebrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works, Hymns}, p. 74.
devotional use of hymns furthered the sanctification process.\textsuperscript{181} This companion served the Methodist whether in worship with the society or at home in personal devotions.

The whole hymnbook is a journey that moves towards perfection; but also a great many of the hymns themselves embody that journey, while others focus entirely on perfection. When examining the hymns themselves, it appears that even a few of those hymns focused upon the unconverted have an explicit trajectory toward holiness. Under the heading ‘Exhorting and beseeching return to God,’ at least two hymns seem to point toward the future of a sinner who turns to God:

Hymn 1
4 He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean—  
His blood availed for me.\textsuperscript{182}

Hymn 3
6 The spirit of faith, O faith in thy blood,  
Which saves us from wrath, And brings us to God,  
Removes the huge mountain Of indwelling sin,  
And opens a fountain That washes us clean.\textsuperscript{183}

In these two examples, not only is forgiveness promised to those who turn to God, but also freedom from the power of sin and cleansing of the soul.

This trajectory builds and culminates in the section for ‘Believers’ with hymns focused upon ‘Seeking [or Groaning for] full Redemption.’

Hymn 331
1 The thing my God doth hate,  
That I no more may do,  
Thy creature, Lord, again create,  
And all my soul renew;  
My soul shall then, like thine,

\textsuperscript{182} Wesley, Hildebrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works, Hymns}, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{183} Wesley, Hildebrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works, Hymns}, p. 83.
Abhor the thing unclean,
And sanctified by love divine
Forever cease from sin.⁸⁴

Hymn 331 emphasizes cleansing from sin as well as the promise and the gift of Christian perfection.

Hymn 332
2 Slay the dire root and seed of sin,
Prepare for thee the holiest place;
Then, O essential Love, come in,
And fill thy house with endless praise.⁸⁵

In a reference to original sin, hymn 332 speaks of removing the root of sin and bringing the believer to a state of being filled with God’s love.

Hymn 336
1 Ye happy sinners, hear
The prisoner of the Lord,
And wait till Christ appear,
According to his word;
Rejoice in hope, rejoice with me,
We shall from all our sins be free.

2 The Lord our Righteousness
We have long since received;
Salvation nearer is
Than when we first believed;
Rejoice in hope, rejoice with
We shall from all our sins be free.

3 Let others hug their chains,
For sin and Satan plead,
And say, from sin's remains
They never can be freed:
Rejoice in hope, rejoice with me
We shall from all our sins be free.

4 In God we put our trust;
If we our sins confess,
Faithful he is, and just,
From all unrighteousness
To cleanse us all, both you and me:
We shall from all our sins be free.

5 Surely in us the hope
Of glory shall appear;
Sinners, your heads lift up,
And see redemption near;
Again I say, rejoice with me,
We shall from all our sins be free.

6 Who Jesu's sufferings share,
My fellow-prisoners now,
Ye soon the wreath shall wear
On your triumphant brow;
Rejoice in hope, rejoice with me,
We shall from all our sins be free.

7 The word of God is sure,
And never can remove;
We shall in heart be pure,
And perfected in love;
Rejoice in hope, rejoice with me,
We shall from all our sins be free.

8 Then let us gladly bring
Our sacrifice of praise;
Let us give thanks, and sing,
And glory in his grace;
Rejoice in hope, rejoice with me,
We shall from all our sins be free.\(^{186}\)

The theme of hymn 336 is focused on being free from sin as well as being perfected in love. It would be difficult for the reader or the singer of this hymn to miss the sapiential call to Christian perfection.

Hymn 344
1 Ever fainting with desire,
For thee, O Christ, I call!
Thee I restlessly require,
I want my God, my all.
Jesu, dear redeeming Lord,
I want thy coming from above:
Help me, Saviour, speak the word,
And perfect me in love.\(^{187}\)

Hymn 344 expresses a deep desire and restlessness on the part of the believer to experience perfect love. In this as well as the other hymns of this section, the

sapiential role of Christian perfection can be seen. The hymnody, which could be called the language of the early Methodists, also demonstrates a holiness consciousness. Certainly, the initial salvation of the person was critical, but for a Methodist, this was but the doorway into a journey toward becoming a real Christian. Brown summarizes this argument well:

> Although Methodist theology and practice by no means stood still between Wesley’s day and Crosby’s, hymns written, published, memorized, and sung played a pivotal role throughout early Methodist history in orienting a pilgrim community to strain toward its entire sanctification. The evangelistic implications are clear: conversion is merely a good beginning, and the gospel goal is a life of growth in grace, going on to perfection.  

John Wesley was certain that hymns were intimately connected to pursuing Christian perfection and explicitly stated that, ‘When Poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of Piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.’ Given the evidence both in content and arrangement, early Methodist hymnody, ‘the handmaid of piety’, strongly supports the sapience of doctrine of Christian perfection as well as its constitutive role (giving organized existence) within the movement.

### 3.2 Controversy: Refining the Connection of Doctrine and Discipleship

While it appears that most of the opposition that John Wesley faced surrounded the issues of Calvinism, the doctrine of original sin and antinomianism, there were also opponents to Wesley’s views on Christian perfection. In some cases, these debates are intertwined. Whatever the criticism or its intensity, John Wesley remained steadfast in his defence of the doctrine. In many of the exchanges between Wesley and his critics, it seems that the primary objection was the charge that Wesley promoted sinless perfection. Wesley vehemently denied that he taught

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sinless perfection, but rather focused on being perfected in love. Nevertheless, as previously noted, Wesley would not absolutely deny the term ‘sinless,’ stating that he did not use the term, but would not reject it outright.

In a response to John Newton, Wesley addresses Newton’s criticism of Christian perfection. In a friendly, but direct tone, Wesley rehearses Newton’s objections in a letter written 14 May 1765:

But the main point between you and me is Perfection. ‘This,’ you say, 'has no prevalence in these parts; otherwise I should think it my duty to oppose it with my whole strength; not as an opinion, but as a dangerous mistake, which appears to be subversive of the very foundation of Christian experience; and which has, in fact, given occasion to the most grievous offences.'

Wesley then gives a short recollection of how he came to his conviction about Christian perfection and responds to Newton’s objections:

And I am still persuaded this is what the Lord Jesus hath bought for me with his own blood. Now, whether you desire and expect this blessing or not, is it not an astonishing thing that you, or any man living, should be disgusted at me for expecting it; and that they should persuade one another that this hope is 'subversive of the very foundations of Christian experience?' Why then, whoever retains it cannot possibly have any Christian experience at all. Then my brother, Mr Fletcher, and I, and twenty thousand more, who seem both to fear and to love God, are, in reality, children of the devil, and in the road to eternal damnation! In God's name I entreat you make me sensible of this! Show me by plain, strong reasons, what dishonour this hope does to Christ, wherein it opposes Justification by Faith, or any fundamental truth of religion.

Wesley’s response to Newton appeals to the experiences of Methodists and compares Newton’s opposition to Christian perfection to rejecting justification by faith, ‘or any fundamental truth’. By implication, Wesley is stating that Christian perfection is a ‘fundamental truth’ of the Christian religion.

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In his response to the Rev Mr Dodd, Wesley argues from a scriptural basis and demonstrates his conviction that Christian perfection is scriptural:

Whoever, therefore, will give me more light with regard to Christian perfection, will do me a singular favour. The opinion I have concerning it at present, I espouse merely because I think it is scriptural. If therefore I am convinced it is not scriptural, I shall willingly relinquish it.\(^{192}\)

Wesley further addresses Dodd and argues against the ‘necessity of sinning’ or ‘sinful perfection’:

This is my grand objection to that doctrine of the necessity of sinning: Not only that it is false, but that it is directly subversive of all holiness. The doctrine of the Gnostics was, not that a child of God does not commit sin, that is, act the things which are forbidden in Scripture, but that they are not sin in him, that he is a child of God still; so they contend, not for sinless, but sinful, perfection; just as different from what I contend for, as heaven is from hell. What the Donatists were, I do not know; but I suspect they were the real Christians of that age; and were therefore served by St. Augustine and his warm adherents, as the Methodists are now by their zealous adversaries.\(^{193}\)

In this letter, Wesley recognizes the zeal of the Methodist’s adversaries, but continues to defend the doctrine of Christian perfection against claims by Dodd that sinning was a ‘necessity’.

The controversies of early Methodism were not strictly external, but at times, also erupted within the movement. In one of the most notable instances, two Methodist preachers Thomas Maxfield and George Bell, leaders in the London Methodist Society, took the doctrine of Christian perfection ‘to its furthest limits, claiming that the perfected Christian was without sin and, once perfected, would persist in this angelic-like state.’\(^{194}\) By 1763 Maxfield and Bell had left the movement, but the collateral damage was done. As a result, John Wesley went about setting standards to which the preachers were to conform represented by the

\(^{194}\) Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 209.
publication of the *Large Minutes*. Tyson notes that some of Charles Wesley’s hymns and poems were in response to the ‘perfectionist claims of George Bell and Thomas Maxfield.’ Interestingly, Charles response through hymns reinforces the sapience of Christian perfection, in this case providing correction and spiritual direction away from perilous theologies.

Wesley’s insistence to stay with Christian perfection as a constitutive doctrine is significant given his vehement outside critics as well as internal strife. The opposition forced Wesley to refine his position and clarify what he meant and did not mean by perfection. As argued earlier in this chapter, Wesley saw value in the various terms for perfection and his multi-faced approach to the doctrine was likely born from the crucible of controversy. Still, Wesley would not deny even what was likely the most objectionable term, ‘sinless perfection.’ These facts reinforce the argument for Christian perfection as a constitutive doctrine.

### 3.3 Real Christianity: Evangelism and Making Disciples

The argument can be made that for the two Wesley brothers and the Methodist movement, Christian perfection was indeed constitutive. The doctrine appears as the heart of Wesley’s life, sermons and writings. The doctrine was also central in the hymnody and even in the arrangement of those hymns. Christian perfection seems to be systematically central for Wesley and not just a significant component of his overall theological understanding. With this basis, it is possible to propose Christian perfection as a vision that shapes our understanding of the Christian life and as a result shapes our understanding of the theology and practice of evangelism.

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In what is commonly referred to as the *Great Commission* and the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus instructed his followers: ‘Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”’ (Matthew 28:18–20)

John Wesley commented on this verse:

Make them my disciples. This includes the whole design of Christ’s commission. Baptizing and teaching are the two great branches of that general design. And these were to be determined by the circumstances of things; which made it necessary in baptizing adult Jews or heathens, to teach them before they were baptized; in discipling their children, to baptize them before they were taught; as the Jewish children in all ages were first circumcised, and after taught to do all God had commanded them.197

A view of Christian perfection from the standpoint of discipleship is a way to join the previously described facets of perfection and to provide a way of describing the constitutive nature of Christian perfection. The terminology of Christian discipleship can be used to describe both the state of a person as a disciple (or follower of Jesus Christ) as well as the process by which the person becomes a disciple. In her study, *Making Disciples*, Sondra Higgins Matthaei, postulates this link between Christian perfection and discipleship. Writing about John Wesley’s examples of persons who had been transformed, Matthaei observes, ‘These models of a holy life led John Wesley to emphasize that sustained growth in holiness—making disciples—was only possible within the context of the life of the faith community.’198

John Wesley, while not using the explicit terms of discipleship or evangelism, as we know them, still observed the connection between being a disciple and growth in holiness of heart and

life. Wesley focused upon the *ordo salutis* and providing ways to enable persons to make the journey from unbelief to full salvation (Christian perfection).

The Wesley’s did not see a division between evangelism and discipleship, but rather pursued the transformation of people into the persons God had created them to be. In fact, the only requirement to be a part of the movement was the desire to ‘flee the wrath to come.’\(^{199}\) In this way, Wesley was inviting people into the journey of discipleship before they had experienced evangelical conversion. It can be inferred that in the Wesleyan movement, one could be a disciple before they had experienced conversion. One potential view of Christian perfection in light of Wesley’s theology is observing Christian perfection from the perspective of discipleship. The view of discipleship can bring the facets of perfection together. As such, Christian perfection is not relegated to some point on the Christian journey, but as a constitutive doctrine it is the vision of the journey’s destination. Therefore, a disciple is one who seeks conversion, and then having found it, presses on to perfection. Discipleship is a way of describing the constitutive nature of perfection as well as providing a matrix in which the various terms or facets can exist. This thesis argues that conversion is a significant waypoint on the journey of discipleship. However, a focus on discipleship as a *telos* obstructs or obscures conversion as a waypoint whether that focus is intentional or otherwise.

It could be argued that Christian discipleship has become almost exclusively understood in terms of Christian education or growth in the Christian life. Discipleship is what happens after conversion and evangelism is what occurs before. However, this is not the perspective of John and Charles Wesley or the Methodist

movement. Walter Bruggeman, although not writing from a Wesleyan perspective, defines discipleship in a way that seems analogous to early Methodism:

Discipleship is not just a nice notion of church membership or church education; it entails a resituating of our lives. The disciples of Jesus are the ones who follow their master, able to do so because they have been instructed in his way of life, both his aim and his practice of embodying that aim. The disciple is one who is closely associated with the master-teacher, a profoundly undemocratic notion, for the relation consists in yielding, submitting, and relinquishing oneself to the will and purpose of another.

Discipleship fundamentally entails a set of disciplines, habits, and practices that are undertaken as regular, concrete, daily practices; such daily disciplines are neither greatly exciting nor immediately productive, but like the acquiring of any new competence, discipleship requires such regimen—not unlike the learning of a new language by practicing the paradigm of verbs; not unlike the learning of piano by practicing the scales; not unlike the maintenance of good health by the tenacity of jogging; not unlike every intentional habit that makes new dimensions of life possible. The church is a community engaged in disciplines that make following the master-teacher possible and sustainable.200

Particularly, John Wesley saw the process of becoming a Christian as a unified journey that begins with coming face to face with one’s sin, continues with embracing justifying grace through faith, and continues still with the pursuit of Christian perfection. This pursuit required more than knowledge of God, but means of grace engaged in a community that would enable a person to work out their salvation.

As introduced in chapter one, Charry argues for the sapiential nature of Christian doctrine. The sapiential nature of Christian perfection shares both knowledge and wisdom about who God is and who God desires persons to be: ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.’201 Charry notes this connection in the work of Athanasius:

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201 Matthew 5:48.
With Athanasius we noted that patristic understanding of Christian vocation is assimilating oneself to God in a gradual process of illumination and purification, spurred by the assumption that in order to become good one must know goodness. Thus, salvation is linked with Christian discipleship, for which knowing God the Holy Trinity and assimilating oneself to God are central. Two requirements for progress in the Christian life immediately present themselves. One is sapiential knowledge of the triune God, for without illumination, how can one participate in the divine life? The other is the desire to be transformed by this knowledge, or else it would be to no avail. In short, theology that renders God accessible to believers is essential to spiritual formation.  

In this view, the sapiential nature of Christian perfection is needed for both salvation and discipleship to be realized in person’s lives. Charry is also demonstrating the link between conversion and discipleship that is enabled by the sapiential nature of doctrine. Sapience is therefore transformational knowledge and by application the knowledge of Christian perfection as a constitutive doctrine and telos facilitates transformation in the life of the person.

Wesley’s understanding of justification was the beginning of conversion, not the destination. While some degree of transformation occurs in the New Birth, which Wesley sees as adjacent to justification, it is not the complete renewal in the image of God that is seen in Christian perfection. Watson proposes that the doctrine of justification as understood by Wesley is the ‘theological basis for a polity of accountable discipleship.’ He further observes that justification is ‘bestowed with a purpose: to work out our salvation in the power of the Holy Spirit.’ While justification could be seen as the foundation for accountable discipleship, Christian perfection is the goal or telos of such discipleship for Wesley. In this respect, there is little, if any distinction in Wesley between what we would term evangelism and discipleship. The work of Methodism was intended to awaken persons to the reality

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202 Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 103.
of God, introduce them to the justifying grace of God and help them pursue Christian perfection. In describing the contrast between sanctification and entire sanctification, Watson observes, ‘Christian perfection, therefore, is the term to be preferred, understood as maturity of Christian discipleship, but in no way precluding the continued work of sanctifying grace.’ The work of evangelism or discipleship was not complete at justification, but rather the process continued as a person worked out his or her own salvation and journeyed toward Christian perfection.

If Christian perfection is the telos, or perhaps more appropriately, a vision of the journey of the Christian life, then for Wesley one picture of the person who is making this journey is a ‘real Christian.’ The descriptive term ‘real Christian’ is used 37 times in the Jackson Edition of Wesley’s works. In Sermon 21: Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Wesley describes the journey:

Some have supposed that he designed, in these, to point out the several stages of the Christian course; the steps which a Christian successively takes in his journey to the promised land; — others, that all the particulars here set down belong at all times to every Christian. And why may we not allow both the one and the other? What inconsistency is there between them? It is undoubtedly true, that both poverty of spirit, and every other temper which is here mentioned, are at all times found, in a greater or less degree, in every real Christian. And it is equally true, that real Christianity always begins in poverty of spirit, and goes on in the order here set down, till the ‘man of God is made perfect.’ We begin at the lowest of these gifts of God, yet so as not to relinquish this, when we are called of God to come up higher: But ‘whereunto we have already attained, we hold fast,’ while we press on to what is yet before, to the highest blessings of God in Christ Jesus.

In expounding on Matthew 5:1-4, Wesley points out that the journey begins with a poverty of spirit, but that for ‘real Christians’ this is only the starting point and much more of the journey is ahead as one pursues ‘the highest blessings of God in Christ Jesus.’

205 Watson, The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance, p. 64.  
206 Wesley & Outler, The Works, Sermons 1, p. 475.  
207 Wesley & Outler, The Works, Sermons 1, p. 475.
In Sermon 24: *Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount*, Wesley describes a part of the pattern of life for disciples:

Not that we can in any wise condemn the intermixing solitude or retirement with society. This is not only allowable but expedient; nay, it is necessary, as daily experience shows, for everyone that either already is or desires to be a real Christian. It can hardly be that we should spend one entire day in a continued intercourse with men without suffering loss in our soul, and in some measure grieving the Holy Spirit of God. We have need daily to retire from the world, at least morning and evening, to converse with God, to commune more freely with our Father which is in secret. Nor indeed can a man of experience condemn even longer seasons of religious retirement, so they do not imply any neglect of the worldly employ wherein the providence of God has placed us.

Wesley describes the expediency of the pattern of being in community and withdrawing from that community as one becomes or continues the life of a ‘real Christian.’

Wesley allows for the description of a ‘real Christian’ to include the beginning of the Christian life and makes room for growth and maturity throughout the journey. In his observations concerning the Trinity, Wesley makes allowance for different levels of understanding among ‘real Christians’:

But the thing which I here particularly mean is this: the knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion. I do not say that every real Christian can say with the Marquis de Renty, ‘I bear about with me continually an experimental verity, and a plenitude of the presence of the ever blessed Trinity.’ I apprehend this is not the experience of babes, but rather fathers in Christ.

Here Wesley includes both ‘babes’ and ‘fathers’ to be among the ranks of ‘real Christians.’ In a letter to the ‘Rev. Mr G—.’ he further observes that a ‘real Christian’ may be one who does not yet possess assurance of faith:

Those who are connected with me do not call themselves Methodists. Others call them by that nickname, and they cannot help it; but I continually warn

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them not to pin it upon themselves. 2. We rarely use that ambiguous expression of ‘Christ's righteousness imputed to us.’ 3. We believe a man can be a real Christian without being ‘assured of his salvation.’ 4. We know no man can be assured of salvation while he lives in any sin whatever.\textsuperscript{210}

It is clear, however, that although Wesley allowed for various levels of maturity among ‘real Christians,’ one could not be called by the term unless he or she was pursuing Christian perfection. In Sermon 25: \textit{Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount}, Wesley describes the characteristics that should become identified with a ‘real Christian:’

Wherein does the righteousness of a Christian exceed that of a Scribe or Pharisee? Christian righteousness exceeds theirs, First, in the extent of it. Most of the Pharisees, though they were rigorously exact in many things, yet were emboldened, by the traditions of the Elders, to dispense with others of equal importance. Thus they were extremely punctual in keeping the fourth commandment, they would not even rub an ear of corn on the Sabbath day; but not at all in keeping the third, making little account of light, or even false, swearing. So that their righteousness was partial; whereas the righteousness of a real Christian is universal. He does not observe one, or some parts of the law of God, and neglect the rest; but keeps all his commandments, loves them all, values them above gold or precious stones.\textsuperscript{211}

In Wesley’s observation of the text, the Pharisees were selective in keeping the law, whereas the ‘real Christian’ keeps each commandment out of love. In his sermon, \textit{Christian Perfection}, Wesley further observes: ‘but his Master was free from all sinful tempers. So, therefore, is his disciple, even every real Christian.’\textsuperscript{212} For Wesley, one must continue this pursuit to be a ‘real Christian.’

While Wesley’s description of ‘real Christians’ can seem to be a life of duty and solemnity, Wesley insisted that to be a ‘real Christian’ was also to live a life of happiness. In Sermon 77: \textit{Spiritual Worship}, Wesley writes:

And it is equally certain, on the other hand, that he who is not happy is not a Christian; seeing if he was a real Christian he could not but be happy. But I allow an exception here in favour of those who are under violent temptation;

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, v. 12, p. 263.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works, Sermons 1}, p. 567.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works, Sermons 2}, p. 118.
\end{itemize}
yea, and of those who are under deep nervous disorders, which are indeed a species of insanity. The clouds and darkness which then overwhelm the soul suspend its happiness; especially if Satan is permitted to second those disorders by pouring in his fiery darts. But excepting these cases the observation will hold, and it should be well attended to: whoever is not happy, yea, happy in God, is not a Christian.\textsuperscript{213}

While Wesley’s eighteenth century definition of happiness may slightly differ from ours, it is clear that Wesley did not perceive the life of a ‘real Christian’ as a joyless void. But making exceptions for those under ‘violent temptation’ or psychological disturbances, a ‘real Christian’ should experience happiness in God.

Wesley was also clear that various disciplines would be required along this journey of becoming a disciple. In his sermon \textit{On Redeeming the Time}, Wesley states:

But do not imagine that this single point, rising early, will suffice to make you a Christian. No: Although that single point, the not rising, may keep you a Heathen, void of the whole Christian spirit; although this alone (especially if you had once conquered it) will keep you cold, formal, heartless, dead, and make it impossible for you to get one step forward in vital holiness, yet this alone will go but a little way to make you a real Christian. It is but one step out of many; but it is one. And having taken this, go forward. Go on to universal self-denial, to temperance in all things, to a firm resolution of taking up daily every cross whereto you are called. Go on, in a full pursuit of all the mind that was in Christ, of inward and then outward holiness; so shall you be not almost but altogether a Christian; so shall you finish your course with joy: You shall awake up after his likeness, and be satisfied.\textsuperscript{214}

Wesley observes the necessity and the benefit of a disciplined life, including rising early, as part of the journey of a ‘real Christian.’ Self-denial and taking up one’s cross is seen as an inescapable part of being a disciple.

Wesley is also clear that becoming and being a ‘real Christian’ comes at a price. One must be willing to let go of those things once held dear and grasp onto those things that are of God. Wesley observes in his sermon, \textit{On Riches}:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{213} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works of John Wesley, Sermons 3}, p. 100.
  \item \textsuperscript{214} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works of John Wesley, Sermons 3}, p. 332.
\end{itemize}
But it would not be strange if rich men were in general void of all good
dispositions, and an easy prey to all evil ones, since so few of them pay any
regard to that solemn declaration of our Lord, without observing which we
cannot be his disciples: ‘And he said unto them all’—the whole multitude, not
unto his apostles only—’If any man will come after me’, will be a real
Christian, 'let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.'d
O how hard a saying is this to those that are at ease 'in the midst of their
possessions'? Yet the Scripture cannot be broken. Therefore unless a man do
'deny himself' every pleasure which does not prepare him for taking pleasure
in God, 'and take up his cross daily'—obey every command of God, however
grievous to flesh and blood—he cannot be a disciple of Christ, he cannot
'enter into the kingdom of God'.

Not only is discipleship costly in relation to material possessions, but also in relation
to one’s friends and acquaintances. In a letter to Mr Knox, Wesley spells out more of
the cost of being a ‘real Christian:’

Where is that light now? Do you now see that true religion is not a negative
or an external thing; but the life of God in the soul of man; the image of God
stamped upon the heart? Do you now see, that in order to this, we are
justified freely, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus? Where are
the desires after this, which you once felt? the hungering and thirsting after
righteousness? And where are the outward marks of a soul groaning after
God, and refusing to be comforted with anything less than his love?
Will you say, ‘But if I had gone on in that way, I should have lost my friends
and my reputation?’ This is partly true. You would have lost most of those
friends who neither love nor fear God. Happy loss! These are the men who do
you more hurt than all the world besides. These are the men whom, if ever
you would be a real Christian, you must avoid as you would avoid hell fire.
‘But then they will censure me.’ So they will. They will say you are a fool, a
madman, and what not. But what are you the worse for this? Why, the Spirit
of glory and of Christ shall rest upon you.

The cost of being a ‘real Christian’ is a real one, but according to Wesley one that
pales in comparison to the life of a true disciple.

Wesley did not need to use the terms ‘evangelism’ or ‘discipleship’ because
the early Methodists were making disciples as demonstrated in the following
chapters. For instance, as discussed in another chapter, Wesley’s use of hymns was
not haphazard or without purpose in helping persons pursue the life of a ‘real

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Christian.’ The editors of the Bicentennial Edition of Wesley’s Works observe that in the hymns, we see Wesley’s description of the life of a ‘real Christian.’ In fact, the order of the hymns was designed to describe this journey as the editors note in the section on *John Wesley As Hymn-book Editor*:

> With this chief aim, then, of compiling a book that should be what Manning described as ‘a spiritual biography of the sort of person whom he called in the preface a real Christian’, in fact a poetical Pilgrim's Progress, Wesley plundered those volumes which were to hand and which he knew contained the material he needed.\(^{217}\)

As early Methodists worshiped and sang together, they were both describing and participating in the journey of discipleship. In addition, as early Methodists gathered in societies, classes and bands, they were being encouraged and equipped to be ‘real Christians’. In David Lowes-Watson’s seminal work, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, Lowes-Watson provides what he suggests as ‘one of the most succinct descriptions of the format of a class meeting’.\(^ {218}\) His source is J. Nightingale, in a work entitled, *Portraiture of Methodism*. Nightingale describes a class meeting:

> The leader having opened the service by singing and prayer, all the members sit down, and he then relates to them his own experience during the preceding week, His joys, and his sorrows; his hopes and his fears; his conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil; his fightings without and his fears within; his dread of hell, or his hope of heaven; his pious longings and secret prayers for the prosperity of the church at large, and for those his brothers and sisters in class in particular…

After some such harangue as this, the leader proceeds to inquire into the state of every soul present; saying, “Well sister, or well brother, how do you find the state of your soul this evening?” The member then proceeds, without rising, to unbosom his or her mind to the leader; not, as has often been said, by particular confession, but by a general recapitulation of what has passed in the mind during the week. Such advice, correction, reproof, and consolation, is then given, as the state of the case may require; so the leader passes on to the next, and the next, until every one has received a portion of meat in due season.

After this, the leader, or some other on whom he may be pleased to call gives out a stanza or two of a hymn, which being sung, standing, they proceed with

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prayer; when such thanks-givings, deprecations, or petitions, are poured forth as the different experiences may have suggested.\textsuperscript{219}

Nightingale’s picture is of a community determined to travel together on the journey of discipleship. These early Methodists clearly understood that the journey was not complete at justification or initial salvation, but pressed on together toward Christian perfection.

### 3.4.1 Multi-faceted Wisdom for Real Christians

As stated previously, the doctrine of Christian perfection can be defined by looking at the doctrine from the various angles or facets present in Wesley’s theology. When communicating about Christian perfection, both John and Charles Wesley used a variety of terms to describe the doctrine. While scholars have identified some terms as definitive descriptions of Wesley’s doctrine, John Wesley especially seems to have resisted the urge to emphasize one term against or in lieu of the others. Although Wesley moves between terms and sometimes appears to favour a select few; never the less, he seemed convinced that to use one particular term would diminish and water down the complexity and richness of the doctrine of Christian perfection. Wesley explicitly observed that when viewed from different angles, Christian perfection might be described in different ways. In \textit{A Plain Account of Christian Perfection}, Wesley states: Now, take it in which of these views you please, (for there is no material difference,) and this is the whole and sole perfection, as a train of writings prove to a demonstration, which I have believed and taught for these forty years, from the year 1725 to the year 1765.\textsuperscript{220} When viewed in context, each one of these terms seems to highlight a particular dimension of Christian perfection.


\textsuperscript{220} Wesley, \textit{A Plain Account}, pp. 117-118.
perfection for Wesley. Yet all of these different angles or facets served to describe the same coherent doctrine.

### 3.4.2 Constitutive Wisdom for Real Christians

It can be argued that for both John and Charles Wesley, the doctrine of Christian perfection was the constitutive doctrine of early Methodism. The doctrine was the unifying goal of the movement and the dominant lens through which the Wesley’s saw the Christian life. This dominance can be seen through the sermons, the hymns and even the correspondence of early Methodists. The doctrine of Christian perfection consumed much of John Wesley’s time and energy as he fervently defended his views against his detractors, but he also continued to emphasize the doctrine’s centrality throughout his ministry. In fact, it was toward the end of his life in September of 1790 that Wesley identified the doctrine as the ‘grand depositum’ for which Methodism had been raised up by God.\(^{221}\) It is worth noting that, in Wesley’s mind, he was not proclaiming any new doctrine, but simply reclaiming that which he observed from scripture and from the early church. In his thinking, he was reclaiming the way of genuine Christian disciples.

### 3.5 Conclusion

When you approach evangelism with an eye to perfection rather than conversion, that is the theological matrix in which evangelism becomes a matter of discipleship versus other models such as revivalism. Charry notes, ‘Religious communities also have primary doctrines that teach members to form a coherent pattern of life by modeling themselves on exemplary individuals through practices that shape their lives, and by habits of thought and behavior.’\(^{222}\) The primary

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\(^{222}\) Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, p. 5.
doctrine of Christian perfection served the early Methodists by giving them a vision of the life God intended for them.

This chapter argues that a 'real Christian' is one whose life is being shaped by the pursuit of perfection from the inside out. MacIntyre provides a way to understand perfection as a telos pursued by a complex practice while Charrý provides a way to understand how the doctrine shapes the whole into a formative process. This thesis argues that the telos of Christian perfection joins conversion and discipleship and prevents their fragmentation into two disjointed aims. As such, it can be argued that evangelism is finished when a person experiences conversion. However, unless evangelism is operating with a telos of Christian perfection the temptation will be to fragment conversion and discipleship and forego the ethos of discipleship. Evangelism intentionally aims at conversion as a waypoint, but the vision of Christian perfection ensures that discipleship will continue.

Chapter 4 will explore the connection between Christian perfection and evangelism in the early Methodist movement from the perspective of John and Charles Wesley but also from early Methodist preachers and laity.
Chapter 4: Christian Perfection and Evangelism in Early Methodism

Perhaps as early as their childhood and certainly beginning with the ‘Holy Club’, John and Charles Wesley developed a holiness consciousness that pervaded their spiritual lives and ministries. This consciousness indicates that their whole thinking was shaped by the telos of perfection; and even when it is not explicitly stated, it is the best explanation of their thinking and practice. This consciousness that focused upon Christian perfection as the telos of the Christian life, also dominated the culture of early Methodism and influenced their practices including the practice of evangelism. The evidence for this can be seen in the sermons of John and Charles, the accounts of the lives of early Methodists, and Methodist hymnody.

Out of this holiness consciousness emerged an approach to evangelism that focused upon a long-term vision for the transformation of people beyond their justification by faith through grace, to the perfection of the person in love. This vision, led to an evangelistic approach that sought to form people into Christian disciples all along the journey through the use of small groups (classes and bands) as well as field preaching and witnessing which sought to point people to God, but not necessarily to elicit an immediate conversion. In early Methodism, evangelism and discipleship were not divorced as they are today.

Drawing upon the work of Meadows to provide a framework, this chapter will explore John Wesley’s ‘Way’ theology of evangelism. Using evidence from the lives of early Methodists, this chapter will further demonstrate the centrality of Christian perfection and how the doctrine provides the telos for spreading the gospel in the early Methodist movement. As MacIntyre discusses practices and their relationship to telos, the practices of the early Methodists in spreading the gospel will be related to the telos of Christian perfection. Within this context Charry is
helpful by showing how doctrine, if properly understood and embraced, can be virtue producing or ‘aretegenic’.

Alastair MacIntyre defines practices in a way that distinguishes the word from its normal use:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.223

For MacIntyre, practices are far more complex than simple tasks or skills. ‘Practices’ are those activities that are intimately connected to the ‘goods’ that are encompassed by the activity and are achieved in the process of participating in the activity. Wilson observes that MacIntyre’s definition makes a clear distinction between internal and external goods. While external goods may be achieved through some activity, they are still external to that activity. However, internal goods ‘are goods intrinsic to an activity; they cannot be truly conceived, experienced, or understood apart from a particular kind of activity.’224 MacIntyre explains further:

Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is. So are the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, and so is the work of the historian, and so are painting and music.225

MacIntyre’s view of practices can be applied to the field of evangelism as Jonathan R. Wilson points out using MacIntyre’s definition of practices in the context of the church:

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223 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p. 187.
224 Wilson, Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from Macintyre's after Virtue, p. 35.
225 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p. 18.
We may, for example, engage in evangelistic activities as a practice to achieve goods internal to that practice: attaining the unity of faith, full knowledge of Christ, and maturity as believers. Or we may transform those activities into something else by seeking to increase our ‘giving base,’ having the largest church in town, or increasing our reputation and influence in the denomination.\textsuperscript{226}

Wilson’s application of MacIntyre demonstrates how practices may be redirected into external goods that no longer align with the original telos. It is through this lens that we may view evangelism as a practice in early Methodism—a practice that had Christian perfection as an internal versus an external good. In addition, this ‘good’ forms the telos of practice of evangelism for early Methodists and therefore Christian perfection is both the goal and an internal good to evangelism. When evangelism in this Wesleyan sense becomes ordered by a different end or telos, then evangelism serves other purposes as mentioned above.\textsuperscript{227}

Charry’s contribution is her discussion of the sapiential nature of Christian doctrine and the aretegenic properties of doctrine. Charry argues that Christian theology has lost its sapiential nature that is, the characteristic of engaged knowledge that ‘emotionally connects the knower to the known’.\textsuperscript{228} Charry argues that in the older Christian texts, the authors were speaking to the whole person and thus pastoral care, evangelism, catechesis, etc. happened simultaneously and without the divisions that are currently operative.\textsuperscript{229} Charry laments:

Although knowing God dominates Calvin's theology, he nevertheless turned Protestantism away from the vision of God as the goal of life and instead stressed the centrality of trust in God's love, even while insisting that God

\textsuperscript{226} Wilson, \textit{Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from Macintyre's after Virtue}, p. 63.

\textsuperscript{227} Wilson describes a similar situation involving worship: ‘This distinction between external and internal goods can help us discern the disorder of our worship when we ask ourselves to which of these our worship is ordered. So, if the things that we are seeking in and through worship can be conceived apart from worship, our worship is disordered.’ Wilson, \textit{Living Faithfully}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{228} Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{229} Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. viii.
indeed may not elect all to salvation. With the seventeenth century, abetted by the epistemology of John Locke, theology began to dismantle the notion of sapience altogether.\textsuperscript{230}

With the loss of this nature, theological knowledge became disconnected from knowing God and thus lost much of its power to form Christians.

The second aspect that Charry contributes is her idea of the ‘aretegenic’ or virtue-producing role of Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{231} Charry argues that the \textit{Sermon on the Mount} provides a good example of an aretegenic text in which the author seeks to present the reader with an invitation to become a follower of Christ and prepare for the suffering that will follow: ‘He reassures them that they and their mission are of paramount importance, that they are capable of accomplishing it, and that through their lives God will be glorified’.\textsuperscript{232} In a similar way, John Wesley and the early Methodists saw both the sapiential and aretegenic role of Christian doctrine as they engaged their mission to spread scriptural holiness. Wesley saw perfection as ‘aretegenic’ in the sense that it not only aims at conversion of the sinner, but the formation of the saint. Wesley seems to have viewed theology not as an end in itself, but in concert with ancient Christians, saw theology as engaged knowledge that led persons to an encounter and relationship with the living God. To this end, Wesley preached, wrote about and taught the doctrine of Christian perfection in order that persons might experience the transforming power of God in their lives. Wesley also saw this doctrine as one that would produce virtue in the lives of those early Methodists as they and matured in their faith.

\textsuperscript{230} Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{231} Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{232} Charry, \textit{By the Renewing of Your Minds}, p. 79.
4.1 The Early Methodist Way of Evangelism

Meadows’ paradigm, which was introduced in Chapter 1, provides a helpful basis for discussing John Wesley’s plan of evangelism. Meadows observes the following concerning the Wesleyan paradigm:

…the Wesleyan *evangel* was neither personal salvation, nor the kingdom of god, as such. Rather it is a gospel of holy love which promises that every life and every community can be caught up and transformed by the saving embrace of God. The *telos* of evangelism, therefore, is not evangelical conversion or discipleship, but a journey of entering into communion with the triune God. And, finally, the *ethos* of evangelism is rooted in the practice of corporate spiritual direction, which flowed from small groups, through the gathered society and family homes, out into the world in ever widening circles of mission. This approach is what I would tentatively call an ‘ancient-future’ paradigm of evangelism.233

While Meadows argues for ‘communion with God’ as the *telos* of an ‘ancient – future paradigm’, thesis has argued that the *telos* of evangelism in Wesley and the early Methodists was the doctrine of Christian perfection. This distinction will be explored later in this chapter within the discussion of the early Methodist *telos*.

Using the three characteristics of *evangel*, *telos* and *ethos*, John Wesley’s plan of evangelism will be analysed for evidence to support the argument that Christian perfection was the *telos* of evangelism or ‘spreading the gospel’ in the early Methodist movement. Figure 1 demonstrates how the *evangel*, *telos* and *ethos* relate to one another in the work of evangelism. In this framework, all three components work together in the ministry of evangelism in a dynamic relationship. The interrelationship of these dimensions of *evangel*, *telos* and *ethos* will be examined as well as the gain or loss, which results from particular emphases. This paradigmatic approach also connects with MacIntyre and Charry, by providing an

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interpretive framework for analysing the fragmented understandings, aims and practices of contemporary evangelism.

Figure 1. The Relationship Between Evangel, Telos and Ethos

As Wood observes, ‘Whatever else he was—and he was a man of many parts—Wesley was first and foremost an evangelist.’

In addition to the unique evangel, telos and ethos of early Methodism, there are several features of John Wesley’s way of evangelism that characterize the vision for evangelism among early Methodists. First, John Wesley’s ordo or via salutis appears to form a framework for his theology of evangelism. Secondly, Wesley seems to have valued the power of Christian living holy lives as a way of spreading the gospel in addition to proclamation and witness. Third, and closely connected to the second feature,

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Wesley affirmed that evangelism was the work of ordinary Christians and not just the professional clergy. Fourth, Wesley saw salvation as a present reality, not something that would just be realized in the future. Fifth, it is the work of the Holy Spirit both preveniently and in conjunction with the work of the evangelist that brings about the conversion and transformation of persons. These characteristics will be highlighted through the framework of \textit{evangel, telos} and \textit{ethos}.

\textbf{4.1.1 The Early Methodist \textit{Evangel}}

Meadows contention is that Wesley’s \textit{evangel} is holy love, which includes aspects of both personal salvation and the eschatological kingdom, but points to Wesley’s focus as ‘a gospel of holy love’.\textsuperscript{235} A life transformed by God and identified with a deep love of God and neighbour does seem to be the ‘good news’ that Wesley and the early Methodists preached to the unconverted as well as those seeking redemption. Skevington Wood describes Wesley’s \textit{evangel}:

\begin{quote}
In recognizing this [Wesley’s goal to spread scriptural holiness] he conceded that it is insufficient for the gospel preacher to confine himself to the bare message of salvation. Even in addressing the unconverted, it is necessary to stress the resultant life of holiness. Those who are being invited to tread the Christian way have a right to know where they are going. The impression must not be conveyed that conversion is an end in itself.\textsuperscript{236}
\end{quote}

Wood describes Wesley’s \textit{evangel} as a comprehensive message that cast a vision for the kind of life to which God was calling the unconverted. It was a vision of a life justified by grace, but also sanctified by grace. Tuttle agrees in his observation that, ‘any reference to the Wesleyan message that does not also include reference to perfection as the hallmark of Methodism is sadly amiss. Grace

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{235} Meadows, ‘Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism’, p. 8.  \\
\textsuperscript{236} Wood, \textit{The Burning Heart}, p. 305. 
\end{flushright}
continues to work in us throughout our lives.” For Wesley, the *evangel* is both incomplete and inadequate unless it communicates a vision that points to Christian perfection.

Wesley directly connects the preaching of Christian perfection with spreading the gospel when writing his brother, Charles, in 1766:

> Where Christian perfection is not strongly and explicitly preached, there is seldom any remarkable blessing from God; and, consequently, little addition to the Society, and little life in the members of it. Therefore, if Jacob Rowell is grown faint, and says but little about it, do you supply his lack of service. Speak and spare not. Let not regard for any man induce you to betray the truth of God. Till you press the believers to expect full salvation now, you must not look for any revival.  

As previously argued, Christian perfection was a constitutive doctrine in early Methodism and it is this vision of transformation that Wesley and the Methodists continued to cast versus an *evangel* that stopped short at justification and the new birth. Among the early Methodist preachers, Wesley’s emphasis was carried out as these lay leaders of the Methodist movement sought to spread the gospel among the people of the British Isles. It is recorded that in a 1781 sermon, Mr William Hunter emphasized the vision of Christian perfection:

> After exhorting believers to go on to perfection, Mr Hunter observed, that, without this, we cannot increase in the Divine life, nor obtain a becoming meetness for glory. When our eye is fixed on Christ, and all the powers of the mind are engaged in this great and blessed exercise, then the work of sanctification is carried on in all its parts. Sin grows weaker and weaker; Divine love spreads through the soul. Faith grows; and the love of God and man increases.

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Hunter observes the necessity of preaching Christian perfection in general, but he also seems to specifically emphasize it early in a Christian’s life noting the power of the vision of Christian perfection as a catalyst for believers.

Another early Methodist preacher, James Rogers, records the fruit of the Methodist mission to Leeds:

“In the year 1779 I was appointed to labour at Leeds, where I found a people ripe for the doctrine of holiness; and many that year believed unto full salvation. This was the richest soil for Methodism I had yet known. We found two thousand two hundred members in society, and about twenty local preachers, who greatly assisted us in the work; and the word of the Lord ran and was glorified; to which the harmony which subsisted between the preachers, stewards, leaders, and people, greatly contributed.”

Rogers’ account provides a vivid description of the work of the Methodists, but also shows the evangel of holy love, the ethos of spiritual direction and the telos of Christian perfection.

Finally, Thomas Hanson describes the content and nature of his preaching:

“To this end the chief matter of my preaching has been the essentials of religion; such as, the lost state of man, depraved, guilty, and miserable by nature; his justification through the alone merit of Christ by faith only, together with the witness and fruits of it; the new birth, the necessity, benefits, and fruits of it, in all inward and outward holiness. I have endeavoured to explain the new covenant in its benefits, condition, precepts, threats, and rewards I have shown that perfect love is attainable here, by those that press for it with their whole heart. I teach piety to God, justice and mercy to men, and sobriety in ourselves, endeavouring to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and man, in every station of life and in all relations. I also endeavour to guard souls against the temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil; against the hurtful opinions that surround them; and against the hindrances of their repentance, faith, hope, love, and holiness. I have also shown them the danger of delay, of refusal, or of drawing back to sin, death, and hell.

Hanson observes that his preaching included the ‘essential’ of Christian perfection and that he focused on the benefits and fruit of the way of salvation. These and other

early Methodists focused on an *evangel* that went beyond a call to initial conversion and cast a vision of life (*telos*) characterized by Christian perfection through an *ethos* characterized by spiritual direction.

Wesley’s *evangel* demonstrates a progression from the earliest hints of the presence of God in prevenient grace to the radical transformation of sanctifying grace, often identified as *ordo or via salutis*. It is important to note at this point that the view of an ‘order’ of salvation initially observed by Outler has come under scrutiny by Wesley scholars in recent years.\(^{242}\) Some scholars would argue for a *via salutis* which would emphasize the process of salvation over and against the view of an *ordo salutis* which acknowledges a process, but emphasizes significant milestones of grace which form an order. Maddox and Collins are two significant scholars who represent the two sides of this argument with Maddox arguing for a *via salutis* and Collins arguing for the *ordo salutis*. From a teleological perspective, it could be argued that an *ordo salutis* emphasizes a more conversionistic view of salvation to the neglect of the journey and especially the continued journey to Christian perfection. A *via salutis* could be seen as emphasizing a view of salvation that has a journeying and on-going nature, but never arrives at a destination. It does not appear that either Maddox or Collins would deny that there is both process and significant signposts as a person experiences salvation, and may have much agreement when it comes to Wesley’s soteriology. The debate seems to be more one of emphasis. Maddox seems to frame his argument in a manner that avoids a reformed (scholastic) view that sees ‘ordo’ as static stages rather than a journey with movement. Collins, on the other hand, seems to frame his argument so that the significant ‘real’ changes that he identifies as ‘qualitatively distinct realizations of grace’ are not lost by

pushing the language of way, journey or via too far. In the context of this study, the
debate, like many others in Wesley studies, tends to demonstrate the fragmentation
present in the understanding of evangelism. Viewing conversion as either a full stop
or a comma may result in the loss of one perspective or the other. Perhaps the semi-
colon would better represent Wesley’s view of salvation, which could preserve both
the process and the significant spiritual moments. A semi-colon preserves the
connection between the different parts of a sentence while emphasizing a significant
pause in the midst of the message. Similarly, salvation is marked by significant
moments in a person’s life and these moments are linked together by a process or
journey between the points. As Logan describes Wesley’s view, ‘Grace was not
structurally contained, but dynamically operative in three modes—prevenient,
justifying and sanctifying.’ God’s activity is evident in both the significant
moments and the process of salvation as a person experiences God’s grace.

As Maddox acknowledges, ‘It is true that Wesley himself understood the core
of his theology to lie in the order of salvation’. In this core, whether an ordo or via
salutis is emphasized, the most critical issue is that Wesley did not see the end of
salvation in the justification or even new birth of persons, but rather called early
Methodists to pursue full salvation or Christian perfection. As Tuttle observes,
‘Although Wesley spoke about an instantaneous experience called ‘entire
sanctification,’ his major emphasis was the continuous process of ‘going on to
perfection.’ We have seen that Wesley soon learned that the only way to keep
Methodists alive was to keep them moving.’ As presented in Chapter 2, the

evidence for this aim includes Wesley’s design of the 1780 hymnbook in which hymns are ordered ‘under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians.’ Wesley observed that persons generally became Christians according to this pattern, but he did not insist upon a rigid pattern of experience.

Wesley’s *evangel* and the *evangel* of the Methodists communicated a vision of a life transformed by the power of God. This transformation involved both a relative change in a person’s relationship to God as well as a real change of their character and heart. Wood credits this *evangel* with helping the Methodists stay on track in the way of salvation:

> This intensive reiteration of the need to make progress was the best possible fellowship message for Wesley’s converts. One of the reasons why such a high percentage of them stayed the course is to be found here. None of those who listen to Wesley’s preaching could rest on their spiritual oars. As he mounted his horse and headed for his next location, they knew that they themselves must be on their way as they made for the Celestial City.

It was this message that pointed to the *telos* of Christian perfection and kept Methodists focused on the prize, rather than the start of the race.

### 4.1.2 The Early Methodist Telos

As evidenced by Wesley’s sermons, hymnbooks and other sources, he observed an *ordo salutis* marked by ‘critical realizations of grace’ through which persons experience salvation. This stance separates Wesley from a soteriological paradigm that focuses upon the decision made by a person to follow Christ or reductionists who would attempt to reduce salvation to a one-time event. The ‘way’ of salvation also distinguishes Wesley from the missiological paradigm as well, while recognizing that the order includes aspects of both paradigms. While Wesley affirmed the conversion of persons through God’s justifying grace and the new birth,

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he also affirmed the reality of sanctifying grace that continues the salvation process.

In Meadows’ analysis, this order culminates in communion with God informed by the *evangel* of holy love and propelled by an *ethos* of spiritual direction. This thesis has argued, however, that the *telos* of evangelism in Wesley and the early Methodists was the doctrine of Christian perfection. This *telos* certainly involves communion with God. It may be argued that communion with God is present in the entire way of salvation with preventing or prevenient grace as an initial communion, justification as a conscious entering into communion and sanctification as a deepening of that transforming communion. Communion with God establishes the relational aspect of Wesley’s *telos*, however, there is also a transformation in virtue and character, which may be better represented by Christian perfection. In other words, although communion with God is the thread emphasized by Meadows, Christian perfection is the fulfilment of communion with God. This distinguishes Wesley’s view, which is inherently transforming, from other understandings, which place their emphasis on justification. Outler points to the *telos* for Wesley when he states, ‘And no matter what stage a convert's Christian experience might have reached, his life in the Society and class-meetings was always aimed at the way beyond, and he could count on guidance and help along that way all the way---to 'perfection of love in this life.’

A distinctively Methodist approach to an understanding of evangelism will be characterized by a ‘full-orbed ministry of evangelism'. In the evangelistic process equal significance will be accorded to Christian proclamation on the one hand and Christian nurture on the other. Logan reminds us that this was part of the genius of the Wesleyan tradition - spiritual oversight, nurture and discipline took place in the structured life of the early class meetings. These structures provided the ‘theological grid' upon which the ongoing spiritual journey of the 'awakened' could be plotted. Outler echoes the thoughts of

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Logan when he maintains that Wesley saw conversion as 'the bare threshold' of a full and comprehensive ministry of evangelism. The Wesleyan tradition accepted the responsibility and challenge of the continuing growth of new converts so that they experienced not simply justifying grace but also sanctifying grace as well. 251

The trajectory of the Methodist movement was guided by this telos as indicated by the use of societies, classes and bands to encourage and guide persons toward Christian perfection. Stanley Hauerwas states, ‘Put differently, perfection names the telos any adequate account of the Christian life requires. Moreover, it places that emphasis rightly—for the teleology is not one of moral decisions or justifications, but of the self.’ 252

It is important to note that while Wesley saw the telos of evangelism as Christian perfection, he also believed that salvation (and even ‘salvation to the uttermost’) was a present and not a future reality. In his sermon, The Scripture Way of Salvation, Wesley insists, ‘If you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are; and expect it now.’ 253 Tuttle observes, ‘Wesley was an evangelist. His primary motivation, however, was not simply to save the lost—though that was certainly important. His primary motivation was the love of God and people, and the desire to build Methodists up in the kind of holiness that would sustain forever.’ 254

This telos was not only for individuals, but also for the flourishing of the community. Alexander Boraine observes that Wesley’s telos is intimately connected to his ethos:

Not only is the end of holiness evangelism, but the end of evangelism is holiness. God’s purpose for the believer is that he should be holy. God’s design is the restoration of the relationship which man enjoyed with his

Creator before the fall. This holiness is none other than love for God and for men made possible through God’s love in Jesus Christ for all men.\textsuperscript{255}

Wesley clearly focused on the transformation of individuals as they sought Christian perfection, yet he also observed how that transformation within individuals resulted in an even stronger witness for the gospel. In addition, Wesley observed how pressing on to perfection had a positive impact on the community at large. This can be seen through Wesley’s \textit{ethos} of evangelism.

4.1.3 The Early Methodist Ethos

Wesley’s \textit{ethos} was a multi-faceted approach to communicating the gospel. As Meadows observes, the \textit{ethos} of early Methodism can be identified as spiritual direction. Meadows notes: ‘In ancient perspective, one way to interpret the complex process of evangelizing the seeker in early Methodism is through the lens of “spiritual direction.”’ Although spiritual direction is typically identified with the relationship between two people, it can refer to any relational practice that helps a person hear, see and respond to God.\textsuperscript{256} Boraine argues that Wesley emphasized at least four ways of providing this direction in early Methodism:

1. \textit{Kerygma}, ‘The gospel must be preached.’
2. \textit{Koinonia}: ‘The gospel must be lived and its power embodied in the actual life of the community which claims Christ as Savior and Lord.’
3. \textit{Didache}: Knowledge and learning are combined with holiness and piety.
4. \textit{Diakonia}: ‘Wesley understood that mission without humble service is a contradiction in terms.’

\textsuperscript{255} Boraine, \textit{The Nature of Evangelism in the Theology and Practice of John Wesley}, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{256} Meadows, ‘Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism’, p. 23.
Boraine summarizes his argument for Wesley’s holistic ethos:

It was never a case of either/or but both/and. On the one hand he held Kerygma, Koinonia, Didache, and Diakonia together, emphasizing that it is the gospel which motivates service and in this way minimized the danger of succumbing to the temptation to turn stones into bread. On the other hand, he strongly condemned a profession of faith which was not accompanied with a practical love of the neighbor.257

As indicated, preaching was a significant part of Wesley’s approach to evangelism in the early Methodist movement. Laceye Warner argues that ‘Wesley's favorite New Testament preaching text was Mark 1:15, in which Jesus spoke the following words: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (NRSV). Mark 1:15 is a strongly evangelistic text, often described as a summary of Jesus' commission to the disciples in Mark.'258 However, while preaching is often identified as Wesley’s primary evangelistic tool, it is far from the only method used by the early Methodists. Warner also notes:

The discussion of preaching and societies within the Wesleyan tradition enlightens both the complexity and wholeness of John Wesley's theology and ministry that encourages the living out of scriptural norms with implications for the proclamation and socially prophetic embodiments of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world.259

While Warner’s choice of Mark 1:15 as Wesley’s favourite preaching text may be debated, she appropriately points out that both preaching and the functioning of the societies played a key role in the evangelism of early Methodists.

In his sermon, The General Spread of the Gospel, John Wesley identified what he considered the ‘grand stumbling block to the gospel’ as the lives of Christians.260 When Christians fail to live out a life of committed discipleship, rather

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than offering a compelling witness to the gospel, they instead provide evidence that the gospel is powerless and ineffectual and therefore become obstacles rather than conduits for God’s mission to the world. This was not a new concept for Wesley, who as early as 1731 saw the power of holy living as related to spreading the gospel. In his sermon, *The Wisdom of Winning Souls*, Wesley identifies this connection:

This purpose it is which God hath uniformly pursued through our creation, preservation, and redemption. And this purpose it is, seeing the glory of God is inseparably connected with the winning of souls, which the wise man we are speaking of is continually promoting; as well as its necessary consequence, with regard to which we may, in the second place, consider the end he proposes, namely, the good it brings to every person whom he wins to glorify God.\(^{261}\)

Wesley recognized that persons whose lives had been transformed and were living lives of personal and social holiness provided those outside the Christian faith a provocative witness.\(^{262}\) Or as Outler states, ‘God’s good news is proclaimed in words and symbols, it is celebrated liturgies and rituals, but it is communicated by corporate life and example.’\(^{263}\) In the sermon, *General Spread of the Gospel*, Wesley comments on such lives:

The holy lives of the Christians will be an argument they will not know how to resist; seeing the Christians steadily and uniformly practise what is agreeable to the law written in their own hearts, their prejudices will quickly die away, and they will gladly receive ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’.\(^{264}\)

Wesley envisions the gospel spreading through both the proclaimed gospel and the holy lives of the messengers. In Wesley’s mind, these are not mutually exclusive vehicles, but rather complimentary factors that combine to enable the gospel to spread effectively even in hostile environments.

\(^{262}\) Tomlin discusses the idea of Christians living provocative lives and the evangelistic effect of such lives in G. Tomlin, *The Provocative Church* (London: SPCK, 2002).
\(^{263}\) Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, p. 29.
Wesley’s focus on ‘the evangelical power of holy living,’ also underscores his view that spreading the gospel was the work of ordinary Christians and not limited to clergy. Outler, states: ‘Early Methodism was a lay witness movement with all the crudities and excesses to go with such things. But Wesley had come to realize (against all his clerical instincts) that it is the laity who are the visible church in the world.’ Lay preachers, class leaders, and ordinary Methodists were equipped and expected to engage those around them in spreading the gospel. Outler also points out that as early as 1731, Wesley was affirming the work of laypersons in the work of evangelism by his ‘allowances for irregular ministries.’ In the introductory comments to Wesley’s sermon, *The Wisdom of Winning Souls*, Outler states, ‘This is an interesting affirmation of the evangelical mission of all Christian believers; it is also a denial of any exclusive right of the ordained clergy to evangelize.’

Throughout his ministry, Wesley continued to affirm the role of all Christians in the work of spreading the Gospel as evidenced by the numbers of lay preachers and leaders in the Methodist movement at the time of and even after his death.

Jack Jackson identifies the key modes or practices that characterized early Methodist evangelism’s verbal proclamation. These practices included preaching, exhortation, teaching, and worship. Jackson acknowledges that these practices or ‘modes’ are not explicitly named in early Methodist sources as primary, ‘Rather, they are identified through the emphasis the early Methodists placed on each, as well

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266 Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* p. 29.
as through the framework of ingredients identified in literature on evangelism.'

However, in addition to these modes or practices, early Methodists also engaged in the singing of hymns, love feasts, spiritual direction (classes and bands) and acts of missional service such as visiting the sick and imprisoned as well as assisting the poor. It was the totality of these and other practices, in addition to a commitment to holy living, which formed the *ethos* of the early Methodist movement and created the environment in which the *telos* of Christian perfection was pursued.

### 4.1.4 Methodist Groups

An understanding of Wesley’s ‘way of evangelism’ would be incomplete without recognizing the significant and even essential role of the various Methodist groups. By organizing the Methodist movement into societies, classes and bands, Wesley did what many of his contemporaries were unable to do—he guided Methodists in the way of salvation.

In the preface to Watson’s classic work on the Methodist small group, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, Outler states that the class meeting in particular was ‘more than another experiment in ‘Christian togetherness.’ It was, in fact, a *schola animarium*—a school for growing souls’. Outler’s statement emphasizes that the class meetings (and the same could be said for societies and bands) existed for more than what contemporary Christians have come to know as ‘fellowship’. Rather, the class meeting was an opportunity and a means for helping individuals, in the context of community, grow in their relationships to God and pursue salvation to the uttermost. Watson describes the class meeting as groups ‘grounded in solid theological principles which, as with all of Wesley’s theology, were couched in the

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language of ordinary people with a view to their application in practical
discipleship’. Further, Watson observes that the entirety of Wesley’s polity for all
of the various Methodist groups reflected this ‘practical discipleship’. Watson states,
‘They expressed, an in turn affirmed and enriched, his theological emphases on
Prevenient grace and Christian perfection; and most especially they were an
embodiment of his doctrine of justification by faith.’

Michael Henderson seems to identify Christian discipleship primarily with
education. Yet, Henderson makes a significant contribution in identifying the way
each group contributed to the discipleship of the whole person. Henderson identifies
each group (society, class meeting, band, etc.) with various educational modes.
Societies are identified with the cognitive mode with focus of the group as ‘the
educational channel by which the tenets of Methodism were presented to the target
population.’ Henderson argues that the class meeting was focused on the
‘behavioural mode’ where Christian converts were trained in the way of life that
coincided with Methodist theology. Henderson notes, ‘Whereas the society was an
instrument for cognitive acquisition, almost to the exclusion of any interpersonal
dynamics, the class meeting was a tool for the alteration of behavior…’ Henderson
identifies three areas of behaviour that were introduced and reinforced in the class
meeting: prohibitions, exhortations, and the ‘means of grace’. Bands are identified
with the ‘affective mode’ by Henderson with their focus upon what he calls

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273 D.M. Henderson, John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples
274 Henderson, John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples, pp. 96-97.
‘facilitated affective redirection’. In other words, in the bands, Methodists sought to ‘grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention’.  

Figure 2. Albin’s Analysis of Early Methodist Groups

As shown in Figure 2, the work of Thomas Albin contributes to the overall understanding of these early Methodist groups and how they functioned together to draw people toward Christian perfection. Albin asserts that public services, societies, classes, bands and select societies could be pictured with concentric circles starting

with public services at the periphery, leading to select societies and bands at the centre. Albin also aligns each of these groups with Wesley’s understanding of grace starting with prevenient grace at the edges and sanctifying grace at the centre. It is important to note that Albin observes not necessarily a linear progression toward the centre circle, but the possibility for back-and-forth movement as a person’s journey of faith unfolded.\(^{276}\)

What is clear from Albin, Watson and Henderson is that Wesley saw these various groups as a significant part of the *ethos* of evangelism in early Methodism. The societies, classes and bands (and others) were the vehicles by which Methodists heard the *evangel*, journeyed the way of salvation and pursued the *telos* of Christian perfection. It is important to observe that someone could be on the journey of discipleship before experiencing conversion. This is demonstrated by the fact that the only requirement to be a part of the early Methodist group was a desire ‘to flee the wrath to come’ as described by Wesley in *The Nature, Design, Rules of the United Society*.\(^{277}\) In this sense, a person could be a disciple and part of the Christian community before experiencing conversion.

**4.1.5 The Role of Holy Spirit in the Way of Evangelism**

John Wesley is quite clear that the way of salvation is the work of the Spirit of God and as such is a gift of grace and not anything that can be earned or accomplished by human effort. Wesley states in his sermon, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*:

> And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are 'born again', 'born from above',

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born of the Spirit'. There is a real as well as a relative change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel the 'love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us', producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease, of honour, of money; together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper—in a word, changing the 'earthly, sensual, devilish' mind into 'the mind which was in Christ Jesus'.

Similarly, Wesley would affirm that the work of evangelism would be impossible apart from the work of the Spirit in the lives of persons. While the evangelist communicates the evangel toward a particular telos and through a particular ethos, this work would be in vain without the Holy Spirit’s work in both the evangelist and the person being saved. Wood states, ‘The third person of the Trinity was given the honour that is due to Him as the executive of the Godhead, and thus the dynamic force in all Christian experience…Wesley did not hesitate to ascribe every item in the experience of redemption to the action of the Holy Ghost.’ In his work on the teachings of John Wesley, Oden observes that the work of the Holy Spirit is the ‘driving force in evangelism’ and question for Christians is how they should cooperate with the Spirit so that others are drawn to God.

Hynson observes:

It is important for us to note the insistence that the Holy Spirit's work is immediate, assuring, and empowering. The significance of these concepts is evident when we refer to evangelism. For Wesley these had a precise relation to effective evangelism. The immediacy of the spirit means that the element of the "holy" is present, evoking wonder. As Rudolph Otto states it, the "holy" is characterized by a "numinous" quality, or a category of feeling which eludes a full comprehension in rational terms. The "numinous" involves a deeply-felt experience; to be rapt in worship, to see the Lord as Isaiah saw Him… This immediacy of the Spirit is an aspect of the church in evangelism, as we see in Acts.

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The Holy Spirit’s work is present (immediate) in the *evangel* enabling the message to be received by the hearer but also empowering the Christian who proclaims it. The Holy Spirit also enables persons to ‘press on’ toward the *telos*. Finally, the Holy Spirit works in and through the practices involved in the *ethos* as persons seek God.

### 4.2 The Experience of Early Methodists

Christian perfection was a part of the evangelistic and holiness consciousness of the early Methodists. This can be observed through the experiences and the practices of the early Methodists. The experiences that were recorded by early Methodist people covered the whole range of Christian experience of salvation from the God’s prevenient grace to the experiences of Christian perfection. These experiences help demonstrate the connection between evangelism and Christian perfection. The practices of the early Methodists including preaching, witnessing, Christian education, and worship located within the contexts of field preaching, societies, classes and one-on-one visitation. These practices help demonstrate that Christian perfection was a vision for their evangelistic efforts. John Wesley’s focus upon the doctrine as key and even constitutive is implicitly evident in the way early Methodists spread the gospel and explicitly evident in Wesley’s instructions to his preachers. Without this focus and vision, the converts reached by the movement may have become another ‘rope of sand’, as George Whitfield observed concerning the converts under his ministry. Whitfield lamented that while Wesley was able to

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account for every Methodist through the system of societies, classes and bands, Whitefield was left with a little or no contact with those to whom he preached. While the majority of this evidence pointing to the holiness consciousness of the early Methodists is implicit, one can begin to see the pattern by examining: Wesley’s instructions to his preachers; the lives and practices of the early Methodist preachers; and the hymnody of early Methodism.

4.2.1 Wesley’s Instructions to the Preachers

The lives of early Methodist preachers particularly demonstrate this commitment to Christian perfection as a vision for evangelism. Following in the footsteps of Wesley, early Methodist preachers modelled their ministry after that of John Wesley in many ways. While each person brought his or her own distinct personality and giftedness to the task, it is still evident that Wesley’s pattern was what they emulated. This is no surprise given the extent to which Wesley instructed his preachers in the Methodist way. Many of Wesley instructive comments concerning his preachers are recorded in the Minutes of Conference, his personal correspondence and other treatises. In his advice to preachers, Wesley states:

It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.  

It should be noted that Wesley’s advice to preachers has been truncated over the years so that it does not include the focus on holiness. The call is included as late as the 1936 Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, it appears that this entire section, along with it’s explicit call to build up persons in holiness, was

285 M.E. Church, Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1936), pp. 163-165.
eliminated from the Discipline of the Methodist Church at the 1939 merger of the Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal (North and South) churches.  

It seems clear that for the early Methodist preachers, justification was the initial goal and the trajectory following was to be built up in holiness. Wesley also advised his preachers on the approach to preaching sanctification:

Q. 8. In what manner should we preach entire sanctification?
A. Scarce at all to those who are not pressing forward. To those who are, always by way of promise; always drawing, rather than driving.

Wesley does not present sanctification as an optional subject for preaching and teaching, but rather it seems expected.

Wesley may be seen as almost prescriptive in his dealings with the early Methodist preachers, but his concerns were not unfounded. The Maxfield-Bell controversy certainly convinced Wesley of the need to keep his preachers under a system of discipline with which the major tenets of Methodism could be preserved. Given the constitutive nature of Christian perfection in the Methodist corpus, it is not surprising that many of his comments to the preachers concern this doctrine.

While Wesley was committed to and engaged in a ministry that sought to convert the least, last and lost of the British Isles, it also seems clear that he sought their holiness as well. Wesley was clearly concerned that a ministry that focused solely upon conversion (or justification) would result in possibly a greater tragedy than the unconverted. As early as 1743, Wesley expresses this concern as he writes in his journal, ‘The devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half-awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again. Therefore, I determine by the grace of God not to strike one stroke in any place

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where I cannot follow the blow.’ Wesley also expressed his concern to the Rev. Mr Walker:

But, waving this, and supposing these four societies to be better provided for than they were before; what becomes of the other thirty? Will they prosper as well when they are left as sheep without a shepherd? The experiment has been tried again and again; and always with the same event: Even the strong in faith grew weak and faint; many of the weak made shipwreck of the faith; the awakened fell asleep; sinners, changed for a while, returned as a dog to the vomit. And so, by our lack of service, many of the souls perished for whom Christ died. Now, had we willingly withdrawn our service from them, by voluntarily settling in one place, what account of this could we have given to the great Shepherd of all our souls? 288

Wesley goes even further when he writes in his journal:

I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of god, is only begetting children for the murderer…How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire. But no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection; and the consequence is that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever (Journal, August 25, 1763)

When in conference, Wesley was also clear about the practices of his preachers and the inclusion of meeting in class. In the Minutes of Several Conversations, Mr Wesley is asked:

Q. Is it advisable for us to preach in as many places as we can, without forming any societies?

A. By no means. We have made the trial in various places; and that for a considerable time. But all the seed has fallen as by the highway side. There is scarce any fruit remaining. 289

Wesley is clear and consistent when addressing and training his preachers that ‘awakening’ persons without showing them the need to pursue Christian perfection after their conversion, was unacceptable in the Methodist movement. The early Methodist vision for persons was for full salvation as the lives and practices of the early preachers demonstrate.

4.2.2 Christian Perfection and Evangelism Among the Early Preachers

Wesley’s influence and the holiness consciousness of the early Methodists are also implicitly demonstrated in the lives of the early Methodist preachers. In these accounts, most of which were written as letters to John, show evidence of a holiness consciousness and the trajectory toward Christian perfection in the lives on individual preachers, but also in their practices as Methodists preachers. Evangelism was certainly concerned for the initial salvation or justification of persons, but there was clearly an additional concern that persons continue to press on to perfection.

In his introductory essay to The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers, Thomas Jackson writes:

The truest respect that the present race of Methodist preachers can show for their venerable fathers who now sleep in Jesus, is to imitate them in their zeal for the honour of Christ, and the salvation of souls redeemed by His blood; in their inflexible adherence to the truth; their power in prayer; their plainness and earnest simplicity in preaching; their irresistible appeals to the consciences of their hearers; their self-denial; their pastoral visitation from house to house; their sympathy with the poor and the afflicted; their mighty faith in God; their affectionate concern for the young; their enterprise in carrying the gospel into neglected districts; their fidelity in maintaining every part of the Methodist discipline; their undying attachment and fidelity to each other; their intense earnestness in their attempts to alarm the unconverted, to bring penitent sinners into Christian liberty, and to bring all believers to the possession of the perfect love which casteth out fear.

Even in personal conversations, these early Methodist preachers maintained a focus upon perfect love. Mr John Nelson, records a conversation with a fellow preacher who was struggling with the doctrine:

He replied, ‘There is too much perfection in it for me.’ [commenting on Wesley’s Plain Account of Christian Perfection] I answered, ‘Then you think a less degree of holiness will fit you for heaven, than what is mentioned there: pray what are the words you stumble at?’ On his telling me, I said, ‘They are the words of St. John.’ But he said, ‘We know by experience that

there is no such thing to be attained in this life.’ I replied, ‘If your experience does not answer to what St. Paul and St. John speak, I shall not regard it:’ and when I mentioned some of the passages of Scripture, he did not believe that what I said was Scripture. I pulled out my Bible, and showed him the words; and when he had read them, his countenance changed, and he cavilled no more.  

Mr Nelson seems very concerned that this preacher (Mr John Bennet) sees the centrality of Christian perfection and the proper understanding of it.

Thomas Mitchell describes the gathering in of J. Wheatley’s congregation and their opposition to the doctrine of Christian perfection:

Discipline they knew nothing of; every one would do what was right in his own eyes. And our doctrine was an abomination to them. Great part of them were grounded in Antinomianism. The very sound of ‘perfection’ they abhorred; they could hardly bear the word ‘holiness.’ Nothing was pleasing to them, but ‘faith, faith;’ without a word either of its inward or outward fruits.

Not only were these early preachers focused upon defending Christian perfection as a doctrine, they were also intent upon encouraging their flocks to ‘press on to perfection.’ After exhorting believers to go on to perfection from Hebrews 6:1, William Hunter observed:

…without this, we cannot increase in the Divine life, nor obtain a becoming meetness for glory. When our eye is fixed on Christ, and all the powers of the mind are engaged in this great and blessed exercise, then the work of sanctification is carried on in all its parts. Sin grows weaker and weaker; Divine love spreads through the soul. Faith grows; and the love of God and man increases.

This explicit evidence shows that the early preachers did engage their people and encourage them to pursue a trajectory toward perfect love.

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4.2.3 The Experience of Christian Perfection Among the Preachers

Meadows comments about the dynamic ministries of the early Methodist preachers:

One way or another, the preachers were passionate to see the work of God increase, in both the numbers of changed lives, and their progress in the way of salvation. Wesley encouraged them to be observant, and they frequently refer to general trends in the societies, or actual numbers of those awakened, converted and perfected in love. This was not a cult of success, but a conviction that God would ‘own his work’ and prosper it.294

Many of the accounts of these early preachers not only describe a holiness consciousness from the standpoint of their practices, but also describe their own experiences of Christian perfection. It is clear from the account of Thomas Payne that the doctrine was preached among the Methodists. Describing a Methodist meeting, which he attended, Payne writes, ‘the doctrine of Christian perfection was now preached among us, and numbers professed they had attained the blessing. I had not the least doubt of the testimony of several, as their whole behaviour agreed with their profession. I believed the doctrine, and my soul longed to experience it.’295 Payne later writes, ‘Accordingly, one Saturday night, I came to the class, and resolved not to depart till mine eyes had seen this great salvation.’ 296

John Valton describes his work as a preacher in his Journal, July 7, 1783:

After preaching I met the society, and gave them an account of the great work of God in the Birstal Circuit. I then particularly insisted on the doctrine I had lately enforced, ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.’ Presently, the cries, groans, and prayers of the people drowned my voice, and the power of God rested on us in a wonderful manner. One received pardon, another perfect love, and a backslider was restored.297

The editor of Valton’s account, Joseph Sutcliffe, comments upon Valton and his ministry: ‘In addition to what Mr Valton states here, I have to add, that in love feasts, and on other occasions, he held fast the confidence of the pure and perfect love of God. He pressed this liberty more or less in most of his sermons, in the society meetings, and in visiting the classes. In discipline, he was a pattern of paternal vigilance and care.’

John Wesley, as an encouragement to pursue and to encourage the pursuit of Christian perfection, lifted up the Methodist preacher Alexander Mather. Mather writes of his experience:

I praise Him, that though some of the affairs I have been engaged in, being quite new to me, so deeply employed my thought as sometimes to divert me from that degree of communion with God in which is my only happiness, and without which my soul can never be at rest; yet He gives me always to see, that the fullness of the promise is every Christian's privilege; and that this and every branch of salvation is to be received now, by faith alone. And it can only be retained by the same means, by believing every moment. We cannot rest on anything that has been done, or that may be done hereafter. This would keep us from living a life of faith; which I conceive to be no other, than the now deriving virtue from Jesus, by which we enjoy and live to God. My soul is often on the stretch for the full enjoyment of this without interruption; nor can I discharge my conscience, without urging it upon all believers, now to come unto Him ‘who is able to save unto the uttermost!’

Wesley comments upon Mather’s account by writing:

I earnestly desire, that all our preachers would seriously consider the preceding account. And let them not be content, never to speak against the great salvation, either in public or private; and never to discourage either by word or deed any that think they have attained it: no; but prudently encourage them to ‘hold fast whereunto they have attained;’ and strongly and explicitly exhort all believers to ‘go on to perfection;’ yea, to expect full salvation from sin every moment, by mere grace, through simple faith.

These and numerous other accounts demonstrate that Wesley and the early Methodist preachers were not only concerned for souls to make their way to heaven

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by the grace of the living God, they were also concerned that God’s grace would be shed abroad in their hearts to the end that persons were transformed into new creatures by the power of the Holy Spirit. For early Methodists, justification, while critical and crucial, was not the telos of the Christian experience.

There seems to be implicit evidence that the early Methodists operated from a holiness consciousness which directed them to practice ministry, especially evangelism, with a trajectory toward Christian perfection. The practices of the early Methodist preachers including preaching, individual exhortation, forming societies, and forming classes, all seem to include this trajectory.

4.2.4 The Connection of Holiness, Mission and Evangelism

The stream of evangelism that will be explored in Chapter 4 is primarily located in an emerging-missional paradigm. As such, it is instructive to look at the connection between holiness, mission and evangelism. According to David Bosch, ‘Mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions.’

Further, Dana Robert sees a deep connection between mission and evangelism and uses the metaphor of the heard and body to describe how they related. Robert observes, ‘Evangelism is the heart, both as the pump that circulates the life force and as the seat of the emotions. Without the emotional fervour of the heart, the love affair with the gospel, mission dies…To take evangelism out of mission is to cut the heart out of it.’

So, if evangelism is the heart of mission how are holiness and mission connected?

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It seems that in practice, and perhaps even supported by scholarship, that holiness and mission have become fragmented and detached in many ways. Or, as Dean Fleming has recently noted, ‘In many Christian communities, they seem like vehicles traveling in different directions.’ Holiness and mission can even be thought as antithetical, so how can you justify the claim that holiness is a missional calling?

In her recent book, *Holiness and Mission*, Morna Hooker echoes these questions:

You may perhaps have been puzzled by the title of this book [Holiness and Mission], and found yourself wondering what holiness and mission have in common. Holiness we associate with personal sanctity, and we symbolize it with haloes, suggesting that saints are separated from the rest of us – often, indeed, withdrawing from the world altogether. Mission, on the other hand, means going out into the world – getting involved with all its activities. Why, then, begin a study of mission by talking about holiness?

Hooker then begins to explore the biblical call for God’s people to be a holy people. According to Hooker, ‘…it is with the idea of holiness that the Old Testament begins its awareness of Israel’s mission to the world, and if we are to understand our own mission as Christians, then that is where we, too, must begin.’ Hooker observes that in choosing the Jews, God was separating them from other nations, but this separation was for God’s purpose of being a ‘light to the nations’ (Isaiah 42:6-7).

For Hooker, the connection of holiness and mission is rooted in the New Testament as well. In the incarnation, Hooker argues, we see what God is like, ‘He is not a God who stands apart, but a God who identifies himself with humanity, a God who gets

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involved with his creation.’

When we choose to follow Jesus, we choose to live by His example loving both God and neighbour—a commitment to both holiness and mission. Hooker laments that the emphasis on justification by faith by the reformers drove a wedge between faith and works such that ‘later interpreters stressed faith to the exclusion of everything else.’ Rather than faith being something that needed working out (Philippians 2:12), it became an end in itself. Hooker summarizes:

The call from God is to be holy – and for Christians, that means having the mind of Christ, and becoming like him. It means embodying the gospel, both as individuals and as a community. Mission is not a task to be assigned to a few chosen representatives, but a task for the whole Church, since the Church, as the body of Christ in the world, represents to the world what Christ is.

Michael Riddell also describes the pitfalls of understanding holiness as primarily a separation from the world:

Separation and mission are not easily compatible. It is no coincidence that our Acts 10 passage, which is so central to the missiological era, confronts the traditional understandings of holiness. Separation is a function of preservation, and the impetus to preservation is far from the call to mission. The church has for much of its history accepted uncritically the separatist approach to holiness. In so doing, it has cut itself off from the world which God loves and has given all to reclaim. It is imperative to the renewal of mission that the church reconsider its separatism in the light of Jesus.

If we are to be true to our calling as Christians, we need to see holiness and mission as a double-edged sword—holiness should propel us into mission. And, as we go into mission, holiness should help us to embody the gospel and give a faithful witness to the transforming power of God.

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308 Hooker & Young, Holiness & Mission: Learning from the Early Church About Mission in the City, p. 11.
As explored in this thesis, for Wesley and the early Methodists, the call to holiness was clear, but it was holiness on the move—holiness that was in mission for the salvation of all who would hear the Good News. Wesley did not have a fragmented view of holiness and mission, but rather an integrated view that saw the mission of the people called Methodist to ‘to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.’ Of course, not everyone agreed with Wesley and many in his day promoted a retreat from the world as a part of being holy people. Wesley notes in his sermon, *Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount IV:*

Many eminent men have spoken thus: have advised us ‘to cease from all outward actions’; wholly to withdraw from the world; to leave the body behind us; to abstract ourselves from all sensible things—to have no concern at all about outward religion, but to ‘work all virtues in the will’, as the far more excellent way, more perfective of the soul, as well as more acceptable to God.  

Regardless of the opposition, Wesley saw holiness and mission as inseparable for real Christians. It was destructive, in Wesley’s mind to separate the two dimensions. In the same sermon, he writes:

But has our Lord been wanting on his part? Has he not sufficiently guarded us against this pleasing delusion? Has he not armed us here with armour of proof against Satan ‘transformed into an angel of light’? Yea, verily. He here defends, in the clearest and strongest manner, the active, patient religion he had just described. What can be fuller and plainer than the words he immediately subjoins to what he had said of doing and suffering? 'Ye are the salt of the earth’…

Wesley continues by quoting Matthew 5:13-16 and then lays out his sermon in which he intends to show Christianity as a religion that is far from solitary, but engages the

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312 See the footnote which indicates that ‘many eminent men’ likely refers to ‘will-mysticism’ and those associated with it including Zinzendorf, Law and De Renty and others in Wesley & Outler, *The Works, Sermons I*, p. 532.
world. To do otherwise, according to Wesley is to ‘destroy’ Christianity.\textsuperscript{314} His further argument is that to cover or hide ‘this religion’ is, in fact, an impossibility and contrary to God’s design.\textsuperscript{315} Wesley concludes the sermon by challenging Christians:

'Let your light so shine’—your lowness of heart, your gentleness and meekness of wisdom; your serious, weighty concern for the things of eternity, and sorrow for the sins and miseries of men; your earnest desire of universal holiness and full happiness in God; your tender goodwill to all mankind, and fervent love to your supreme benefactor. Endeavour not to conceal this light wherewith God hath enlightened your soul, but let it 'shine before men', before all with whom you are, in the whole tenor of your conversation. Let it shine still more eminently in your actions, in your doing all possible good to all men; and in your suffering for righteousness' sake, while you 'rejoice and are exceeding glad, knowing that great is your reward in heaven'.\textsuperscript{316}

Elsewhere, Wesley connects the idea of holiness and mission in which holiness is both the ultimate goal and also an inseparable part of the work of spreading the gospel. In his sermon, \textit{The Wisdom of Winning Souls}, Wesley expresses the connection between holy living and the work of ‘winning souls’. Outler notes, ‘the sermon's basic theme is the evangelical power of holy living: this is inseparably connected with the winning of souls.’\textsuperscript{317}

There are many examples in the literature of the early Methodists, especially the early Methodist preachers, which demonstrates a life ‘set apart’ through the renunciation of worldly possessions, values and practices, while still maintaining an active mission in the world. Isabel Rivers points out that ‘the sense of being a stranger in the world was often a crucial part of the experience of conversion.’\textsuperscript{318} Yet, this sense of being a stranger was coupled with the sense of being on a pilgrimage—

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\textsuperscript{314} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works, Sermons 1}, p. 534. \\
\textsuperscript{315} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works, Sermons 1}, p. 548. \\
\textsuperscript{316} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works, Sermons 1}, p. 547. \\
\textsuperscript{317} Wesley & Outler, \textit{The Works, Sermons 4}, p. 305. \\
\textsuperscript{318} I. Rivers, 'Strangers and Pilgrims: Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative', in J.C. Hilson, \textit{Augustan Worlds}, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), p. 197. \\
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not just a pilgrimage of personal piety, but a pilgrimage that included engaging the world for Christ. Rivers notes, ‘the preacher’s life is also literally a journey. He experiences conversion and the call to preach, gives up his trade, leaves behind his wife and children and takes to the road’319. Wesley’s questions to the preachers also demonstrate the expectation that a Methodist preacher demonstrate a life of holiness, but also one committed to mission:

(1.) Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire and seek nothing but God? And are they holy in all manner of conversation? (2.) Have they gifts (as well as grace) for the work? Have they (in some tolerable degree) a clear, sound understanding? Have they a right judgment in the things of God? Have they a just conception of salvation by faith? And has God given them any degree of utterance? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly? (8.) Have they fruit? Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God, by their preaching?320

Preachers were expected to demonstrate evidence of both holy lives and a fruitful engagement with the unconverted. Wesley expected that holiness would be the source of missional engagement. As Timothy Tennent notes, ‘Missional holiness insists on discipleship and sanctification in the lives of believers, but also joins that with a deeper appreciation that we are cleansed from sin so that we can more effectively proclaim and model Christ's life into the world.’321

For Wesley, holiness is a source of mission. As persons grow in their love of God, love of neighbour should follow. But, holiness is also a means by which the mission was accomplished. Holiness can be seen as mission—the witness of a holy people is God's mission project; the medium of the missio Dei. As Wesley notes in his sermon, The General Spread of the Gospel:

The holy lives of the Christians will be an argument they will not know how to resist; seeing the Christians steadily and uniformly practise what is

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319 Rivers, 'Strangers and Pilgrims: Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative'
agreeable to the law written in their own hearts, their prejudices will quickly
die away, and they will gladly receive 'the truth as it is in Jesus'.

In this sermon, Wesley emphasizes that non-Christians will be open to hear the
gospel if they see the kinds of lives that are marked by holiness. Lives set apart, but
also engaged in mission will bear fruit as people practice and preach the gospel.

Holy lives provide a provocative witness to the power of God to transform
people from darkness to light. It is a light not to be hidden, but allowed to shine in
order to bring glory to God and to draw persons to God. Frances Young observes
that while the early church in the Roman Empire saw holiness as a call to be separate
from the culture (abstaining from festivals, strict sexual ethics, etc.), it was not
disengaged from the world. Young maintains, ‘however underground the Church
seems to have been, it was practical out-workings of those commandments [love God
and neighbour] which would prove to be the fundamental way in which Christianity
spread.’

1 Peter, Chapter 3 is frequently connected to mission and evangelism due to
the emphasis on the provocative power of holy living. Reflecting on 1 Peter 3:15,
Graham Tomlin states:

It is the simple phrase: ‘In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.’ It is also the
most crucial part of the verse. As a Christian learns to live her life under the
lordship of Jesus Christ, as she learns to adopt his perspective on money, sex,
power, time and eternity and live her life in the light of these, then she will
become the kind of person who provokes questions in the minds of her

However, this does not imply a passive stance where the believer lives in silence, but
rather looks for opportunities to share the gospel in response to those who see ‘the
hope that is in you’ (1 Peter 3:15 ESV) and loving one’s neighbour with acts of

322 Wesley & Outler, The Works, Sermons 2, p. 496.
323 Hooker & Young, Holiness & Mission: Learning from the Early Church About
Mission in the City, p. 58.
324 Tomlin, The Provocative Church, Kindle Locations: 1174-1177.
mercy. As Fleming observes, ‘for all its emphasis on holy conduct and nonverbal
witness I Peter does not neglect the role of proclamation in the mission of God.’

Michael Riddell describes this dynamic connection of holiness and mission:

If holiness is an essential quality of who God is, and Jesus is the revelation of
God in humanity, then we see in Jesus the epitome of holiness. To the extent
that we share in the life of Christ, we will be participants in that holiness. It is
not a quality we can organize for ourselves; it is more like a byproduct of
devotion to Christ. And devotion to Christ is expressed not in statements of
belief, but in leaving behind our securities and following him into the world,
sharing his compassion for those who are loved by God and do not yet know
it. True holiness will not keep us from the world, but drive us into it in faith.

Holiness should produce lives that attract non-believers, but this is not a ‘build it and
they will come’ mentality. Holiness should also result in the people of God propelled
into the world to join God in His mission.

A word of caution should be given. Holiness should not to be viewed as some
clever marketing strategy for mission or evangelism. Holiness is not simply a means
to an end. Christians do not manufacture a holy lifestyle to set themselves apart from
an unbelieving world for the purpose of attracting attention. Wesley seems clear that
emphasizing the work of mission without a changed heart is ‘having the form of
religion without the power.’ As Wesley consistently preached, holiness is not
something that can be gained by human effort. Rather, it is the mark of a
transforming relationship with Jesus Christ that bears fruit in joining God in his
mission in the world. As Wesley cautioned his preachers:

Q. Why are not we more holy? Why do not we live in eternity? Walk with
God all the day long? Why are not we all devoted to God? Breathing the
whole spirit of Missionaries?

325 Fleming, 'Won over without a Word: Holiness and the Church's Missional Identity
in I Peter', p. 66.
326 Riddell, Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian
West p. 87.
A. Because we are enthusiasts; looking for the end, without using the means.  

Wesley expected the Methodist preachers to practice the means of grace in order to open them up to the work of God and be perfected in love. Mission should not be viewed as separate from the pursuit of holiness and neither should holiness be seen as separate from mission. Rather, as mission emerges as a fruit of holiness, the life of the missionary continues to be transformed by God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

However, this also raises some questions. Does the connection between holiness and mission mean that someone has to be entirely sanctified before they can do mission? Or what level of holiness is required before someone can be in mission? W. Harrison Daniel argues that, at least in the early part of his ministry, Wesley saw ‘a radical solidarity between missionary witness to the good news and the hearer of that good news.’ In other words, God’s grace works in both the missionary and those the missionary is trying to reach, ‘as both Christian and non-Christian stand in need of transformation.’

It seems that this sentiment still echoed later in Wesley’s ministry as he emphasized the work of God’s grace in justification, the new birth and entire sanctification. As Wesley encouraged Methodists to pursue Christian perfection, he did not expect that Methodists were those who had attained it, but

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those who were on the way to perfection.\textsuperscript{331} Certainly, Wesley expected to see fruit in the lives of Methodists and the Methodist preachers and therefore established a system, which cultivated that transformation. Riddell observes how the expectation of holiness can become distorted:

The unfortunate legacy is a Christian view of holiness as some sort of ethereal and disembodied existence, in isolation from potential contaminants. It produces disciples who withdraw from the world and contact with sinners, and punish themselves under impossibly ascetic regimes which make little provision for human fallibility. Such an approach to serving God produces a great deal of psychological pressure, with cycles of abstention, transgression and guilt. Those who experience this without any deep encounter with the grace of God may justifiably suspect that Christianity is inherently oppressive.\textsuperscript{332}

Entire sanctification is not required for one to be in mission; yet, mission should emerge from a life that has been and is being transformed by God’s grace. As that transformation occurs, the provocative nature of that transformed life should empower the missionary and provide opportunities to share the reason for their way of life. As Hooker argues, a biblical understanding of holiness is rooted in God’s command to be holy as God is holy. This perspective is not only concerned with personal piety but also acting with God’s justice and mercy.\textsuperscript{333} Concerning the first Christians, Hooker notes, ‘believing themselves to be God’s holy people, [they] understood their mission in terms of spreading the good news and of doing it.’\textsuperscript{334}

Although some Wesleyan traditions have leaned toward a holiness that is about disengagement, early Methodists—and in fact, early Christians—saw holiness to be about missional engagement with the world. This type of missional spirituality

\textsuperscript{331} Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley} See Wesley’s Plain Account of Christian Perfection, V. 11, pp. 366-446 and Character of a Methodist, V. 8, pp. 339-347.
\textsuperscript{332} Riddell, \textit{Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West} p. 75.
\textsuperscript{333} Hooker & Young, \textit{Holiness & Mission: Learning from the Early Church About Mission in the City}, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{334} Hooker & Young, \textit{Holiness & Mission: Learning from the Early Church About Mission in the City}, p. 89.
enabled the early Methodists to ‘spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.’ This holiness, in turn, propelled everyday Methodists into the highways and byways of England and America to engage in God’s mission. Rather than being seen as two antithetical ideas, holiness and mission should be seen as complementary and inseparable.

4.3 Conclusion

Within the framework of evangel, telos and ethos, Christian perfection can be seen as a unifying vision that brings these three points into focus around the locus of evangelism. Seeing evangelism through the lens (or telos) of Christian perfection brings a new priority to the theology and practice of evangelism that goes beyond initial salvation and justification and thus communicates good news focused on a transformed life necessitates the role of community to accomplish the vision. In this relationship, the evangel, telos and ethos are dynamically related. However, following the argument of MacIntyre, the telos greatly impacts the evangel and ethos.

As this thesis argued in Chapter 2, Christian perfection can also be seen as the telos of discipleship. The journey of discipleship begins in a person’s life before there is a conversion. This can be demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus where Jesus calls the disciples to ‘follow’ him, even before Jesus call of the first disciples as recorded in the Gospel of Mark 1:14-21:

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”
16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.
19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.
Richard Peace notes an important distinction between these first disciples of Jesus and the ‘disciples’ of Jewish rabbis of the same period. Peace notes that rabbis in Jesus day would not seek out followers or disciples. Rather, persons sought out a rabbi that represented a particular school to become their disciple. Further, Peace makes a significant observation about the calling of the disciples in Mark: ‘this is what ministry is all about: disciple making. This also shows where Mark’s attention is focused: on this process of drawing men and women into the kingdom of God.’ Jesus called the disciples before they were ‘converted.’

The Wesleyan understanding of prevenient or preventing grace provides a context in which this pre-conversion discipleship takes place. This was demonstrated in the early Methodist movement as persons were invited to join a class meeting before they had experienced evangelical conversion. In concert with early Methodism, it can be argued that evangelism describes what we do in the discipleship process that moves people on towards conversion. Rick Richardson in his book, Reimagining Evangelism, describes how many people belong to the Christian movement before they come to believe. Richardson argues, ‘Most people today will come to faith in the context of the community. Belonging comes before believing. Evangelism today is about helping people belong so that they can come to believe.’ Christian perfection becomes the telos of evangelism because it is the telos of discipleship. Perfection unites the two.

It is the argument of this thesis that current evangelism scholarship in the Wesleyan tradition is not aligned with the telos\textsuperscript{339} of early Methodism and therefore is missing the vision that made the Methodist movement effective. A representative stream of scholars from current evangelism scholarship in the Wesleyan tradition will be examined to determine the evangel, telos and ethos of each and then contrasted with early Methodism.

\textsuperscript{339} In some cases the evangel and ethos as well.
Chapter 5. The Fragmentation in Contemporary Evangelism Scholarship

Twenty-first century approaches to evangelism in the Wesleyan tradition vary in from, but in general, seem to have one thing in common—a vision that falls short of that found in early Methodism. As discussed in Chapter 3, ‘a vision is a mental model of an ideal future state,’ and the connection between telos and vision is significant. The vision or telos helps to form a map to the future and guides a person as he or she travels the Christian journey. Much of current evangelistic thought is focused upon two paradigms representing ‘broad directions in the theology of evangelism’ as identified by Meadows. This chapter demonstrates how these paradigms negotiate what is understood by conversion and discipleship as well as the relationship between them. This chapter also argues that both ‘broad directions’ become fragmented without the doctrine of Christian perfection.

The first paradigm focuses on the decision of a person to follow Christ and not their life after that decision. While most, if not all, evangelistic approaches would insist that follow-up and discipleship must occur following a person's conversion, in this inherited-conversionist paradigm, it is not seen as a part or vision of evangelism, but as a separate and subsequent process and thus a fragmented understanding of making disciples. This does not mean that a church that focuses on conversion cannot have a successful ‘follow up’ or on-going discipleship program. Rather, if these two are not seen as part of the same vision and share a common telos, fragmentation is likely. In this way of thinking, it is not the ordering of evangelism and discipleship that is problematic, but the fragmentation that occurs if the vision of evangelism thinks it can accomplish its goals apart from the life of discipleship. Evangelism and discipleship may become divided when each has its own telos,

which may or may not be connected. This is especially true when evangelism has personal conversion as the operative telos and discipleship is oriented toward the kingdom. This is not inevitable, but it creates the possibility for disconnection and fragmentation.

The second paradigm is one that focuses primarily on a person’s discipleship and is, in many ways, a reaction against a focus on a conversionist view. This paradigm recognizes the problems associated with a conversionist paradigm such as the focus on conversion to the detriment of discipleship. In addition, the adherents of this paradigm are concerned that the approach is too anthropocentric and focuses too heavily on proclamation. The telos of this emerging-missional paradigm may be unclear in some cases and may also result in fragmentation due to its focus away from conversion. Again, as with the focus on conversion, it does not necessarily follow that fragmentation will occur. From a Wesleyan perspective, it is only fragmented if the vision of evangelism attempts to accomplish its goals apart from an intentional approach to conversion. A focus on discipleship does not guarantee that persons will experience conversion (justification and the new birth) and makes fragmentation in evangelism more likely. In addition, if the telos is unclear, the likelihood of fragmentation is greater.

Early Methodism, with its vision focused on ‘salvation to the uttermost’, allowed a person to belong before believing and recognized that making disciples did not end at one's initial conversion. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 3, early Methodism did not jettison the need for conversion in the way of salvation, but held in tension the need for both conversion and the life of discipleship. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that while some scholars may represent parts of the Wesleyan paradigm—its ethos or evangel—current Wesleyan thought in the discipline of
evangelism demonstrates a fragmentation due to the loss of the telos of Christian perfection. Using the paradigmatic framework of evangel, telos and ethos as a framework for critique, the theologies of evangelism are analysed, compared and contrasted with the pattern set forth by Wesley and the early Methodists.

5.1 Evangel, Telos, and Ethos

Using MacIntyre’s understanding of fragmentation related to the loss of telos, this chapter will demonstrate that current evangelism scholarship in the Wesleyan tradition have become fragmented due to the loss of Christian perfection as the telos of evangelism. It will be demonstrated that various teloi are in place that fall short of the telos of early Methodism. In addition, the evangel and ethos related to that telos will be explored and critiqued as they interrelate. In Chapter 3, the paradigmatic framework developed by Meadows was used to analyse Wesley’s approach to evangelism. In this chapter the framework will be used to analyse the current scholarship through the categories of evangel, telos and ethos.

This thesis has argued that early Methodism was marked by a holiness consciousness and as such Christian perfection was its constitutive doctrine. As previously noted, Charry’s perspective on the sapiential nature of doctrine, contributes to the argument by recovering the role of doctrine in enabling persons to know God. According to Charry, doctrine’s function with people, therefore, is to not only to give them knowledge about God, but it is also a vehicle (or perhaps a means of grace) by which persons come to know God. Doctrine seen in this way provides a way for people to develop a relationship with God. Within the field of evangelism, Charry’s observations contribute by clarifying the sapiential role (ethos) of Christian perfection in the practice of evangelism. In this perspective, evangelism

342 Charry, By the Renewing of Your Minds, p. 4.
is all about a way of life shaped by the wisdom of the doctrine of CP when it is the operative vision and telos. There is a close connection between telos and ethos and therefore, evangelism from my perspective is about having the necessary wisdom to guide people through the way of salvation. Charry provides a way of thinking about the doctrines connected with evangelism by showing how each doctrine’s sapiential nature helps facilitate a persons’ relationship with God. For the purpose of this thesis, Charry provides a way of thinking about the ‘evangel’ as a sapiential doctrine of salvation to the uttermost as the doctrine operates with a formative dimension. With this in mind, Wesley’s understanding of Christian perfection was analysed in Chapter 2 by looking at the various understandings of Christian perfection, which were explored to demonstrate the pervasive impact of the doctrine and it’s sapiential nature in helping persons pursue Christian perfection. Chapter 3 explores Christian perfection as a sapiential doctrine and in a formative role, giving them a vision of the life God intended for them.

As introduced in Chapter 1, MacIntyre’s view of telos and fragmentation is instructive when looking at the field of evangelism. MacIntyre argues that in the field of ethics, a fragmentation has occurred. According to MacIntyre, this fragmentation is due to the rise of emotivism as an ethical framework over and against an Aristotelian view of ‘the good’ as the telos of human life. According to MacIntyre, ‘Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.’

343 The approach of emotivism disallows any claim to a universal or central telos, but rather invites multiple teloi based on individual choice. Similarly,

343 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, pp.11-12.
without a clear telos in the field of evangelism, competing teloi can emerge vying for the priorities of the evangelistic enterprise. In addition, MacIntyre’s argument reinforces the importance of the telos and its relationship to practices. If a practice becomes severed from the telos, then the practice ‘becomes disordered, even when it appears orderly and enthusiastic.’ For evangelism, MacIntyre provides a way to approach the language of ethos and telos, especially in terms of fragmentation.

Meadows’ paradigmatic framework of evang, telos and ethos, discussed in Chapter 3, provides a methodology that will be used to critique representative scholars in the Wesleyan tradition. Meadows’ framework examines the evang, or the good news communicated to persons in a particular approach to evangelism. The framework also examines the telos or end goal of the approach. Finally, the framework looks at the ethos or the practices connected with the particular approach to evangelism. While these are separate and distinct features of an evangelistic approach, they are never the less connected and in many ways dependent upon one another. It is been argued that the telos is the most neglected, however, it is important to see how the three components of the paradigm are related. The evang provides the language and vocabulary for how the telos will be pursued. The content of the ‘good news’ that an evangelist shares helps to shape the direction of the hearer. If the ‘good news’ is not aligned with the telos, then the stated telos is not functional. For example, if the ‘good news’ is focused strictly upon forgiveness of sins and making a commitment to Jesus Christ, then in spite of what the telos may be stated to be, the telos is functionally justification. Similarly, the ethos describes the practices involved in evangelism which enable the ‘good news’ to be communicated and the

344 Wilson, Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from Macintyre’s after Virtue, pp. 33-34.
telos to be pursued. If these practices are not aligned with the telos, then it will be difficult for the telos to be pursued. For example, if evangelistic preaching is the primary feature of the ethos, without complementary practices such as spiritual direction, the telos will functionally gravitate toward justification.

Table 2. Meadows’ Paradigmatic Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inherited-Conversionist</th>
<th>Evangel</th>
<th>Telos</th>
<th>Ethos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Salvation</td>
<td>Evangelical Conversion</td>
<td>Proclamation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wesleyan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Gospel of Holy Love</strong></td>
<td><strong>Communion with God (Christian Perfection)</strong></td>
<td>Corporate Spiritual Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emerging-Missional</strong></td>
<td>The Kingdom - Jesus</td>
<td>Journey of Discipleship</td>
<td>Initiation Into The Kingdom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There has been a contemporary trend toward the emerging-missional paradigm of evangelism. For the purpose of this thesis, I will limit the examination of current scholarship to those within the emerging-missional paradigm. The approach of this paradigm has emerged, at least in part, from a reaction to the inherited-conversionist paradigm. Scholars and practitioners have reacted against a ‘Madison Avenue’ or sales oriented approach to evangelism as well as the understanding of evangelism as strictly verbal proclamation of the gospel.347 Scrutiny of this paradigm has been evident in recent years starting with the work of Billy Abraham.348 As part of what is becoming a well accepted critique within and beyond the Wesleyan tradition, scholars, such as Scot McKnight have also added

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346 The Wesleyan movement has elements of the other two paradigms and holds these elements together in tension through the telos of Christian Perfection.
348 As presented in this chapter, Abraham makes a significant argument against a conversionist viewpoint in W.J. Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 120-139.
their evaluation. In *The King Jesus Gospel*, McKnight argues that the reduction of salvation to a formulation (Four Spiritual Laws, the Roman Road, etc.) forces a *telos* that creates a roadblock to discipleship. McKnight is clear that he does not want to jettison evangelical conversion but rather ensure that the focus is on forming disciples, not persons who are only ‘decided.’ McKnight, though not operating in a Wesleyan framework, strongly reacts against the inherited-conversionist paradigm in his book, *The King Jesus Gospel*. McKnight argues:

Namely, not only have we reduced the robust view of salvation to these four or five points; we are also asking the Plan of Salvation to do something it was never intended to do. The Plan of Salvation, to put this crudely, isn’t discipleship or justice or obedience. The Plan of Salvation leads to one thing and to one thing only: salvation. Justification leads to a declaration by God that we are in the right, that we are in the people of God; it doesn’t lead inexorably to a life of justice or goodness or loving-kindness. If it did, all Christians would be more just and more filled with goodness and drenched in love.

McKnight voices the concern that an inherited-conversionist paradigm will result in a church of the ‘decided’ rather than the ‘discipled.’ Given the established critique of the inherited-conversionist paradigm, this thesis will focus on scholars who represent the move away from a conversionist view and promote the emerging-missional paradigm. Scholars were selected based on their attempt to articulate a Wesleyan approach to evangelism within this paradigm.

### 5.2 Contemporary Theologies of Evangelism

Scholars representing a stream or school of evangelism, which emerges from the work of Outler, will be examined in the following section. Outler is widely accepted as the modern father of Wesley studies and his writings include a serious focus on the field of evangelism. Following Outler, Abraham builds upon some of

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Outler’s work and develops a paradigm, which is followed by other scholars, most notably Jones and Heath. This stream of scholarship does not always claim to be working from a Wesleyan perspective, yet it is clear that they are influenced by Wesley and Outler’s interpretation of Wesley. All of these scholars are part of the United Methodist Church and are connected with Perkin’s School of Theology. They seem to represent a school of thought in the field of evangelism. Other Wesleyan scholars will be included as they provide complementary or opposing views. The four representative scholars will be examined using the paradigmatic framework of *evangel, telos* and *ethos* to expose the cost or impact to evangelism and any resultant fragmentation given the *evangel, telos* and *ethos*.

5.2.1 Albert C. Outler

Albert C. Outler has been acknowledged as one of the most significant Methodist-Wesleyan scholars of the Twentieth Century. An accomplished churchman and theologian, Outler wrote extensively on the subject of evangelism with his *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* being one of his most significant contributions. Not only did he seek to describe what he believed was Wesley’s theology of evangelism, but he also sought to influence the church and point toward what he considered a Wesleyan way of evangelism for his time. Scholars who are researching the field of evangelism from a Wesleyan perspective often quote Outler as an authority on Wesley and on Wesley’s understanding of evangelism.

In his classic work on evangelism, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, Outler presents a model of evangelism that is rooted in his understanding of Wesley and the early Methodist movement. He states, ‘For Wesley, the scope of evangelism was never less than the fullness of Christian experience—‘holiness of heart, and a life conformable to the same’--and he never faltered in this insistence even when his
societies began to bulge and Methodism began to be respectable.\textsuperscript{352} Outler is explicit that his approach to evangelism is driven by a Wesleyan viewpoint and he attempts to articulate a theology of evangelism that is in harmony with his understanding of Wesley and the early Methodists.

\textit{Evangel}

In a general description of the \textit{evangel}, Outler argues that the \textit{essence} of the Gospel is Jesus Christ, God’s self-presentation to us in redemptive love.\textsuperscript{353} Further, he observes that the \textit{form} of the Gospel is the particular message that lifts up Jesus Christ, plain and appealing, to particular people in particular situations.\textsuperscript{354} Outler also posits several ‘motifs’ that he suggests form the Wesleyan \textit{evangel}.

First, Outler suggests that, ‘the prime motive of the Christian life is gratitude.’\textsuperscript{355} He observes that gratitude also forms the ‘prime motive’ of evangelism.\textsuperscript{356} This gratitude is born out of a person’s experience of salvation and, according to him, should result in a desire to share the gospel in grateful response. Thus part of the ‘good news’ that is to be shared is how that ‘good news’ has been experienced in the life of the evangelist. Outler seems to argue that the \textit{evangel} is not just good news about what God has done in Christ historically, but what Jesus is doing in the lives of believers now. It is out of this present reality that the grateful disciple yearns to share the good news with others.

Second, Outler proposes that the ‘prime certainty of Christian faith’ is the knowledge that God, in Christ, is working to reconcile all of creation to Himself.\textsuperscript{357}

For Outler, this seems to be the central to the \textit{evangel}—the good news that God, 

\begin{footnotes}
\item[353] Outler, \textit{Evangelism}, p. 28.
\item[354] Outler, \textit{Evangelism}, p. 28.
\item[355] Outler, \textit{Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit}, p. 47.
\item[356] Outler, \textit{Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit}, p. 47.
\end{footnotes}
operating through prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace is seeking those who are lost. While he sees the evangel as having cosmic implications, there is still a strong emphasis on a message of personal transformation.

Third, the ‘prime dynamic’ according to Outler is the work of the Holy Spirit in human hearts and in the church.\(^\text{358}\) He distinguishes the work of evangelism from a purely human activity. The evangel has power as it is communicated through the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the person receiving the good news before, during and after conversion. Outler is careful not to place undue emphasis on the skill and gifting of the human evangelist, but sees God working through the Holy Spirit as the primary agent.

Fourth, ‘The prime and constant end of the Christian life’ is the Kingdom of God.\(^\text{359}\) Outler comments on this end:

Once again, I hope the parallel is plain. The chief end of evangelism is that men should hear – really hear – the good news that God’s kingdom, God’s rule, God’s governance is a live option for them – in their own ‘Here’ and ‘Now,’ oppressed as they are by all the tyrannies of unfreedom, demoralized as they are by the frustrations of freedom abused.\(^\text{360}\)

Here Outler links the evangel with the telos as he describes ‘the chief end of evangelism’ as the reception of the good news by people and that this good news can have an impact on their current lives, not just in the future. He seems to imply a positive response to the gospel as a prerequisite.

Fifth, Outler identifies the ‘principal means in the Christian life’ as God’s grace.\(^\text{361}\) He offers a clarification and a word of caution for the evangelist:

In like manner, all valid evangelism must depend on the grace of God, and on the means of grace, or else become distorted. The aim of the evangelist is to call people not merely to repentance and conversion, but also to incorporation,
to an engrafting into the Body of Christ and to a life-long process of nurturing and growth in this sacramental fellowship.\footnote{Outler, \textit{Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit}, p. 52.}

Outler shows a concern that evangelism not end at initial conversion, but continue in a life of discipleship. However, he expresses concern that most churches are ill suited for this work of assisting persons in ‘growing up into Christ’.\footnote{Outler, \textit{Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit}, p. 53.} He acknowledges the need for growth, but he is not clear in his \textit{telos}. He does not go as far as to say that Christian perfection is the end, but rather it is the Kingdom and incorporation into the body with life long growth that appear to be his target. In fact, it could be said that there is no target or vision, except a vague idea of growth. Continued growth as a \textit{telos} seems inadequate for providing a vision for the life that persons are being invited to live.

\textit{Telos}

In a lecture entitled, \textit{Theory and Practice in Christian Evangelism – A Theologian’s Comments on ‘The Year of Enlistment’}, Outler expresses the concern that evangelism has become focused on recruiting church membership as opposed to other ends. He states, ‘But we fall into confusion when we tend to identify ‘enlistment’ and ‘evangelism’ and fail to see that the other parts of the church’s program must also be evangelistic as well.’\footnote{Outler, \textit{Evangelism}, p. 16.} Outler seems to be arguing for a more holistic view of evangelism which is noted in his observation concerning the ‘primary meaning’ of evangelism: ‘For ‘evangelism,’ in its \textit{primary} meaning, is the witness of Christians to all who will hear them concerning the Good news of what God has done and is doing in Jesus Christ ‘for us men and for our salvation.’’\footnote{Outler, \textit{Evangelism}, p. 16.} An adequate \textit{telos}, using MacIntyre’s understanding, provides a picture of the ‘true
end.366 Although, he is expressing a concern about an improper telos of evangelism, he unfortunately does not provide an adequate telos in its place. While Outler may not explicitly identify Christian perfection as the vision or telos of evangelism, he does identify the results of an inadequate telos. Recruiting members for the church is certainly an operative telos for many churches today. While churches may not identify their telos as church membership or growth in membership, the practices and metrics of the churches reveal this to be the case. Even in declining mainline denominations such as the United Methodist Church, the primary metrics that judicatories focus upon are professions of faith, church worship attendance and church membership. While early Methodism certainly grew numerically during the revival, numeric growth was not the telos of evangelism, but rather the salvation of souls and salvation to the uttermost.

Outler outlines two possible extremes that can result from a misconstrued understanding of the telos of evangelism. First, he identifies those who might be considered passive evangelists. These persons assume that once ‘we preach the Gospel, proclaim the Word, give our Christian testimony, we have done our job as evangelists.’367 On the other extreme are persons who might be considered aggressive evangelists, or as Outler describes them, ‘the Madison Avenue Approach.’368 This sales oriented approach can be motivated in two ways. First, there are those who truly are seeking the salvation of those who do not know Christ and are motivated by their passion for souls. Second, there are those who seem to be primarily motivated out of a desire to add numbers to church membership and the appearance of success. In either case, these evangelists are pursuing the goal by

366 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p. 54.
367 Outler, Evangelism, p. 17.
368 Outler, Evangelism, p. 18.
means, which make it appear that, ‘The evangelist is its salesman and the unchurched are the customers.’ Outler warns, ‘the church was made for evangelism, not evangelism for the church. When we get this relationship turned the wrong way ‘round, it is our equivalent of those men in Jesus’ day who said that man was made for the Sabbath and not the Sabbath for man.’ In the face of these perspectives, he offers a definition of evangelism that attempts to avoid the pitfalls:

Evangelism is, therefore, the Christian endeavor to seek and to find, to invite and to bring, to enlist and to commission all of God’s children who will hear and who will come, to the end that they may actually participate in God’s work of judgment and mercy and may come to know, really and personally, the power and blessedness of the Christian life: reconciliation and renewal, community and commission, worship and hope.

Outler’s definition includes both the efforts of the evangelist and the work of God’s mercy and grace in the life of those being evangelized. He also seems to go beyond the initial invitation to include participation in the Christian community. He perceives the trajectory of the early Methodists as ‘always aimed at the way beyond, and he could count on guidance and help along that way all the way---to ‘perfection of love in this life.’ Outler provides helpful critique for those who see the telos of evangelism as recruitment or church membership. His observations concerning a passive or sales oriented approach are well taken. In either case, Outler argues, the means of evangelism are highly influenced by the telos. He seems to imply, that if the telos is misplaced or improper, evangelism becomes a pragmatic tool of the church rather than the church being a vehicle for evangelism. However, Outler stops short of naming Christian perfection or any clear alternative as the telos. In doing so, he presents several ends or teloi but does not clearly identify a telos for evangelism.

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His teloi have the potential to create both partial and incoherent approaches to evangelism. This provides an example of the problem when there is a lack of a clear telos. The result is a fragmentation of the theology and practice of evangelism. In Outler’s case this fragmentation is evidenced by his identification of the telos as ‘hearing of the gospel’ in one case and alluding to discipleship in another. This fragmentation will be evident in the exploration of Outler’s ethos.

Ethos

Outler’s view of evangelism insists on an outward witness that impacts the community and social environment of the evangelist. Commenting on the ethos of evangelism, he states, ‘Outward witness in daily living is the necessary confirmation of any inward experience of inward faith. The Word made audible must become the Word made visible, if men's lives are ever to be touched by the ‘Word made flesh.’’ He also argues that the evangelism of the early Methodists demonstrates this type of ethos through Wesley’s use of class meetings and societies:

In and through the Methodist societies, however, the Word made audible was also made visible and thus became even more effective, as the societies became evangelistic agencies in their own right. Thousands of men and women who may have never heard Wesley preach (or only on rare occasions) were attracted to the Christian life and were actually evangelized (converted, born-again, nurtured and matured) by the outreaching and ingathering influence of the local Methodist people.

In discussing a theology of evangelism in a lecture entitled, The Theology of Evangelism, Outler observes that such a theology is rooted in the general theology of the Christian faith. Outler observes, ‘The theology of evangelism is simply the theology of Christianity. Christianity began and has always lived by its impulse to share without limit the good news of God’s saving deed in Jesus Christ.’ With this

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373 Outler, Evangelism, p. 25.
374 Outler, Evangelism, p. 28
375 Outler, Evangelism, p. 27.
starting point in mind, he shares a ‘Methodist definition of the church’ from Article VIII of the United Methodist Church: ‘a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.’\(^{376}\) He then comments, ‘Anything less than this is perfunctory and nominal Christianity.’\(^{377}\) It seems clear that Outler perceives evangelism as an integral part of the Christian faith and as such, an indispensible part of the life of a congregation. Outler summarizes:

> For the Gospel cannot live unless it is shared. It cannot be shared unless it is communicated. And it cannot be communicated unless it is vividly believed and profoundly understood; and this requires every person to conceive and express it in his or her own way.\(^{378}\)

Outler is careful to note that the work of evangelism is not just for the individual evangelist, but is a work of the community ‘drawing us into the fellowship of faith and grace.’\(^{379}\) He also notes that when evangelism is conceived as process whereby persons are brought into the fellowship of the church and nurtured in the faith, then the primary concern of evangelism is not about numbers or the ‘enlargement of the church’ but rather with the ‘vitality of the church.’\(^{380}\) Outler emphasizes the transformative impact that evangelism should have on persons by calling ‘everyone to real repentance and authentic faith.’ He concludes:

> Thus, the business of evangelism, which is the church’s chief business, must be carried on in the setting of a vital and life-giving church that affirms and challenges every member and binds them all together in warm and rich fellowship and gives to each a satisfying task and vocation.\(^{381}\)


\(^{377}\) Outler, *Evangelism*, p. 27.


\(^{381}\) Outler, *Evangelism*, p. 32.
As observed in the section on telos, here Outler seems to be hinting that another telos of evangelism is discipleship. He seems to be inconsistent in naming a clear telos, identifying the ‘hearing of the gospel’ in one instance and seeming to point to discipleship in another. This lack of clarity on a telos becomes as problematic as his critique of inadequate teloi such as church growth. The critical problem lies in setting these up as distinct teloi without showing how they cohere effectively.

One of the strengths of Outler’s ethos of evangelism is his insistence that evangelism involves the entire community of faith, rather than focusing on the work of an individual evangelist. He seems clear that evangelism done in a vacuum without the support of a nurturing community will result, at best, in a form of ‘nominal Christianity’. Outler also seems to extend the vision of evangelism toward maturity in Christ versus the initiation of a person into the faith. He seems to articulate an ethos that comes close to corporate spiritual direction seeing both the need for clear proclamation and communication of the gospel as well as a community that can nurture, sustain and encourage converts to press on. The difficulty, however, is that the target (or telos) which persons are to pursue is not clearly identified and risks aiming at an ambiguous target of growth.

Conclusion

The evangel Outler seems to propose is the love of God demonstrated through the person of Jesus Christ. Sharing the gospel for Outler, necessarily and clearly lifts Jesus up in compelling ways to persons who have not yet heard the good news. This evangel is close to the Wesleyan evangel identified in the paradigm as holy love. However, it does not seem to include the emphasis on sanctification which holy love includes.
In some instances, Outler’s view of evangelism seems to approach the argument of this thesis: that the telos of early Methodism was Christian perfection and this telos helped form a vision for persons that moved beyond initiation, initial salvation or a decision to follow Christ. However, it should also be noted that he does not seem to go as far as the early Methodists and focus on Christian perfection as the vision for evangelism. In addition, he seems to posit at least two separate teloi (conversion and discipleship) resulting in fragmentation and potential confusion rather than one telos, which could unify both evangelical conversion and the life of discipleship.

It seems clear that the ethos for Outler includes the entire church as a nurturing environment in which a person can come to faith and begin to grow in Christian discipleship. He was clearly aware of the role of Methodist groups in the way of salvation. He notes in his foreword to Watson’s book, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, that Watson’s work overcomes what Outler calls a ‘false distinction’ between evangelism and nurture.\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^2\) Outler observes, ‘The class meeting was more than another experiment in ‘Christian togetherness.’ It was, in fact, a *schola animarium*—a school for growing souls.’\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^3\) As noted, he seems to emphasize both proclamation on the one hand and discipleship on the other. This fragmentation is likely due to the lack of a clear telos, which could unify these emphases.

### 5.2.2 William Abraham

Abraham has written extensively on evangelism as a Wesleyan scholar and his seminal work, *The Logic of Evangelism*, has been used by several scholars\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^4\) as the basis or starting point of their work on evangelism. Abraham’s definitive work

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\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^3\) Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance*, p. ix.

\(^3\)\(^8\)\(^4\) Scott Jones, Bryan Stone and Elaine Heath are three examples.
on evangelism is his book, *The Logic of Evangelism*. His stated purpose is to give attention to what he perceives as a neglected area of Christian theology, namely evangelism. Abraham states, ‘I seek to offer an account of the nature of evangelism and to articulate the implications of that account for the practice of the modern church in the ministry of evangelism.’ Abraham seeks to provide a more theological approach to evangelism versus what he perceives as largely practice-oriented approaches to the field.

Abraham begins with a survey and critique of evangelism literature. He acknowledges the contributions of these authors including Bryan Green, George Sweazey, Donald McGavran, and Robert Coleman, but he observes that most of the writing is focused on the how-to or practice of evangelism without much reflection upon the theology that underpins the work of evangelism. He identifies David Bohr’s *Evangelization in America*, ‘as one of the very few books that could serve as a model for the serious student.’ Abraham proposes several reasons for the lack of theological reflection on evangelism. First, he suggests that since Christianity has been such a part of the Western culture and mind-set, thinking on evangelism has been seen as unnecessary. Secondly, he sees the focus on other disciplines having the effect of ‘inhibiting serious engagement with the topic of evangelism.’ In addition, he proposes that those who have written about evangelism have been dismissed as ‘revivalists’ and therefore ‘lightweight’ scholars. Fourth, he sees the challenge of defining evangelism as a reason for the lack of scholarly conversation. Finally, Abraham sees the confusion of ‘evangelicalism’ and ‘evangelism’ as a reason for the lack of engagement:

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Another crucial factor fostering the climate of disinterest and antipathy is the fact that evangelism has been linked almost exclusively with a particular cluster of schools within modern Christianity, namely with fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Even dictionary definitions of evangelism reflect this, for some confuse evangelism with evangelicalism.\textsuperscript{388}

These factors, according to Abraham have led to a lack of serious reflection and thought on the theological underpinnings of evangelism and have led to proclamation and church growth as the dominant schools of thought. Given this understanding, he presents his thesis: ‘Over against those who construe evangelism as the proclamation of the gospel and against those who construe it as church growth, the thesis presented and argued here is that we should construe evangelism as primary initiation into the kingdom of God.’\textsuperscript{389} This reaction to a conversionist or church growth paradigm follows the argument of this thesis that the telos is inadequate. But, rather than replacing an inadequate telos, another inadequate telos may have taken its place. Outler has clear but multiple or partial teloi while Abraham has a comprehensive but ambiguous telos.

\textit{Evangel}

Abraham’s argument begins by defining what he means by the gospel. He is quick to set the discussion of the gospel within an eschatological framework stating that the evangel in his view of evangelism is ‘intimately related to the gospel of the reign of God that was inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.’\textsuperscript{390} In addition, he sees the kingdom of God as the centre of the message of Jesus and the disciples and surmises that this fact is a stumbling block for persons hearing the gospel in the contemporary world.\textsuperscript{391} At the outset this demonstrates the

\textsuperscript{388} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{389} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{390} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{391} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 17.
connection between the telos and evangel for Abraham since he will define the telos as initiation in the kingdom of God.

Arias in, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus*, places an emphasis upon Jesus’ and the ‘gospel of the kingdom’ or the ‘good news of the kingdom of God’.\(^{392}\) While he does not appear to directly draw from Abraham, Arias’ argument is similar:

To announce the kingdom as a gift today, and in every generation since Jesus came, is to tell the ‘old, old story of Jesus and his love’ – the story of his life and proclamation, of his teaching and healing ministry, of his passion, death, and resurrection.\(^{393}\)

An evangel also needs to point to the intersection of the story of Jesus and the story of the one being evangelized. In similar fashion, Abraham’s evangel does not give a clear picture of how the story of Jesus or the Kingdom impacts the person being evangelized. Without this connection, such an evangel leads to further fragmentation of conversion and discipleship. It seems that both Arias and Abraham are arguing for the gospel of Jesus over the Apostle Paul thus separating the news of the Kingdom from a call to conversion.

Also in a similar manner to Abraham, Stone identifies the evangel as the kingdom or reign of God and observes that this evangel can be seen in the evangelism of Jesus. According to Stone, this evangel is characterized by an invitation to a new government, which operates according to an order that is ‘counter to the present order.’\(^{394}\) In addition, according to him, this evangel is an announcement of peace that can be seen in Jesus’ ministry. Stone also observes that


in the already and not yet nature of the kingdom there is an allowance for the rejection or acceptance of the *evangel*.\(^{395}\) Again, his *evangel* does not explicitly demonstrate the intersection of the story of Jesus’ kingdom and the story of the person receiving the good news and without such an intersection; fragmentation of conversion and discipleship is perpetuated.

Abraham insists that eschatology is the ‘cornerstone’ of his argument on the nature of evangelism. With this foundation in mind, he observes that the early church was not selling ‘celestial fire insurance’ but rather the message was focused on the reign of God in the present and the implications of that reign for the lives of individuals and communities. He acknowledges the tension between the already-and-not-yet of the kingdom and concludes that the evangelistic motivation of the early church was not a fear of what would happen to those who died without faith in Christ, but rather it was a motivation emerging from the reality of God’s power present in their community.\(^{396}\) Though not writing a specifically Wesleyan theology of evangelism, Abraham reveals his Wesleyan roots as well as his present affiliation, as he argues in harmony with the early Methodists, that the *evangel* has ‘good news’ for persons in the present, not just the future. However, he does not identify holy love as the *evangel*, but rather the reign of God. While there are certainly connections that can be drawn between the kingdom and the holy love of God, this is not an *evangel* which links up the message of personal salvation with the kingdom of Jesus. Abraham’s *evangel* is limited by his telos of initiation into the Kingdom of God and this impact can also be seen in his ethos.

\(^{395}\) Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, p. 82.  
Telos

Shifting from the understanding of evangelism as proclamation, Abraham turns to an analysis of another common conception of evangelism, church growth. Rather than focusing on a practice, he describes a telos, namely numerical growth of the church, as the problematic issue.

Church growth, defined by Abraham as the planting of local churches, is another popular view of the evangelistic enterprise and has been a major influence particularly among Western Churches throughout the latter part of the twentieth century. He is clear that church growth is not the telos that he is identifying and he is quick to point out that church growth and evangelism should not be equated with one another. Nevertheless, he observes three connections. First, he observes that the work of evangelism should produce ‘numerical growth of the church.’ Secondly, he observes that many would ‘think of evangelism fundamentally in terms of the growth of the church.’ Finally, Abraham observes that those within the church growth movement have rejected the traditional understanding of evangelism and have developed alternative views such as the ‘Christian presence’ of Peter Wagner and the ‘power encounters’ of John Wimber. While these emphases help it terms of recovering the role of the Holy Spirit and Christian community, the focus remains on church growth rather than the growth of disciples.

While there are serious issues with the church growth approach to evangelism, Abraham does acknowledge some contributions. First, the church growth movement has driven the church to do research and accumulate the facts on the factors that impact persons coming to faith and joining the church. Second, the emphasis on

399 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 71.
numerical growth of the church has highlighted the need for evangelism and ‘the church’s missionary endeavors’ toward unreached people groups.\textsuperscript{400} Third, he appreciates the willingness of church growth proponents to explore the theological implications of their work.\textsuperscript{401} Church growth as a \textit{telos} may not fit in the Wesleyan paradigm, however, it should be noted that Wesley would not be offended by talk of numerical growth. Instead, Wesley would have objected to confusing the fruit of numerical growth with the ultimate aim of persons being perfected in love since numerical growth should be the natural outcome of a real Kingdom people and community. He objects to confusing the \textit{telos} as well, but identifies the \textit{telos} with initiation into the Kingdom. However, Abraham is open to critique here by the Wesleyan objection to ‘preaching like an Apostle’,\textsuperscript{402} and the problem of focussing on numbers of converts without being more concerned for individuals becoming holy.

Abraham also identifies concerns related to the church growth understanding of evangelism. He begins with an overall observation that, ‘despite disclaimers to the contrary, a set of significant tensions exists between the requirements and character of authentic evangelism and the principles and policies of the church growth tradition.’\textsuperscript{403} His first specific concern is related to the pragmatism of the church growth movement. This pragmatism, according to Abraham, may have led to ‘a false confidence’ in the achievements of church growth practitioners. In his analysis, this could lead to the impression that a focus on church growth will be a ‘magic wand’ that can cure the ills of mainline churches and reverse their decline.\textsuperscript{404} Again, Abraham correctly points out that a \textit{telos} of reversing church decline is problematic

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\textsuperscript{400} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{401} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{402} Wesley, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, v. 3, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{403} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{404} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 78.
\end{flushright}
and potentially harmful. If the telos is ‘saving’ the church, then Wesley’s concern for saving persons to the uttermost is lost in the pragmatic attempt to save the church as an institution.

A second concern issue raised by Abraham is the ‘subsidiary role’ given to serious theological reflection on evangelism from the church growth movement. He notes that varied ecclesiological bodies have embraced the church growth movement without much, if any theological reflection on the implications of the model. He sums up this criticism: ‘In fact, we may forget about theology altogether and translate church growth into a set of public relations and management skills that we can sell to those who are severely tempted to domesticate the Holy Spirit in the structures and requirements of a prosaic profession.’ A telos of church growth may lead to compromises of method and more critically a neglect of theological reflection.

While still addressing the issues within the church growth movement, Abraham reasserts that ‘becoming a Christian is a complex and radical affair.’ Given this reality, Abraham then contends that it is also a complex process to initiate someone into the body of Christ. In his analysis, church growth theory ‘blunts’ the radical nature of becoming a Christian and therefore may create a ‘superficial initiation’ rather than one that is ‘genuine’. In addition, he points to the fragmentation of discipleship and evangelism as another potentially negative by product of the church growth movement. He notes:

…the legitimate desire to draw some kind of division of labor between evangelists and church planters on the one side and pastors and church teachers on the other leads to an artificial division between level 1 and level 2 discipling and thereby begins to undercut the rich, demanding conception of discipleship to be found in New Testament.

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405 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 81.
407 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 84.
408 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 85.
While Abraham’s critique is helpful in identifying the division that is often created between evangelism and discipleship, his insistence on initiation as the telos of evangelism perpetuates the division. If the telos is initiation into the Kingdom, the further work of discipleship may be diminished or even ignored since the telos has been accomplished. It does not necessarily follow that discipleship will be neglected after initiation, but the resulting fragmentation does create a situation where such neglect may occur. If the telos is the entrance into a life of discipleship, conversion will be neglected and persons may be left without a clear waypoint, which marks the beginning of that journey. Conversion may be an expectation of initiation into the kingdom, but unless it is also initiation into a kingdom community that makes disciples, it is effectively initiation into a life that does not exist. Initiation into the kingdom, through incorporation into a kingdom community of disciples, may precede conversion itself, but loosening the connection between initiation and conversion is likely to result in the neglect of conversion altogether.

Abraham recognizes that his criticism is open to challenge by referring to the Pentecostal movement and the focus on the work of the Holy Spirit while also embracing some of the basic tenets of the church growth movement. This openness by Peter Wagner and John Wimber, specifically, ‘has led to an approach to evangelism that focuses less on program and traditional training and more on the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit in revelation.’ 409 As noted in Chapter 3, John Wesley observed the critical role of the Spirit in the way of salvation. However, Wesley would have likely resisted the church growth emphasis of Wagner and Wimber without an emphasis on persons pursuing full salvation.

409 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 87.
Abraham suggests that in addition to conceiving evangelism as either proclamation or church planting (growth), three other views are possible. First, Abraham notes that evangelism can be viewed as the effort to convert persons to Christianity. He suggests that the terminology of ‘soul-winning’ and the widespread revival meetings of the nineteenth century represent this view.\(^{410}\) Secondly, he observes that evangelism can be construed as ‘witness’. The primary mode of this understanding of evangelism is the sharing of one’s own testimony of faith in Jesus Christ with another person. Third, he sees discipleship or making disciples as a view of evangelism. In this conception, persons are not only ‘brought to a decision to follow Christ but are also taught to be disciples.’\(^{411}\) Of these three conceptions, Abraham notes, ‘Each of them focuses on an important dimension of the coming of the rule of God and erects it into the essence of evangelism.’\(^{412}\) He is demonstrating the fragmentation that is present in evangelism, but does not seem be offering a true solution. Some of the difficulty with Abraham’s argument is that his analysis seems to swing from different *ethos* to different *telos*. While there is a dynamic connection between the *evangel, ethos* and *telos*, a theology of evangelism is clarified by distinguishing the parts of the framework. When Abraham fails to do so, it becomes difficult to clearly identify his *ethos* from *telos*. In light of these various conceptions of evangelism, Abraham states his working definition: ‘My proposal is very simple at this point. We can best improve our thinking on evangelism by conceiving it as that set of intentional activities which is governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time.’\(^{413}\) Abraham then proceeds to explain and defend his definition in the light of objections that he foresees directed at the

\(^{410}\) Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, p. 93.

\(^{411}\) Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, p. 94.

\(^{412}\) Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, p. 95.

\(^{413}\) Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, p. 95.
definition. Perhaps his use of the term goal is a helpful distinction. If initiation is not the telos, but a goal that moves toward the telos, then evangelism may be governed by a farther-reaching telos. However, if that is the case, he does not clearly identify that telos. An additional problem that arises is that the goal cannot be initiation as such, but should be the outcome of what it means to be initiated. Initiation itself may not be an adequate goal or telos and the result is fragmentation of conversion and discipleship.

Abraham begins by defining initiation ‘more broadly’ in terms of, ‘an act or set of acts that admits one into a society, a set of principles, a body of knowledge, a way of living, and the like.’\footnote{Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 96.} He insists that the view of initiation that he is proposing is not the understanding from the ‘church at large’, but rather ‘a complex web of reality that is at once corporate, cognitive, moral, experiential, operational, and disciplinary.’\footnote{Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 103.} With this understanding, Abraham proposes that four agents are involved in evangelism as seen as initiation. The primary agent, according to Abraham, is the triune God, followed by the church, the evangelist and finally the person being evangelized. Relating the ethos and telos Abraham notes that the acts involved include, ‘proclamation, basic instruction, prayer, and ensuring that those who respond are brought to baptism or confirmation.’\footnote{Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 104.} It is unclear in Abraham’s scenario where conversion would fit. It is also unclear whether it matters that catechumen is initiated into a disciple-making community.

Abraham identifies several objections to his definition and provides a response to each. Two of these objections are helpful to note at this point. First, Abraham observes that some may object that his proposal would sacrifice quantity
for quality in evangelism. His response to this claim is that it is a ‘bogus contrast’
and that the ultimate goal of evangelism is not to enlist people in the church, but to
‘introduce them in a realistic and honest fashion to the reign of God.’  
However, this does not seem to be the vision of early Methodism which sought to lead persons
to both conversion and a life of discipleship. A second objection that Abraham
counters is that his approach ‘confuses evangelism with Christian education or
nurture.’ He responds to this critique by asserting a distinction between ‘establishing
or grounding’ people versus ‘sustaining and nurturing them in discipleship.’
His response to both of these objections, as well as the others he mentions, is grounded in
his definition of evangelism as initiation. The second response, especially,
demonstrates the fragmentation of evangelism that is being argued in this thesis. He
is drawing a distinction between evangelism (initiation) on the one hand, and
discipleship on the other. In doing so, he may be perpetuating the problem that he is
attempting to solve. In other words, by drawing this distinction, he is separating
himself from the approach of the early Methodists where making disciples was not
fragmented into evangelism and discipleship, but rather was identified by pursuing a
telos of Christian perfection with an evangel of holy love in the context of an ethos
of spiritual direction. Abraham notes: ‘My primary concern in pressing my case is to
evoke a radical change of vision and orientation.’  He sums up his discussion on
evangelism as initiation by the following statement: ‘I do not claim that this is the
only way to proceed. Nor would I insist that initiation is the only term we might use
to bridge the gap that currently exists between evangelism and the kingdom of God.’
Finally, he suggests a hymn by Charles Wesley to sum up the ‘vision and horizon I

418 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 108.
am seeking to capture and apply to evangelism. The Hymn is number 211 in A Collection of Hymns For the Use of the People Called Methodist under the section, ‘For Believers Rejoicing.’

All glory to God in the sky,
And peace on earth be restored!
O Jesus, exalted on high,
Appear our omnipotent Lord!
Who meanly in Bethlehem Born,
Didst stoop to redeem a lost race,
Once more to thy creatures return,
And reign in thy kingdom of grace.

When thou in our flesh did appear,
All nature acknowledged your birth;
Arose the acceptable year,
And heaven was opened on earth;
Receiving its Lord from above,
The world was united to bless
The giver of concord and love,
The prince and the author of peace.

O wouldst thou again be made known!
Again in thy Spirit descend,
And set up in each of thine own
A kingdom that never shall end.
Thou only art able to bless,
And make the glad nations obey,
And bid the dire enmity cease,
And bow the whole world to they sway.

Come then to thy servants again,
Who long thy appearing to know;
Thy quiet and peaceable reign
In mercy establish below;
All sorrow before thee shall fly,
And anger and hatred be o’er,
And envy and malice shall die,
And discord afflict us no more.

This hymn appears in the Methodist hymnbook under the section entitled, ‘For Believers Rejoicing’. While the hymn certainly addresses the desire to see God’s Kingdom established in the lives of people, it could be argued that this is not a vision

or telos of initiation, but one of Christian perfection. Abraham apparently does not recognize that the kingdom of God for the two Wesley brothers was essentially an inward reality of God reigning in the heart.

Perhaps another hymn may represent the vision of the early Methodists. The following hymn appears under the heading, ‘Seeking for Full Redemption’:

O FOR a heart to praise my God,
   A heart from sin set free!
A heart that always feels thy blood
   So freely spilt for me!

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
   My great Redeemer's throne,
Where only Christ is heard to speak,
   Where Jesus reigns alone;

An [sic] humble, lowly, contrite heart,
   Believing, true, and clean;
Which neither life nor death can part
   From him that dwells within;

A heart in every thought renewed,
   And full of love divine;
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good,
   A copy, Lord, of thine!

Thy tender heart is still the same,
   And melts at human woe:
Jesus, for thee distressed I am,
   I want thy love to know.

My heart, thou know’st, can never rest,
   Till thou create my peace;
Till, of my Eden re-possessed,
   From every sin I cease.

Fruit of thy gracious lips, on me
   Bestow that peace unknown,
The hidden manna, and the tree
   Of life, and the white stone.

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart!
   Come quickly from above,
Write thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of love.\textsuperscript{422}

Here, Charles Wesley describes the vision and \textit{telos} of the early Methodists, which is centred, on perfect love. It seems that Abraham’s vision for initiation into the Kingdom does not go as far as this vision in this hymn. In another example, Hymn 376, Wesley writes about the entire way of salvation:

\begin{quote}
1 Prisoners of hope, arise,
And see your Lord appear!
Lo! on the wings of love he flies,
And brings redemption near.
Redemption in his blood
He calls you to receive;
Look unto me, the pard'ning God!
Believe, he cries, believe!

2 The reconciling word
We thankfully embrace,
Rejoice in our redeeming Lord,
A blood-besprinkled race.
We yield to be set free,
Thy counsel we approve,
Salvation, praise ascribe to thee,
And glory in thy love.

3 Jesu, to thee we look,
Till saved from sin's remains,
Reject the inbred tyrant's yoke,
And cast away his chains.
Our nature shall no more
O'er us dominion have;
By faith we apprehend the power
Which shall for ever save.\textsuperscript{423}
\end{quote}

Here we see the entire way of salvation from the call of God to receive pardon to the experience of full salvation and freedom from our sinful nature.

Related to the \textit{telos} of evangelism, Abraham addresses the issue of conversion and its relationship to evangelism by asking the question, ‘Is conversion an essential part of initiation into the kingdom of God, or is it a passing phase of

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Western Christianity, a relic of the introspective conscience of the West bequeathed to us by Augustine, a theme that has outlived its usefulness for coherent thinking about evangelism? To answer this question, he suggests that the connection between conversion and evangelism needs to be explored. To begin, he seems to question the validity of the language of conversion and the new birth itself. He notes ‘fruitless debates’ concerning the use of the terms and suggests that the original meaning from the early church (John 3) has been lost which connected the new birth with entry into the Kingdom of God. In addition, he suggests that the new birth has also been separated from baptism, ‘and, therefore, finds itself uprooted from that social and ecclesial context, making it work, hopelessly starved of moral and theological content.’ While he levels significant critique toward the language of conversion and the new birth, he never the less asserts, ‘What the language of conversion and new birth is reaching for is indispensable.’ This indispensable component is defined by Abraham as the ‘crucial, personal, and experiential dimension of entry into the dynamic rule of God.’ He seems to acknowledge the necessity of conversion in the life of the believer, but wants to redefine the concept. This attempt at redefinition leads Abraham to the work of Jose Miguez-Bonino who suggests that Wesley’s view of conversion should be reread in light of contemporary understandings of theological and metaphysical claims.

Based on the work of Miguez Bonino, Abraham asserts that. ‘For Wesley, ‘being’ comes first, then manifests itself in ‘acting.’’ Abraham observes that Wesley’s view ‘destroys the unity of ‘being’ and ‘acting’ in both humans and

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424 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 120.
426 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 123.
However, this appears to be a false dichotomy. Wesley’s view of justification and the new birth as both a relative and a real change seem to be drawn from both Wesley’s understanding of scripture and the experiences of those in the Methodist revival. Wesley’s thinking that justification and the new birth were logically separate did not prevent him from seeing the two inextricably linked in the experience of Christians. Overall, as Collins argues, Wesley’s theology is one marked by a conjunctive nature and therefore it is more likely to assert that Wesley held in tension ‘being’ and ‘acting.’ In fact, one can see this tension played out in Wesley’s own experience of faith and the advice given him by Peter Böhler as recorded in Wesley’s journal:

Immediately it struck into my mind, ‘Leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?’ I asked Böhler whether he thought I should leave it off or not. He answered, ‘By no means.’ I asked, ‘But what can I preach?’ He said, ‘Preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.’

Not only is the tension of ‘being’ and ‘acting’ evidenced from Wesley’s own life, but by the manner in which Methodist groups (especially Class Meetings) operated. One could attend a class meeting on the basis of desiring to ‘flee the wrath to come,’ before any experience of the new birth or justification. However, there were practices and a rule of life expected of those who attended these groups before and after any experience of conversion. It seems that there is evidence to support a more dynamic relationship between ‘being’ and ‘acting’ than Abraham allows.

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430 In a footnote (12), Abraham acknowledges that he would defer to Wesley scholars as to whether this is an accurate reading of Wesley.
Abraham’s assertion that conversion ‘does not take place in a vacuum’, is one that should be acknowledged.\textsuperscript{433} This is certainly true as a person’s culture, social location, family, experience of the church and more play a significant role in how a person becomes a Christian. He observes, that this recognition, ‘requires the call to commitment to relate very specifically to the objective and concrete conditions of those being evangelized.’\textsuperscript{434} This in turn, argues Abraham, reorients the goal of evangelism to be focused upon the ‘creation of a new creature’ rather than ‘just the formal acceptance of a message or a doctrine’.\textsuperscript{435} He appeals to the General Rules of early Methodism as evidence of this understanding within the movement. Despite this assertion, his telos for evangelism with its focus upon initiation seems to fall short of that goal. It seems to that the goal of ‘initiation’ could include everything in general, but without specifying anything in particular. Initiation is not really a telos on MacIntyre’s terms. To become a real telos, Abraham would have to provide a more coherent description of what it means to be a kingdom-shaped person.

Arguably, he might be doing this with his polyvalent approach (attempt at faceting), but each of these valences still requires further positive characterisation to be useful as a telos.

\textit{Ethos}

Rooted in his understanding of the eschatological kingdom, Abraham begins to explore the place of proclamation in evangelism. First, he seeks to dispel the understanding that evangelism is primarily about the proclamation of the arrival of God’s kingdom on earth.\textsuperscript{436} He stresses that no one would have conceived of early Methodists such as Wesley or Whitefield as evangelists and in fact, such language

\textsuperscript{433} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{434} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{435} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{436} Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 40.
did not emerge until the revivalists of the late nineteenth century. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the research of Boraine demonstrates that although Wesley is sometimes identified as being a precursor to nineteenth century evangelists, the ethos for the early Methodists was much more complex. Still, it is clear that Wesley engaged in what we would describe today as evangelism: working for the salvation of souls, proclaiming the good news, and the general spread of the gospel. He seems to be missing the tension in the ethos early Methodism between proclamation on the one hand and the work of discipleship on the other. Abraham argues, the view of evangelism, as proclamation has become the dominant motif in Western Christianity and thus seems to consider early Methodist evangelism as a conversionist paradigm. He points out that the Lausanne Covenant closely ties evangelism to proclamation and thus reinforces this understanding. Further, he argues that this close linkage between evangelism and proclamation has led to the professionalization of evangelism. Never the less, Abraham also observes the benefits of this view:

> If everything is evangelism then nothing is evangelism; and we should be surprised if anyone in the church takes it very seriously. Defining evangelism as the verbal proclamation of the gospel provides a clear, manageable concept that is rooted in the early history of the word and that calls the church to excellence in communicating the Christian gospel to those who are prepared to listen.\(^{437}\)

The view of evangelism as proclamation has enabled the church to maintain a focus on the work of evangelism, however, he quickly returns to his concerns.

Abraham notes that defining evangelism as verbal proclamation does not eliminate ‘the church from engaging in other laudable and urgent tasks.’\(^{438}\) Yet, he still expresses several concerns with such a definition. First, he notes that ‘continuing to define evangelism as proclamation alone involves a radical transformation of the

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\(^{437}\) Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, p. 45.

\(^{438}\) Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, p. 45.
practice of evangelism." In addition, he observes that a focus on evangelistic preaching has not produced a ‘focus on the coming of the reign of God in Jesus Christ.’ Abraham connects his *telos* for evangelism with the *ethos*, or in this particular case, the practice of proclamation. A third objection to defining evangelism as verbal proclamation is expressed by Abraham as a failure to recognize the power of God revealing himself to the listener as the gospel is communicated. Evangelism is ‘not just a matter of getting the word out,’ he notes. He observes that the argument could be made for not abandoning proclamation as the model for evangelism, but rather revising the model to ‘focus on the kingdom of God.’ Abraham seems to be arguing for a change of the *telos* rather than the *ethos*. He seems to suggest that by changing the *telos*, proclamation becomes a more helpful practice. In this vein, he suggests that Watson makes such an attempt to revise or redefine proclamation in his writing on evangelism. Abraham notes Watson’s thoughts on both prophetic and personal evangelism. In the area of personal evangelism, Abraham observes: ‘Personal evangelism, as might be expected, takes place when Christians share their faith with others, entering into dialogue and conversation to make known the evangel.’ Regarding prophetic evangelism, Abraham observes that Watson is a bit more ‘radical and original.’ He states:

>The prophetic evangelist must be able to seek out the signs of the New Age in human history and existence, must be able to interpret them in the light of God’s coming rule, and must then be able to communicate them as good news to as many as possible. Especially important within this is the need to interpret the signs of God’s social grace.

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Ultimately, however, Abraham is critical of Watson’s attempt to work within the bounds of traditional formulations of evangelism. He summarizes Watson’s approach:

It [Watson’s approach] represents a valiant effort to retrieve the eschatological dimension of the gospel, but it leads us down some precarious pathways that are unlikely to get evangelism back on track. Nor does it adequately address the varied objections that have been leveled against the conventional understanding of evangelism when it focuses so narrowly on proclamation. The issue is not just that of getting the message straight, difficult as that may be.444

Abraham is correct in his analysis that the issue is not just ‘getting the message straight.’ Never the less, he argues that ‘proclaiming the good news of the kingdom is foundational in evangelism.’ He defines the good news: ‘It is the unique narrative of what God has done to inaugurate his kingdom in Jesus of Nazareth, crucified outside Jerusalem, risen from the dead, seated at the right hand of God, and now reigning eternally with the Father, through the activity of the Holy Spirit, in the church and in the world.’445 This gospel, insists Abraham, should include an invitation to faith and repentance and the kingdom should be proclaimed as a ‘present reality.’446 The evangel is critically important in evangelism, but unless the evangel is guided by a telos and enlivened by an ethos the ‘right message’ alone will not solve the challenge of evangelism. What seems to be missing in Abraham’s evangel is any sense how the message of the kingdom, both the already and the not-yet, impacts and transforms the lives of people.

Regarding the practice of evangelism, Abraham observes two characteristics of the contemporary practice of evangelism: ‘deeply reduced fragments of the

444 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 69.
446 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 171.
Christian message and the personalistic debris of the Christian moral tradition. Abraham further critiques the practice of evangelism by noting that evangelism cannot be confined to verbal proclamation and further that many involved in evangelism have virtually ignored the response of the hearer, thus ignoring the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Abraham summarizes what he sees as the ‘fundamental problem’ in current practice of evangelism: ‘only scattered dimensions of Christian initiation are identified, and even then they are given inadequate attention.’ From the perspective of this thesis, the question for Abraham is whether this is the most fundamental problem with evangelism. Abraham identifies the problem, but not the underlying cause. This thesis has argued that the fundamental problem is a vision or telos of evangelism that falls short of the vision found in early Methodism—a vision and telos of Christian perfection that enabled early Methodists to sapientially pursue the entire way of salvation. The loss of the telos has resulted in a fragmentation of evangelism into various Abraham provides a telos, identified as initiation into the Kingdom of God, however, this telos is short of the vision of Christian perfection. More critically, initiation into the Kingdom fails MacIntyre’s test of being a ‘true end.’ MacIntyre argues:

…unless there is a telos which transcends the limited goods or practices by constituting the good of a whole human life, the good of a human life conceived as a unity, it will both be the case that a certain subversive arbitrariness will invade the moral life and that we shall be unable to specify the context of certain virtues adequately. To follow his argument, without a ‘true end’ MacIntyre argues, there will be fragmentation. This is critical since the telos informs both the evanel and the ethos

447 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 141.
448 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 142.
449 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p. 54.
450 MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, p. 203.
and Abraham’s view on practices or the \textit{ethos} of evangelism is informed by his \textit{telos} of initiation into the Kingdom.

Abraham notes the fragmentation of evangelism in his article on \textit{A Theology of Evangelism}. He does so by identifying the fragmentation into two wings represented by social action on the one hand and ‘various schemes for revival’ on the other.\footnote{W.J. Abraham, ‘A Theology of Evangelism’, \textit{Interpretation: A Journal of Bible \\& Theology}, 48/2 (1994), p. 120.} However, it is possible that Abraham’s position is leading to yet another fragment with the \textit{telos} of initiation. The fragmentation that this thesis identifies is between conversion and discipleship. Applying the paradigmatic framework, he is addressing a fragmentation located within the \textit{ethos}, but seems unable to solve the divide between conversion and discipleship with a \textit{telos} of initiation.

Abraham notes Wesley’s concern in the early Methodist movement for engaging in those evangelistic practices that would reach the people where they were located – in their cultural location, social location, and even geographic location. He identifies Wesley and the early Methodist preachers’ use of outdoor field preaching as evidence of this concern. Abraham warns against a pragmatic approach and notes that evangelism is not simply something that can be neatly packaged and deployed in our communities.\footnote{Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, pp. 165-167.} The paradigmatic framework of \textit{evangel}, \textit{telos} and \textit{ethos} supports Abraham’s argument. The interrelation of these three concepts is critical and an approach that presents a ‘neatly packaged’ program should be viewed with suspicion. Packaging evangelism, argues Abraham, may result in suffocating ‘the need for both divine inspiration and human creativity in evangelism.’\footnote{Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 167.} Thus he warns that the church must not forget that God is the ‘primary agent’ in evangelism. He states, ‘if God is not allowed to be Lord in the church, then it is unlikely that the
church will be very effective in introducing people into the rule of God." It should be noted here that Jones is critical of Abraham’s focus on the church as the locus of evangelistic ministry. Jones states, ‘By requiring the presence of the church for the existence of the reign of God, he has limited God’s sovereign action on earth to be no larger than the ministry of the church.’ If Abraham is inextricably linking the kingdom or reign of God to the church, rather than claiming it is ‘most fully expressed in the church’ as Jones claims, then Abraham is imposing a serious limitation.

Related to the ethos, Abraham further argues that evangelism ‘must be intimately linked to the grounding of people in the kingdom of God.” He proposes the renewal of a catechumenate that includes the six dimensions of initiation for which he argues:

If we attend only to the experiential dimension, the result will be sickly sentimentalism; we shall have a religion of heat without light, of zeal without knowledge. If we attend only to the commandment to love, the result will be an austere moralism; we shall have a religion of duty without power and joy, of self-righteousness without humility. If we attend only to the creed, the result will be dead orthodoxy; we shall have a religion of light without heat, of knowledge devoid of love and zeal. If we attend only to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the result will be a frantic activism; we shall have a religion of Pentecostal fire without moral content, of pragmatism without intelligent direction. If we attend only to baptism, Eucharist, and the spiritual disciplines, the result will be hard ritualism; we shall have a religion of external rite without evangelistic passion, of rigid form without a warm heart. And if we attend to all of these without setting them firmly in the context of the kingdom of God, we shall have only a humanistic religion unrelated to the great sweep of God’s action in history for the renewal of creation. All six of the dimension of initiation must be catered to in the concrete process of initiation.

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457 Abraham, The Logic of Evangelism, p. 175.
Abraham argues that persons, ‘deserve to receive the full riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ.’ The question remains as to whether initiation leads to those riches of the gospel. Or to put it differently, to what end does initiation lead? His suggestion of a catechetical approach is certainly reminiscent of the early Methodists and the system of groups that helped to make disciples. However, with initiation serving as the telos of evangelism, there is still a concern that persons will stop with initiation rather than continuing to pursue Christian perfection. A Wesleyan approach communicates an evangel of holy love, aims at a telos of Christian perfection and has an ethos of spiritual direction that is present in the system of groups that he identifies.

Abraham is also critical of any attempt to divorce evangelism and social action. He observes:

> Evangelism and social action would then be causally and conceptually related. The reverse does not hold. Social action can stand on its own feet without leading to evangelism; it is done out of love for the neighbor and not as a mechanism for enticing people into the kingdom of God. Evangelism, by contrast, is incomplete if it does not lead to the creation of agents of the kingdom who, in appropriate circumstances, express their love for the neighbor through social action.\(^{459}\)

He compares evangelism to a military boot camp in which the point is to ‘break in’ the new convert and ‘initiate him or her into the art of being an agent of the rule of God.\(^{460}\) In this way, he argues that evangelism should not be seen in conflict with other ministries of the church, since it is fulfilling the role of initiation. The problem with his analogy is that a military boot camp has a clear telos in mind for their recruits – they envision recruits becoming soldiers. Yet, he does not clearly describe what the initiated should look like at the end of ‘boot camp.’

\(^{458}\) Abraham, *The Logic of Evangelism*, p.179.
Stone’s work, *Evangelism After Christendom*, builds on the work of Abraham, Outler, John Howard Yoder, and others in an attempt to redirect the reader to think about a *telos* that goes beyond conversionistic thinking. Stone’s *ethos* is that evangelism happens as the church seeks to be the church. Through the practices of worship, hospitality, and otherwise living out what it means to be the body of Christ, the church is evangelistic. His view of evangelism is deeply rooted in ecclesiology and makes the claim that ‘all Christian evangelism is fundamentally rooted in ecclesiology.’

While Stone’s *ethos* provides a more holistic view of evangelism, it does run the risk of Abraham’s caution that ‘If everything is evangelism then nothing is evangelism; and we should be surprised if anyone in the church takes it very seriously.’

While Stone takes issue with Abraham’s warning, the danger of evangelism becoming absorbed into the fabric of the church is never the less real.

Abraham questions whether, with the impact of modernity, his approach to initiation is a ‘viable’ approach. He also questions whether this approach to evangelism as initiation is feasible given the ‘wider ecumenism’ at work among ‘the great religious traditions of the world.’ With modernism, he observes, many assumptions about the doctrine of sin, Christology, pneumatology, and others are called into question due to scepticism about the supernatural. It should be noted that it is now generally understood that post-modern people tend to accept the supernatural, but reject truth claims. This is a situation which still proves challenging for evangelism.

Abraham notes a ‘general trend’ away from the traditional approaches to evangelism but suggests Fred Brown, a Salvation Army officer from London, as an

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example of an exception to this trend. According to Abraham, Brown suggests the solution is to be found in ‘the development of a new Christian community that is tolerant in character, open to new ideas, and integrated into existing structures.’ A ‘spirit of tolerance’ focused on small groups aimed at developing relationships of ‘loving mutuality’ marks Brown’s proposal.\(^{464}\) He cautions against dismissing Brown’s proposals too quickly and suggests that Brown is attempting to make connections with persons who have rejected Christianity or at least its religious vocabulary. He suggests that Brown is trying to find a language that will speak to newer generations by appealing to values.\(^{465}\) Abraham believes that Brown’s concern to ‘cultivate a vibrant Christian community and to focus on the moral structure of Christian discipleship are welcomed strategies. Never the less, he is critical of Brown’s proposal, stating:

> On the one hand, he desires to maintain a commitment to much of the traditional Christian message, at least for himself. On the other hand, he wants to treat most of the commitments of the secular saint as the equivalent of that language expressed in action.\(^{466}\)

His strongest critique of Brown is this close connection that the approach has with secularism. He notes: ‘They are the leftovers in the Western tradition when some version of utilitarianism has occupied the public arena.’\(^{467}\) Brown’s approach forfeits the \textit{ethos} of a distinct Christian community for one that more closely resembles the world at large. Abraham is correct in his assessment, that without this distinction the church may fail to be the ‘word made visible’, as Outler expressed it.\(^{468}\)

Abraham observes that while there are major impediments to evangelism, there is still hope and that persons are still open to the gospel regardless of the

\(^{466}\) Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 195.
\(^{467}\) Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 198.
\(^{468}\) Outler, \textit{Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit}, p. 25.
challenges. He notes, ‘Evangelism has never depended on a sunny analysis of the culture it is seeking to Christianize’.\footnote{Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, p. 202.} It can also be observed that, in general, throughout the history of the Christian movement, the church has seen much of its growth in the face of persecution and cultural upheaval.

Conclusion

Abraham makes a significant contribution to the field of evangelism by calling attention to the theological underpinnings that guide the work of spreading the gospel. He provides helpful critique of the propensity to construe evangelism as proclamation. In addition, he critiques the tendency to focus evangelism on initial conversion by introducing his concept of initiation into the kingdom.

However, while initiation begins to move evangelism toward a \textit{telos} beyond initial conversion, it may not represent a \textit{telos} at all. If \textit{telos} means goal then initiation may be adequate. However, from MacIntyre’s view, the \textit{telos} serves a greater role than a goal. It provides a vision of the life that a person is pursuing. As such, Abraham never describes a vision or view of an initiated person. He does not answer the question: How do you know that someone is initiated?

4.2.3 Scott Jones

Jones is both a scholar and a Bishop of the United Methodist Church. He has written extensively on Methodist theology, polity and evangelism. His work on evangelism, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor}, builds on the work of Abraham and presents a slightly different \textit{telos} than that of Abraham. Jones’ stated thesis is to refine Abraham’s definition of evangelism and work out a rationale for his definition that, ‘evangelism is that set of loving, intentional activities governed
by the goal of initiating persons into Christian discipleship in response to the reign of God.  

Evangel

To accomplish a redefinition of Abraham’s proposal, Jones begins by looking at the contributions of both Arias and Abraham in terms of their focus on the reign of God as the evangel and its relation to evangelism. He observes, ‘Arias and Abraham have made a very significant and important point about the significance of the reign of God for a holistic understanding of the gospel, and thus of evangelism.’ He then argues that the central theme of scripture is God’s love and that this is emphasized in the Wesleyan tradition. He further argues that God’s loving actions relate to evangelism because these actions are ‘good news’ and they are ‘invitational’ as God works to invite persons, ‘to participate in the reign of God.’ He further argues that, ‘God’s love is an illuminating starting point for a theology of evangelism.’ He then draws the connection between God’s love and missionary activity:

The God who is love is a missionary God who seeks to save the world. God’s loving reign as sovereign over the creation aims at justice, peace, and love. Given the state of human sin, this requires judgment and reconciliation, both between God and humanity and within the human community.

Drawing upon Bosch and Moltmann, Jones argues that evangelism is an integral part of mission:

From all that has been said here, the relationship between evangelism and mission is made visible. Bosch says, ‘Mission includes evangelism as one of its essential dimensions.’

Bosch quotes Moltmann, who says, ‘Evangelization is mission but mission is not merely evangelization.’

The *evangel* that Jones proposes is ‘God’s love’. Jones identifies God’s love as the starting point for a theology of evangelism and sees the love of God as connecting point between evangelism and mission:

...all of the above actions [the incarnation, sending of the Holy Spirit, universal offer of grace] taken by God or expressions of God’s love for humanity...God’s actions are good news. Humanity’s problems can be solved, and God is actively working to do that.

Jones implies that God’s actions are not in themselves the ‘good news’, but rather God’s love that is behind these actions. This *evangel* seems to come close to the *evangel* in early Methodism identified by Meadows as ‘holy love.’ The strength of this view is that God’s love is central to the good news of Jesus Christ and God desires the healing of his people. However, the weakness is that without an emphasis on holy love, there is a loss of the character that God desires in addition to the healing of persons. God’s love without holiness may lead to what Kenda Creasy-Dean calls, moralistic-therapeutic-deism. Dean observes, ‘God’s love is consequential love, which calls for a consequential faith, which calls for communities where holiness—not niceness—rules the day.’

Collins is critical of current trends in Wesley studies toward focusing on love as the primary attribute of

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holiness. As Collins observes, ‘without the qualitative distinctiveness of holiness as Wesley understood it, a love so conceived is likely to be informed by self-will, sentimentality, or what human reason itself judges to be both good and acceptable.’\footnote{Collins, \textit{The Theology of John Wesley}, pp. 7-8.} The loss of holiness closely connected with love can damage the transformational dimension of the 	extit{evangel}.

\textit{Telos}

Jones highlights Abraham’s ‘six aspects of initiation’ related to the \textit{telos}, identified as corporate, cognitive, moral, experiential, operational and disciplinary. It should be noted that these aspects represent what Wesley might call ‘forms’ of religion. There appears to be a lack of a transformational aspect to ‘initiation.’ Further, he identifies Abraham’s four ‘agents’ that include, God, the church, the evangelist, and the person or persons evangelized.\footnote{Abraham, \textit{The Logic of Evangelism}, pp. 103-104.} Shifting to his primary thesis, Jones states, ‘Construing evangelism as initiation into Christian discipleship provides a logical foundation for his six aspects of initiation.’\footnote{Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1094.} He further claims:

\begin{quote}
Abraham’s concern for the importance of the reign of God and evangelism can be best preserved if Christian discipleship is always discussed as the faithful response of persons to the reign of God. It is in fact God’s love that is most important. God’s mission to the world is an expression of God’s love. God’s mission aims at making persons disciples of Jesus Christ. Evangelism is that part of the churches mission that seeks to initiate persons into Christian discipleship in response to the reign of God.\footnote{Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle locations 1112-1116.}
\end{quote}

He expresses a concern about Abraham’s insistence that God’s reign is limited to the bounds of the church. Jones states, ‘from a larger perspective, we do not want to limit the reign of God to the ministry of the church. It is God at work saving the world, and clearly God will use those persons and save those persons whom God
chooses to use and save.\textsuperscript{485} In spite of this concern, Jones acknowledges that the church is ‘one of the four key agents in the process of evangelism’ and further observes that, ‘faith-sharing is best done with a congregation because its goal is to initiate the non-Christian person into discipleship in a congregation.’\textsuperscript{486} He seems to be open to the same critique here, as he has levelled against Abraham. The use of the term ‘congregation’ implies that this initiation is into an ecclesiastical body which, as he is critical of Abraham, ‘limits the reign’ of God in initiating persons into discipleship to the bounds of the institutional church. Perhaps Jones intends ‘congregation’ to include various forms of the body of Christ including house churches, small Christian movements and the like. However, such an implication is not clear and leads one to conclude that the initiation of persons into discipleship happens best with a formal church structure.

Following Abraham, Jones identifies both the contribution and the challenges presented by the church growth movement. According to Jones, the strength of the church growth movement identified with Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner, and their result-oriented approach, is that they focus on the need for persons to come to Christ and what actually achieves that end in a particular context.\textsuperscript{487} The ‘principal weaknesses’ of a results oriented approach, claims Jones is that evangelism is

\textsuperscript{485} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 1123-1124.
\textsuperscript{486} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle locations 1148-1157.
\textsuperscript{487} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle locations 1673-1680.
reduced to ‘simply conversion and incorporation into the church.'\textsuperscript{488} Therefore, with this focus, the rest is left ‘to the process of discipling.’\textsuperscript{489}

Jones identifies George G. Hunter, III’s, \emph{Church for the Unchurched}, as ‘perhaps the best expression of this church-growth school of thought.’\textsuperscript{490} Because Hunter focuses on numerically successful, large congregations, he argues that this approach illuminates both the strength and weakness of Hunter’s work. The strength is that Hunter descriptively identifies congregations that demonstrate successful evangelism. However, the weakness is that Hunter focuses on large congregations and ‘opens himself to the criticism that his sample is skewed.’\textsuperscript{491} Jones summarizes his concern:

One of the chief ways Christianity has been corrupted is in confusing the welfare of the institutional church with the welfare of the reign of God. Thus, large churches with big attendance and large budgets and large staffs are presumed to be discipling persons well. However, the theological questions about what constitutes faithful discipleship in a particular context are often ignored in favor of large numbers.\textsuperscript{492}

He seems concerned that church growth not become an end in itself, but rather come as the result or fruit of evangelistic endeavours.

Jones’ preferred definition of evangelism is taken directly from William J. Abraham’s book, \emph{The Logic of Evangelism}: ‘We can best improve our thinking on evangelism by conceiving it as that set of intentional activities which is governed by

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{488} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1683.
  \item \textsuperscript{489} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1684.
  \item \textsuperscript{490} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1685.
  \item \textsuperscript{491} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1708.
  \item \textsuperscript{492} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1761.
\end{itemize}
the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God for the first time.'

However, he argues that Abraham’s definition does not go far enough in linking evangelism and discipleship. This thesis critiques Abraham on a similar basis, yet Jones fails to recognize that without a unifying *telos* such as Christian perfection, the divide between conversion and discipleship will likely remain. He states, ‘we have already examined in the previous chapter the reasons entry into the reign of God is an unsatisfactory way of defining this ministry. Rather, evangelism should be seen as initiating persons into Christian discipleship.’

Jones proposes that ‘we can best improve our thinking about evangelism by construing it as that set of loving, intentional activities governed by the goal of initiating persons into Christian discipleship in response to the reign of God.’ However, he still demonstrates a fragmentation of evangelism as a divide between conversion and discipleship is created. Jones views this definition improving upon Abraham by linking evangelism with the ‘logically prior commandment to love God and to love one’s neighbor as oneself.’

However, evangelism cannot merely be about initiation into discipleship without intentionally initiating people into the kingdom. Without conversion, including justification and the new birth, we are left with a process with no definitive change in the person who is being initiated. While he may acknowledge the need for conversion, by conflating it within the context of initiation, he may be losing a critical part of the work of God in the life of the one being evangelized. Jones

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demonstrates the same problem as Abraham, although this is the very question he set out to solve.

Jones argues for the need to contextualize the work of evangelism and connects the efforts to know a person’s context with ‘loving a person well’. While acknowledging the difficulties posed by cultural, linguistic and socio-economic barriers, however, he cautions against the homogenous unit principle, pioneered by Donald McGavran. He cites Hunter who argues that the strangeness of the church can be a barrier to unchurched people and that, ‘When these cultural barriers are removed, the gospel is attractive and people are interested in coming.’ Jones argues:

> When homogeneous units are culturally formed by ethnicity, language, and other factors, they can be a valid starting place for a Christian journey. But the character of the community must make it clear that new believers will be shaped in ways that will help them appreciate the diversity of God’s people.

He emphasizes that evangelism is ‘deeply relational’ and therefore love should be the starting point for the work of evangelism.

Jones insists that given his definition of evangelism, and the connection he draws to discipleship, the need for Christian community is critical. He argues, ‘Further, I identified seven aspects of initiation into discipleship, one of which was the ecclesial aspect, and argued that Christian discipleship should always involve

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participation in a church and the means of grace that it supplies."\textsuperscript{502} Further Jones states, ‘Neither the mystic who thinks that a solitary life will conduce to holiness, nor the contemporary American who believes one can be a Christian without going to church has the Christianity of the New Testament.’\textsuperscript{503}

According to Jones, persons are initiated into Christian discipleship through the seven aspects of evangelism for which he argues.\textsuperscript{504} He then defines Christian discipleship as ‘a life of faithful obedience to God lived by persons who faithfully accept the call to discipleship.’\textsuperscript{505} Again, he seems to be focused upon life and not the inward transformation of the heart. Jones is quick to caution against discipleship and salvation stating by describing a tension in scripture between God’s universally available grace and the call for an explicit profession of faith in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{506} Jones states, ‘my definition of evangelism is compatible with either of the positions described above’\textsuperscript{507} because it does not equate evangelism with entry into the reign of God or into salvation. It focuses on entry into Christian discipleship.’\textsuperscript{508} He states that ‘Christian maturity’ is the goal of salvation and further defines a Christian:

Once discipleship is seen as a process aiming at this goal, then to be a Christian is to be one who is on that journey. Some of the texts in the New

\textsuperscript{502} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 2202.
\textsuperscript{503} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 2240.
\textsuperscript{504} Jones outlines the seven aspects in Chapter 3: baptism, cognitive commitments, spiritual disciplines, conversion, morality, spiritual gifts, and faith-sharing in Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle Locations 1186-1187).
\textsuperscript{505} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 2268.
\textsuperscript{507} The first position Jones describes is one in which an explicit profession of faith in Christ is required in order to be saved (John 14.6, Acts 4.12). The other position, according to Jones, suggests that all persons are recipients of God’s grace (John 1.9).
Testament speak of the Christian life as one would speak of running a race, or growing up, or being guided by the Spirit. Thus, one does not have to claim to have reached the goal in order to be a Christian.\textsuperscript{509}

Jones goes on to argue for the need for clarity ‘about what the Christian life is all about,’ and the need for communicating the implications of the good news of the gospel. He argues that if evangelism involves love for persons, then ‘it it must always have the character of invitation. It is an invitation for hearing the good news of God’s judgment and God’s offer of forgiveness and reconciliation.’\textsuperscript{510}

Jones’ \textit{telos} seems to clearly be the initiation of persons into Christian discipleship. While this \textit{telos} does go further than Abraham’s initiation into the Kingdom of God, it still does not go as far as what this thesis has argued is the \textit{telos} of early Methodism and John and Charles Wesley, Christian perfection. As such Jones creates the same fragmentation between conversion and discipleship that is observed in Abraham. Jones acknowledges that sanctification is part of the process of salvation, yet he seems to identify it with the discipleship process rather than as the \textit{telos}.

\textit{Ethos}

Jones explores the Wesleyan understanding of salvation as a process involving repentance, justification, and sanctification and the importance for evangelism. He notes, ‘finding ways in which to connect with what God is already doing in the lives of persons is one of the first tasks of evangelism.’ Jones argues:

In the past, too many evangelists have assumed that Christ is not present if Christ is not explicitly named. This is far too limiting. A doctrine of prevenient grace recognizes that God is at work in all situations, enlightening everyone (John 1:9). The evangelist’s first task, then, is to listen for

\textsuperscript{509} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 2292.

\textsuperscript{510} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 2394.
indications of God’s grace that are already present in the situation at the time of one’s arrival.\textsuperscript{511}

He continues by exploring each part of the process and concludes with a discussion of sanctification in which he identifies worship, formation and witness as tasks in which sanctification is lived out as a response to the Great Commandment. Jones argues that when corporate worship is focused on God as the object of worship versus a focus on the individual worshipper, worship is ‘the most important way in which we fulfil the commandment to love God with our whole beings.’\textsuperscript{512} He includes the Eucharist, prayer and fasting under the heading of worship while reserving those practices that focus more on changing the person under the heading of formation.\textsuperscript{513} Formation, according to Jones, includes Christian practices such as study and fellowship, identifying scripture as the most ‘important aspect of study’.\textsuperscript{514} Jones argues that witness is connected to sanctification because, ‘In connecting the two Great Commandments the way he did, Jesus implied that loving others is intrinsically related to loving God.’\textsuperscript{515} He identifies the moral transformation of persons, the discovery and use of spiritual gifts, the practice of hospitality and faith sharing as aspects of discipleship connected to witness.\textsuperscript{516} He acknowledges conversion ‘as a necessary aspect of initiation’, but he does not clarify whether conversion is an initiation into a life of discipleship or whether conversion is a part

\textsuperscript{511} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 1217.
\textsuperscript{512} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 1343.
\textsuperscript{513} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 1392.
\textsuperscript{514} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 1451.
\textsuperscript{515} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle location 1482.
\textsuperscript{516} Jones, The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship, Kindle locations 1482-1588.
of the journey of discipleship after initiation. Perhaps this confusion stems from Jones move to draw away from what he sees as the individualistic understanding of early Methodists and Wesley drawing upon the work of José Miguez-Bonino. 

Interestingly, although Jones cites Miguez’s concern with an individualistic view of conversion, Miguez argues for a description of Wesley’s approach to the good news that describes the Wesleyan paradigm well:

God intends to create for himself a holy people. This purpose becomes an actual, experienced, visible reality when men and women turn to him in faith. Perhaps this would be the best way to summarize Wesley's message. This is the good news. And it is indeed good news for the poor of the land — the miserable masses of the uprooted that crowd in the new industrial and mining centres, caught in the crisis of the birth of modern industrial capitalism, powerless victims of social anomia. Not only that they were accepted by God but that they could be "re-made" — they could receive an effective, visible, inherent, measurable new power and dignity. They could become conscious and active subjects of a new life. Their work counted; their will was liberated. In the emergent society, where success was coming to be the meaning of life, these marginals were for the first time offered the highest kind of success — accessible to all through faith. The entry to that reality was "conversion."

Here, Miguez describes a vision of early Methodism that certainly has a focus on individual believers, however, Jones and Miguez may be forgetting that societies are composed of individuals and as those individuals are truly transformed, the implications for the community are significant. Jones’ attempt to focus on a ‘holistic approach to evangelism’, is problematic if the significance of conversion, including justification and the new birth, is lost and assimilated into this holistic understanding. Jones acknowledges the difficulties faced in defining evangelism and suggests that one of the ‘most fundamental problems surrounding the definition of

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evangelism is clarifying its relationship with mission. He summarizes the difficulty:

One position equates mission with evangelism, and both are viewed as winning souls for eternity. A middle position holds that evangelism and social action are both important, but they are genuinely distinct and should not be prioritized. Another extreme position on this spectrum is that mission and evangelism are the same, but they are viewed as humanization or social action.

Jones appeals to Bosch who, he argues, seeks to combine these positions. He summarizes Bosch’s argument by using five interrelated statements:

- First, mission is wider than evangelism, and therefore not to be equated with it.
- Second, evangelism is an essential dimension of mission.
- Third, evangelism is witnessing to what God has done, is doing, and will do that aims at a response.
- Fourth, evangelism is always contextual and relates to the preaching and practice of justice.
- Fifth, evangelism is more than verbal proclamation.

He argues that while the church’s mission is more than evangelism – evangelism is still an essential part of that mission.

From this position Jones begins to explore the various definitions of evangelism and concludes that the wide diversity of definitions of evangelism can be accounted for the fact that, ‘in defining evangelism, one is defining a term that reflects one’s whole understanding of God, salvation, ecclesiology, and eschatology.’ He concludes following Barrett, that definitions of evangelism can be divided into two categories: evangelism as a process or evangelism as a product. Jones argues that ‘evangelism be conceived as a process that aims at a

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product.⁵²⁴ Using the example of the Parable of the Sower from Luke 8, Jones observes that this conception leaves results ‘undetermined’, although the sower’s intention is to have a harvest. In his effort to synthesize process and product, he may be losing the important contribution of each category. Is a theology of evangelism trapped on the horns of this dilemma? Is synthesis forced upon evangelism or can the distinctiveness of both process and product be preserved without such a synthesis. This thesis argues that to see the theology of evangelism as process of initiation, even if that initiation leads to a ‘product’ can lead to what Wesley cautioned as a ‘form of religion’ without the ‘power.’ As Meadows observes, ‘The soteriological paradigm cautions us that conversion cannot be reduced to one ‘aspect’ among many in a process of initiation, but is a gift of spiritual power that makes the new life of the kingdom possible, and without which both discipleship and fellowship slide into the mere form of religion.’⁵²⁵

Many definitions of evangelism tend to focus on proclamation and Jones identifies what he claims are two problems with those definitions. First, Jones expresses the concern that efforts of writers such as Ruffcorn and Klaibler, reduce evangelism to verbal forms in spite of their efforts to extend the definition to include deeds.⁵²⁶ Second, he argues that even with the ‘broadest understanding of the term,’ proclamation cannot encompass the whole range of possible ways that a person

might be led into Christian discipleship.\textsuperscript{527} Jones also resists the arguments of those who would claim that everything the church does can be construed as evangelism.\textsuperscript{528}

The ethos that Jones proposes can be identified with the activities that he labels, ‘intentional.’ Jones allows for most anything to count as evangelism as long as the intention of the evangelist is to initiate someone into Christian discipleship. The problem with this argument is that although the intention may be to initiate someone into Christian discipleship, the activity chosen may not be effective or worse may be culturally offensive to the person(s). It also seems unclear whether Jones thinks one can be a disciple without being a convert. He certainly sees the possibility of someone being discipled who is not yet a Christian. This thesis has argued from the perspective of early Methodism that a person can be a disciple before they were converted as they desire to ‘flee the wrath to come.’\textsuperscript{529} So, a disciple is one who seeks conversion, and then having found it, presses on to perfection.

\textit{Conclusion}

Jones avoids the pitfall of making every activity of the church evangelism, although he allows for ‘a whole range of activities.’\textsuperscript{530} He emphasizes these activities are intentionally aimed toward ‘initiating persons into Christian discipleship.’\textsuperscript{531} He also focuses on God’s love as the ‘central theme of scripture’, and therefore the crux of the message to be shared in the work of evangelism. The strengths of Jones’ work

\textsuperscript{528} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle locations 1815-1822.
\textsuperscript{530} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1875.
\textsuperscript{531} Jones, \textit{The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship}, Kindle location 1875.
lies in his attempt to move from Abraham’s initiation into the kingdom to the
initiation into Christian discipleship. While this move is a positive one in terms of
correcting a singular focus on conversion and bringing discipleship into the
discussion and comes closer than Abraham in describing what an initiated person
might look like, it is the argument of this thesis that it still falls short of the *telos*
found in early Methodism. With its emphasis on the journey of discipleship there is
also the potential loss of any sense of conversion in the life of persons, a loss that
may leave the ‘initiated’ with an unclear destination and waypoints. Jones is
concerned that the individualistic view of conversion can be problematic, but he may
allow his concern to carry him too far. As Ben Campbell Johnson argues:

> The inwardness of faith does not, in the finest sense, lead to privatization. Rather, the pathway into the depths leads to springs of inspiration and to the water of life that nurtures personal meaning and also inspires visions of a new society and a new world. Christian faith is always personal but never private. Faith is born in community, nurtured in community, and expressed through community. The journey into one’s personal depths, the practice of prayer, and the disciplines of meditation and silence strengthen the individual’s participation in the community.\(^{532}\)

The issue with Jones (as well as Abraham) is that the goal is being initiated.
Whether one is being initiated into the Kingdom or into discipleship, it is still the
beginning of something. No one escapes the rule of God, so while everyone is ‘in’
the Kingdom, they may not submit to it. Initiation is part of the task, however,
evangelism does not end at conversion. Initiation may be a goal, but it is not a proper
*telos* as MacIntyre conceives it. Therefore, the *telos* cannot be a process of
discipleship, because it does not necessarily imply growth - discipleship is seen as a
small period of time after conversion where you learn to live as a Christian not as a

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life long process. The telos from a Wesleyan perspective is the new creation (Christian perfection).

5.2.4 Elaine Heath

In the Mystic Way of Evangelism, Heath, follows the trajectory of Outler, Abraham and Jones in her understanding of evangelism. Heath explicitly refers to Abraham and Jones in a footnote as she sets forth her definition of evangelism:

Real evangelism is not colonialism, nationalism, or imperialism. Evangelism rightly understood is the holistic initiation of people into the reign of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The process of evangelization is expressed in three categories of activities introduced to the church by Jesus: preaching, teaching, and healing. Evangelism includes all aspects of the initiation of persons into the holy life, including catechesis, individual and corporate spiritual disciplines, participation in the sacraments (or ordinances, in some communions), and active membership in the life and mission of a local faith community. Evangelism as an initiatory process is complete only when individuals are fully incorporated into the church, participating in the life of the church in worship, service, prayer, and evangelistic presence in the world. This means that evangelism really is at the heart of everything we believe and practice as Christians. As Watchman Nee might have said were he involved in the conversation today, evangelism is at the core of the ‘normal’ Christian life.  

Following the initiatory language of Abraham and Jones, Heath describes evangelism in a similar fashion but departs slightly from both by appealing to the Christian mystics for insight. She notes that, ‘there is a striking absence in most contemporary discussions of evangelism of the wisdom of the great spiritual giants—the Christian mystics—to shape and lead our understanding of the theory and practice of evangelism.’ With this emphasis, she brings a focus on holiness noting that the Christian mystics are ‘exemplars of holiness’ and that their voices are needed in the ‘theory and practice of evangelism.’ In addition, Heath advocates for what

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she terms, ‘eco-evangelism’ which she defines as ‘being good news to creation in the name of Jesus.’

Evangel

Heath seems to argue for a connection between the *evangel* and the life of the evangelist. Her focus on the Christian mystics (such as St. John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, John Woolman and Mechthild of Magdeburg) highlights the role of the evangelist as an exemplar of the life to which the invitation is being given. She comments:

> Their contemplative vision of the love of God and the redemptive purposes of God in the world shatter our programmatic and market-driven assumptions about evangelism. Their passionate surrender to Christ exposes imperialistic, exploitive, and manipulative versions of evangelism, and highlights the falsity of accusations that evangelism is just one more way the church is in collusion with the world.

Further she argues, ‘Christian mysticism is about the holy transformation of the mystic by God, so that the mystic becomes instrumental in the holy transformation of God’s people.’ The life of the mystic, or the evangelist, becomes a part of the *evangel* by demonstrating in action, the message that is being proclaimed. Heath insists that this transformation is not an end in itself, but ‘always results in missional action in the world.’ While Abraham and Jones would likely affirm this emphasis, it is not as explicitly present in their arguments. Outler does emphasize this especially in his discussion of Wesley and in his view of ‘outward witness in daily living’ where he emphasizes the need for the word of the good news to be embodied.

Telos

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537 Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, Kindle location 120.
539 Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, Kindle location 140.
Heath uses the terminology of ‘vision’ related to her understanding of evangelism. She proposes that the mystics give the church a ‘contemplative vision for evangelism’ that can help the church face the challenges of the end of Christendom and of living as the church in exile (a description she draws from Brueggemann). She observes, ‘With the growth of religious pluralism and spiritual syncretism in postmodern culture, the church’s historic primacy as America’s spiritual and moral compass continues to erode.’ It is within this context that Heath sees a vision for evangelism characterized by three themes: ‘love as God’s meaning, holiness for the sake of the world, coming home to God’s love, healing, and the redemption of creation.’ She identifies the first of these themes, ‘love as God’s meaning’ as the ‘primary’ unifying theme. In discussing, ‘love as God’s meaning,’ it is clear that Heath has a therapeutic view in mind. Drawing on Julian, she states, ‘It was precisely this aspect of Julian’s theology—her therapeutic view of redemption—that was needed in her fourteenth-century context, and that is needed for evangelism today.’ Further she comments, ‘Julian’s doctrine of the healing, transforming mercy of God is unsurpassed in holding forth hope to people with all forms of brokenness, which must be a central concern for evangelism.’

Similar to Heath, Arias’ evangel is connected with hope. Arias observes, ‘Once you disentangle the puzzling collage of Jesus’ sayings on the future, what comes through is a powerful message of hope in the midst of tribulations.’ Arias observes, ‘Indeed, Jesus lived by hope and died by hope. He taught hope, and he

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541 Heath, *The Mystic Way of Evangelism*, Kindle location 211.
proclaimed hope. He celebrated hope, and he called his followers to become the people of hope.⁵⁴⁶ For Arias, the kingdom is the *evangel* of Jesus and thus the proper *evangel* for today and its message includes both the reign of God and hope for the future.

Combining her reading of both Julian and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Heath argues:

But fear of hell is not the motive for their evangelistic message. Instead, they offer a compassionate, profoundly hopeful vision of God’s love that is healing, inclusive, and global, and that is concerned with individuals as well as communities, a perspective that is fundamental to a contemplative vision for evangelism.⁵⁴⁷

This ‘hopeful vision of God’s love’ informs both Heath’s *evangel* and *telos*. The *evangel* that she seems to propose is a message of healing rooted in God’s love for his creation. The *telos* is the healing that takes place as persons ‘come home’ and experience healing through God’s love. This interrelation of *evangel* and *telos* is much like Abraham and Jones with their focus on an *evangel* of the kingdom and a *telos* of discipleship where the message is focused on the kingdom of Jesus while the *telos* is focused on becoming a part of that kingdom in a life of discipleship.

However, it should be noted that Heath’s emphasis on holiness is not explicitly connected to the *telos* as it is to the *evangel* and the *ethos*. She observes:

This is the message of holiness the church in America needs. Now more than ever, when so many pastors measure their success in numbers, buildings, and budgets, the church is starving for holy leadership. This kind of holiness offers a witness that doctrinal arguments will never provide. It is an evangelistic beacon that exposes, judges, and rejects all the false, exploitive, and manipulative forms of evangelism that have blighted the name of God’s church. Holiness of heart and life is the language that proclaims the good news to every culture in all times. As seen in Phoebe Palmer and Father

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Arseny, genuine holiness is deeply attractive, inviting people into relationship with the One whose meaning is love.  

It may be inferred that persons become holy messengers after they have experience God’s healing love, but this is not explicitly stated. Yet, Heath does seem to be stretching the telos beyond that of Abraham and Jones by focusing past initiation to the transformation of persons.

Related to telos, Heath argues for an adoption of ‘eco-evangelism’, which focuses on stewardship and the renewal of creation. She strongly argues, ‘Eco-evangelism, being good news to creation in the name of Jesus, must become key in the mission of the church.’ She further observes that ‘Eco-evangelism is about redeeming the earth that God made.’ The introduction of this additional telos potentially fragments evangelism and could lead to the loss of conversion and transformation of persons as the primary focus. Eco-evangelism seems to fit better as a part of the ethos of evangelism, where like social ministry, it can serve as a partner to the process of making disciples.

Ethos

The ethos that Heath proposes focuses on ‘how to live through a hermeneutic of love’ as the basis for the practices related to evangelism. She argues for an ethos that focuses less on proclamation and rather embraces a holy life in service to others. Heath observes:

Rather than impacting the world through teaching or preaching, as did the Franciscans and Dominicans, the Beguines’ ethos was one of embodied holiness of heart and life. In the beginning people marveled at the purity of heart, the holy simplicity, and the apostolic power of their lives.  

Again appealing to Julian, Heath questions:

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548 Heath, The Mystic Way of Evangelism, Kindle location 1095.
549 Heath, The Mystic Way of Evangelism, Kindle location 1964
550 Heath, The Mystic Way of Evangelism, Kindle location 2118.
551 Heath, The Mystic Way of Evangelism, Kindle location 1608.
What if we looked at our world as Julian learned to, ‘with pity and not with blame’? What if we heard God’s call to evangelize out of love instead of fear, hope instead of judgment? What if we saw sin for the complex mixture it is, grounded in wounds and unmet needs? What if we automatically tried to see the ‘total fact’ of others? In short, what would it mean to read our world with a hermeneutic of love?

Heath discusses this ‘hermeneutic of love’ in terms of serving the community, serving the poor and caring for creation in what she terms ‘eco-evangelism.’ She envisions this ‘hermeneutic of love’ being lived out in Christian communities like the Missionaries of Charity of Calcutta. Heath acknowledges the challenges associated with such a proposal and critiques that much of evangelism is designed ‘to keep newcomers from leaving for another church.’ She argues:

> The idea of congregants living like the Missionaries of Charity in our own suburban neighborhoods seems unimaginable. But is it? Is being the church really about buildings, programs, budgets, and ‘giving units’? Isn’t the ‘normal’ church supposed to be a community of Christians living for the sake of the world? What is the basis for our ecclesiology?

Heath roots this understanding of ethos in the practices of the early Methodists:

> The early Methodist societies were in many ways semimonastic communities for ordinary lay people. The emphasis was on holiness of heart and life, a combination of personal piety and social activism, which was essentially a posture of kenosis. Methodism became the largest Christian movement in North America by the mid-nineteenth century because of the power of its class and band meetings to form Christian disciples. Class and band leaders were unpaid laity. Many holiness Methodists were unpaid lay leaders whose social justice advocacy reformed American culture. Palmer, for example, never received payment for her ministry, not even for travel expenses. This was a historic Methodist model of kenosis.

She argues that kenosis, or an emptying of the self, is an essential dimension to both the Christian life and to the practice of evangelism. Heath argues that the surrendering of our agendas and ‘dying to self’ are essential if the evangelistic approach of the mystics is to be adopted.

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In contrast to Heath, Arias’ *ethos* focuses on the proclamation of the kingdom similar to the inherited-conversionist paradigm, but without a similar *evangel* and *telos*. His *ethos* is distinguished by the focus on proclaiming the kingdom versus proclaiming personal salvation. He suggests a ‘holistic proclamation’: the apostles’ evangelization was to be a holistic proclamation, in word and deed, of the reign of God, just as Jesus’ evangelization was.\(^{556}\) Arias is therefore connecting proclamation with the actions and lifestyle of the evangelist – word and deed in a manner that parallels Jesus:

> Jesus announced the coming reign of God many times and in many ways: in his teachings to his disciples, in his public preaching, in personal conversations with seekers, before the authorities or his enemies, in parables, in actions, in solemn utterances dressed in apocalyptic imagery, and in the most intimate moments of prayer.\(^{557}\)

Arias argues for a more holistic view of proclamation as the *ethos* of evangelism. This effort is potentially beneficial in terms of retaining the role of proclamation in evangelism. However, it does not seem to be as holistic as early Methodism, which included many forms of proclamation, but encompassed an even broader *ethos* of spiritual direction.\(^{558}\)

Heath’s *ethos* provides a corrective to an exclusively conversionist paradigm that focuses on proclamation. However, as observed in Abraham and Jones as well as partially in Outler, caution is needed to prevent fragmentation and the loss of proclamation altogether. Jackson cautions against focusing on an *ethos* of evangelism that focuses on social activism without ensuring that the message of the gospel is being communicated to those being served. Jackson argues:


\(^{557}\) Arias, *Announcing the Reign of God: Evangelization and the Subversive Memory of Jesus*, p. 27.

When Jesus’ disciples today carry out social ministry, these deeds do not in themselves proclaim the gospel, for the motivation behind these acts is only known when it is verbally proclaimed; it is not intuited. If the motivation is not announced then it is not known. Failure to verbally proclaim the motivation means that the connection between social ministry and motivation behind it might be missed. Social ministry does not substitute for verbal proclamation, but rather accompanies it for a holistic ministry, both in the life of Jesus and his followers.559

This ‘holistic ministry’ as Jackson describes it demonstrates the interrelationship between *evangel*, *telos* and *ethos* and the tension between the inherited-conversionist and emerging-missional that can preserve the contributions of each paradigm. While Heath seems to be attempting to provide such a balance, the weight of her argument still favours the emerging-missional paradigm. The potential loss in the area of *ethos* is a clear practice of verbally communicating the gospel.

**Conclusion**

Heath’s argument to connect the *evangel* with the evangelist through the lens of the mystics is helpful in terms of reiterating the power of holiness in communicating the gospel. She argues effectively that the lives of those sharing the gospel speak in concert with the message that they share. She demonstrates the connection between *ethos* and *evangel* as the mystics she highlighted pursued both holiness and mission together rather than mutually exclusive. As this thesis has argued, the early Methodists also saw the connection between holiness and mission. When combined with an adequate *telos*, this connection serves to bring focus to the work of evangelism.

However, Heath’s *telos* is unclear. On the one hand, she seems to be pointing to a *telos* of healing in a therapeutic framework. Still elsewhere, she focuses on ‘eco-evangelism’, which could be construed as either a *telos* or part of the *ethos*. The lack of a clear *telos* leads to a fragmentation of evangelism where the evangelist may be

559 Jackson, *A Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism as Proclamation*, p. 73.
torn between two teloi. This is does not necessarily follow, as Howard Snyder argues that God’s work of salvation is to heal both the person and creation. Snyder identifies the telos as the healing of creation, which brings these together:

The gospel of Jesus Christ is based on what the Bible teaches about creation, redemption, and transformation through Jesus Christ. It envisions an eventual transformed new creation. The new creation we now experience through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) is the firstfruits not only of our own salvation, but of all creation healed.  

While Heath, may be attempting to argue for a view of salvation similar to Snyder, the connection between ‘healing’ and ‘eco-evangelism’ does not seem as clear and fragmentation is likely to occur.

Heath’s ethos is closely identified with a holy life lived in service to others. While she does not discount proclamation as part of the ethos, her focus tends to favour the initiatory position of the emerging-missional paradigm. The loss of practices that communicate the personal message of salvation can lead to the loss of persons experiencing the personal dimension of conversion.

5.3 Connecting of the Telos

Evangelism is guided by its particular telos or vision. As Meadows notes, ‘In whatever way this goal is conceived, the theology of evangelism must acknowledge the gospel to hold out promises that can be fulfilled by the grace of God alone.’

This stream or school of scholarship rightly recognizes that the emphasis of evangelism should be beyond ‘saving souls.’ However, the telos only seems to go as far as initiation into the Kingdom. This stance is problematic in three ways. First, there is a danger that focusing on initiation will (at least theologically) bypass the needed step of conversion and the new birth, resulting in a fragmented understanding

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561 Meadows, 'Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism', p. 3.
of the way of salvation. Secondly, as this thesis argues, initiation into the kingdom stops short of the Wesleyan way of salvation, which aims at Christian perfection, not initiation or a process (or journey) of discipleship as the telos. Third, as Meadows notes, there is the possible reduction of experiences associated with evangelical conversion to ‘some generalized process of catechesis.’ If Christian perfection is the telos and is located within the way of salvation, then it can hold together justification, initiation and sanctification.

This thesis is wrestling for Christian perfection as a vision and a telos in a way that affirms and integrates conversion as conversion and discipleship as the bigger context. The issue is not just fragmentation between conversion and discipleship, but it is the loss of these things. What is seen in these scholars is the loss of conversion as a distinct and intentional sub-goal or moment, etc. in evangelism. The intentionality of this moment is lost. This stream has made conversion a process and therefore has either discarded conversion altogether or conflated conversion and sanctification. Perfection is a definite experience and it is both preceded and succeeded by growth in grace. Conversion is both preceded and succeeded by discipleship and growth in grace. An emphasis on perfection forces evangelism to take seriously conversion as a defining moment, because perfection is a defining moment at the other end of the narrative journey.

5.4 Defining the Evangel

The evangel is the good news that is being communicated to persons in the work of evangelism including both the biblical story and the promises of the gospel. As Meadows notes, ‘How the gospel is understood will shape any approach to

evangelism, both implicitly and explicitly, at every level of engagement. If the evangel is not aligned to the telos then persons may be directed toward other teloi. For example, the telos may be ideologically identified as Christian perfection, however, if the evangel focuses on personal salvation then evangelical conversion becomes the telos. It is apparent in this stream of evangelism, that the dominant evangel is focused on the kingdom of God. This evangel shapes the telos of initiation into the kingdom and creates an environment where conversion or justification may be overlooked in favour of initiating persons into the kingdom or into discipleship. Heath’s evangel, which includes a focus on a holy life as demonstration of the good news, could potentially represent the Wesleyan paradigm of holy love. However, with Heath’s emphasis on action versus proclamation, the message of personal salvation (that is held in tension with the kingdom in the Wesleyan paradigm) could be obscured.

5.5 Shaping of the Ethos

The ethos represents those practices that surround the work of evangelism and create the environment in which evangelism is done. Meadows observes, ‘Any theology of evangelism, therefore, must be able to distinguish carefully between that which is accomplished merely as the fruit of our own striving, and that which results from the gracious activity of God, working in and through our practice.’ At times this stream does not make such a careful distinction and therefore, the line between the ethos and telos becomes blurred. This blurred line creates the potential for confusion and fragmentation in evangelism. In addition, while much scholarship has been critical of proclamation, to embrace an ethos of initiation is potentially

563 Meadows, 'Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism', p. 3.
564 Meadows, 'Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism', p. 3.
abandoning the role of conversion in the life of persons. An ethos of spiritual
direction can hold in tension proclamation (in its various forms) and initiation or
catechesis.

5.6 Conclusion

It was argued in Chapter 1 that the concepts of telos and vision are closely
related. Through the lens of Meadows’ paradigmatic framework, it can be observed
that while the telos provides a vision of the destination of the Christian journey, the
evangel provides the language for describing that vision and telos. Further, the ethos
provides a medium for guiding persons toward that telos and vision. Without an
adequate telos, or worse, without a telos evangelism becomes guided by fragmentary
aims. This thesis argues that the Wesleyan paradigm with a telos of Christian
perfection, an evangel of holy love and an ethos of spiritual direction hold this
Wesleyan vision together. The Conversionist paradigm is problematic because it
focuses on conversion and misses the bigger picture of discipleship. To say
discipleship follows just compounds the loss. The Missional paradigm is problematic
because it focuses on discipleship and the resulting loss is conversion. The problem
that unites them is fragmentation; the result in these two paradigms is loss in each.
The telos can reunite those things lost and fragmented. This thesis argues that the
work of evangelism is essentially complete at the point of conversion. However,
without a telos of Christian perfection, the temptation will be to fragment conversion
and discipleship and forego the ethos of discipleship. Evangelism intentionally aims
at conversion as a waypoint, but it always has the vision of Christian perfection in
mind so that discipleship will continue.
Chapter 6 – Implications for Wesleyan Evangelism

This thesis began with a question regarding the root cause of an apparent lack of maturity among many congregations of Christians, especially in the Wesleyan tradition. It has been argued that the root cause of this situation is a lack of a clear telos and vision for the life that people are to pursue. The logic of this thesis is that the loss of Christian perfection as a telos for evangelism has significantly contributed to and perpetuated the situation where churches are ill equipped to help persons to grow in faith. Churches that primarily focus on a telos of personal salvation may or may not have a process of discipleship that follows conversion and therefore persons may become fully-formed disciples. Likewise, churches that have reacted to the telos of personal salvation and the related conversionist paradigm may set for themselves a telos of initiation which can lead to the loss of conversion as a pivotal moment in a person’s life. This chapter will examine the implications of a recovery of Christian perfection as the telos of evangelism, as a means of repairing the fragmentation that exists in current theology and practice of evangelism in contemporary Wesleyan scholarship resulting in a lack of fully formed disciples.

When a person begins a journey they find a map or today, most likely, a mobile app and plot both their starting point and their destination. While there may be stops, planned and otherwise, along the way, the destination is always in mind. It is this vision that keeps someone driving late into the night, striving to reach the end of the journey. To focus on a closer destination runs the risk of delaying, stalling or even forfeiting the final destination. Functioning as the telos of evangelism, Christian perfection keeps a person’s eye on the destination even if there are multiple stops along the way including conviction of sin, justification and the new birth and other encounters with the grace of God as the journey continues. The implication is that
one could be considered a disciple before conversion if they are in the Wesleyan sense, desiring ‘to flee the wrath to come.’ A disciple is one who seeks conversion, and then having found it, presses on to perfection. The two Wesley brothers and the early Methodists could have mapped other destinations, but they were convinced that God desired each person to experience salvation to the uttermost and therefore to aim short of that goal was to aim short of the best that God desired for people.

This thesis argues that early Methodists led by John and Charles Wesley, pictured the telos of evangelism as Christian perfection. As introduced in Chapter 1, Northouse identifies the characteristics of vision that include, a mental picture, a change, values, a map, and a challenge. Following Northouse, the characteristics of this vision can be identified. First, this vision gave early Methodists and those they ministered to, a description of a future state that was better than their current experience. It was a state not only free from the guilt, but also the power and the being of sin. Second, the vision helped to describe the change of heart and lifestyle that could be expected as the telos was pursued. This change involved a turning from self to a radical love of God and neighbour. Third, the vision was grounded in the values of Christian discipleship, especially that of holy love. Fourth, the vision of Christian perfection gave Methodists a map toward the future. This map did not terminate at justification or the new birth, but continued on to full salvation. Finally, the vision of Christian perfection provided a challenge to Christians to move beyond a life of casual and shallow discipleship.

In this characterisation of vision, evangelism would then be the initial phase or segment of the journey and a significant part of the process for reaching the vision.

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565 Wesley used this language concerning those who were invited to be a part of a Methodist society. See The Nature, Design, Rules of the United Society in Wesley, The Works of John Wesley, v. 8, p. 270.
This segment would include an *evangel* of holy love that communicates the good news that God loves us and desires to renew us in his image. This segment of evangelism also involves the *telos* of Christian perfection. The ‘true end’ of evangelism is not just the initiation of persons into the faith or a process of discipleship, but rather full salvation. Additionally, evangelism would include an *ethos* of spiritual direction that includes the practices that have Christian perfection as the vision or *telos*: proclamation, witnessing, and community (missional communities, bands, classes, etc.). A twenty-first century approach to Wesleyan evangelism would greatly benefit from the perspective of early Methodism. A renewal of evangelism theology and practice that begins with a vision for transformed people could avoid the pitfalls of many current streams of evangelism, especially those closely related to the Methodist/Wesleyan movement.

As Meadows argues, there are two ‘broad directions’ in the theology of evangelism represented by two paradigms: inherited-conversionist and emerging-missional.\(^{567}\) These paradigms should not be seen as ‘closed alternatives’ but rather as identifiable trends or directions of the theology of evangelism. The concepts of *evangel*, *telos* and *ethos* are embedded within each of these paradigms as well as the Wesleyan paradigm, which provides a way to hold the strengths of these ‘broad directions’ together.\(^ {568}\) It is vital to explore the implications of Christian perfection as a vision for evangelism within the context of these paradigmatic concepts. This thesis has noted that the *evangel*, *telos* and *ethos* are deeply connected to one another.


\(^{568}\) Meadows uses the terminology of ‘Soteriological paradigm’ and Missiological paradigm’ in his article, Meadows, ’The Journey of Evangelism’, pp. 414-415. Here the terms are from a more developed paradigm in Meadows, ‘Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism’, pp. 5-7.
6.1 Changing our Message

As a vision for evangelism, Christian perfection has implications for the 
*evangel*. The *evangel* is the good news of the gospel that communicates to the 
recipient the picture of the life to which they are being invited. This picture is 
incomplete if the *evangel* is focused primarily on personal salvation on the one side 
of the spectrum or the good news of the Kingdom on the other. This thesis has 
proposed that holy love is the *evangel* of early Methodism that enabled the 
communication of the need for both justification and sanctification.

Problems with *evangel* of inherited-conversionist paradigm are closely 
related to the *telos* of evangelical conversion. If personal salvation is the focus of the 
good news, then what may be communicated to seekers is a gospel that is primarily 
about justification. This approach, unfortunately aligns with the ‘bumper sticker’ 
thought in the United States that says ‘Christians are not perfect, just forgiven.’ This 
gospel could result in a person thinking that salvation is all about forgiveness and not 
be challenged to ‘work out their salvation.’

Similar to the conversionist, difficulties with *evangel* of emerging-missional 
paradigm are also related to the *telos*. In some cases, there is a vague idea of growth, 
which seems inadequate for providing a vision for the life that persons are being 
invited to live. In other cases, the loss of holiness closely connected with love can 
damage the transformational dimension of the *evangel*.

This thesis has argued that an *evangel* of holy love as demonstrated in the 
early Methodists keeps a tension between the message of personal salvation and the 
good news of the kingdom of God, which is focused on all creation. There is a 
promise of personal forgiveness of sins as well as the transformation of being 
renewed in the image of God and becoming like Christ. This good news promises not
only freedom from the guilt of sin, but also freedom from the being of sin. Changing our message to communicate the *evangel* of holy love captures both the need for personal conversion and the pursuit of Christian perfection and should enable the formation of persons who are transformed from the inside out.

6.2 Changing our Vision

As a vision for evangelism, Christian perfection has implications for the *telos* of evangelism. The term is used in early Greek literature as well as the New Testament in its various forms to indicate a sense of fulfilment, completion, maturity or perfection. Although related to the term goal, *telos* is not simply one goal among many but it is an ultimate goal. MacIntyre defines a *telos* as a ‘true end’ and suggests that without a clear *telos* that represents such a ‘true end’ fragmentation results. MacIntyre’s contribution to this thesis suggests that considering the theology and practice of evangelism without a clear vision of the *telos*, results in an incoherent diversity of understandings and activities.

The emerging-missional paradigm can be problematic, as discussed in Chapter 4. While the inherited-conversionist paradigm focuses on personal salvation as the *telos*, this paradigm targets discipleship. This focus can lead to the loss of conversion as a significant waypoint in the life of a seeker and can create a fragmented understanding of the work of evangelism. Of equal or greater concern is the fact that representative stream had unclear *teloi*, creating and even greater possibility for fragmentation of the understanding of evangelism. Without a clear *telos*, both the *ethos* and the *evangel* are impacted negatively. The *ethos*, or practices associated with evangelism, may end up serving multiple or worse conflicting ends. The *evangel* may be unclear or inadequate if the *telos* is in question, leaving the seeker without a clear picture of the life they are being called to.
This thesis has argued that the telos of a Wesleyan theology of evangelism should be Christian perfection. It has been argued that the multiple facets of the terminology for Christian perfection, the constitutive nature of the doctrine and the role of the doctrine in Wesley’s way of evangelism, all provide evidence that Christian perfection was the constitutive doctrine of early Methodism. As the constitutive doctrine, it was the theological filter through which early Methodists perceived their lives and ministries. This is represented by the inclusion of Christian perfection in the ordo salutis as the telos of salvation, i.e. salvation to the uttermost.

As argued in Chapter 3, evangelism describes what we do in the discipleship process that moves people on towards conversion. This makes evangelism an essential ingredient of discipleship and the telos of both evangelism and discipleship is Christian perfection for Wesley and the early Methodists. Perfection therefore holds evangelism and discipleship together. Evangelism in this conception is specifically about equipping people as disciples who intentionally seek conversion and then discipleship. In other words, conversion would be a ‘goal’ versus a telos of evangelism. The Wesleyan paradigm holds in tension both the need for personal conversion and the on-going journey of discipleship. Changing our vision will enable the formation of holy persons in a holy community, not just converted persons.

6.3 Changing our Practice

As a vision for evangelism, Christian perfection has implications for the ethos of evangelism. As Charry observes:

But to progress in Christian excellence beyond the basics requires training and cultivation of the skill of attending to God and of reexamining and reforming oneself in light of that attending. ‘Becoming a sapient and excellent Christian requires development of the eyes, ears, muscles, and mind of the whole self.’

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569 Charry, By the Renewing of Your Minds, p. 244.
The *ethos* represents those cooperative practices done with the knowledge that salvation is the work of God through grace.\(^{570}\)

The difficulty with *ethos* of inherited-conversionist is the focus on proclamation as the primary practice for communicating the gospel. If the *evangel* of the paradigm is personal salvation and the *telos* is evangelical conversion then proclamation, whether in the form of preaching or personal witnessing will be the natural method of communicating the gospel. Graham Tomlin describes the challenge the church faces:

…unless there is something about church, or Christians, or Christian faith that intrigues, provokes or entices, then all the evangelism in the world will fall on deaf ears. If churches cannot convey a sense of ‘reality’ then all our ‘truth’ will count for nothing. Unless someone wants to hear, there’s no point in shouting louder. Churches need to become provocative, arresting places which make the searcher, the casual visitor, want to come back for more.\(^{571}\)

The challenge, especially in an increasingly secular world, is that persons are resistant to the Christian message. As Tomlin suggests, just changing the content of the message is insufficient. The message and the messenger must be provocative.

The problems with *ethos* of emerging-missional include the loss of proclamation as a part of the *ethos*. We still need practices that communicate the gospel clearly and invite persons to conversion. The emerging-missional paradigm, with its heavy emphasis on initiation, coupled with a *telos* of discipleship, may diminish or de-emphasize the need to verbally communicate the gospel to persons.

This thesis has argued that an *ethos* of spiritual direction provides both the verbal witness and catechesis through the *Kerygma, Koinonia, Didache*, and

\(^{570}\) Meadows, 'Entering the Divine Embrace: Towards an Ancient-Future Wesleyan Theology of Evangelism', pp. 3-4.

\(^{571}\) Tomlin, *The Provocative Church*, Kindle location 245.
Rather than being trapped in a dilemma between proclamation and initiation, the Wesleyan ethos is envisions sharing the gospel through corporate spiritual direction, which includes both options. Evangelism as spiritual direction is giving people a vision of the life they can have and then guiding them toward that end. Changing our practices will require serious reflection on the message of our preaching, the nature of community in the church, the teaching of doctrine, and mission. It will require a preaching methods that can communicate holy love, small groups focused on ‘giving an account’ along with the pursuit of passionate spirituality, teaching that sees doctrine as sapiential (not knowledge alone), and mission that emerges as the fruit of the resulting transformation in the lives of everyday, ordinary Christians.

6.4 Further Research

Further development of the typological methodology used to examine the doctrine of Christian perfection, including the exploration of additional terms, may yield even more of a complete picture of the multi-faceted doctrine of Christian perfection. In addition, this methodology of viewing the various facets of a doctrine through the use of multiple terms may prove useful in the study of additional Christian doctrines. Further study of secondary sources which would track the particular facet of Christian perfection that each historical tradition has privileged might yield fruitful data regarding how reductionist thinking may have played a part in each of these movements. In addition, some questions emerge that lie beyond the scope of this thesis. How do we communicate a vision of Christian perfection given

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the ‘baggage’ associated with the terminology? What term(s) should be privileged in contemporary settings?

6.5 Conclusion

The contribution of this thesis is a renewing of Christian perfection as a vision for evangelism, which can hold conversion and discipleship in tension, thus repairing the fragmentation. This thesis proposes a new vision for evangelism that aligns more with the process of making disciples as observed in the early Methodist movement. When the telos of Christian perfection is applied to evangelism, the tendency is to see the long-term process versus a short-term effort to convince people to make a decision of faith. Telos does not mean something that happens at the end, but something that guides the entire journey, and should be the starting point of our thinking, not merely the conclusion. The decision of faith is a crucial waypoint in the journey, but it is not the destination and a vision of Christian perfection. If evangelism has the telos of Christian perfection, the work of evangelism can be understood to be complete at the point of conversion. However, without the unifying telos of Christian perfection, the result is the fragmentation of conversion and discipleship. If the telos is understood to be conversion, then discipleship may be neglected. On the other hand, if the telos is understood to be discipleship, then conversion may be lost as a significant waypoint and the work of evangelism is incomplete. Evangelism intentionally aims at conversion as a waypoint, but it always has the vision of Christian perfection in mind helping to ensure the continuation of the journey of discipleship. Evangelism in the Wesleyan spirit is communicating a vision of the life that is made possible by the power of God in Jesus Christ and walking with the recipients of that vision as they experience conversion and are
moved to work out their salvation with fear and trembling in a life of continued discipleship marked by holiness and Christ-likeness.
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