

10. John Wesley and Children

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John Wesley, whose life spanned the eighteenth century (1703-91), was not an educational theorist himself and did not set any new trends in the area of child psychology. As the founder of Methodism and one of the important English theologians of his time, however, Wesley has had a continuing influence on one of the largest Protestant denominations worldwide.

Wesley's attitude toward children is often caricatured simply as a harsh reflection of his mother's dictum: "In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will."¹ It is true that he did say, "Break their will, that you may save their soul,"² and the daily regimen for the students in his Kingswood School seems very harsh these days. Nevertheless, his views were very much in keeping with the prevailing English perspectives of the day. And his interactions with and concerns for children indicate a much more compassionate view than one might expect, given his writings on original sin and his strict regulations for Methodist schools.

1. Letter, Susanna Wesley to John Wesley (July 24, 1732), in *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings*, ed. Charles Wallace Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 370. See also John Wesley, the entry dated August 1, 1742, in *Journal and Diaries II*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975-), 19:287 (hereinafter cited as *Works*).

2. John Wesley, Sermon 96, §9, in *Works*, 3:367.

Attitudes toward Children in Eighteenth-Century England

Although there is no consensus on the history of the concept of childhood, some analysts have felt that the idea that children were "little adults" was relatively common in medieval Europe.³ Children were often portrayed as miniature adults, with small adult features, wearing small adult clothes, positioned in traditional adult stances. The art and literature of the period reflects a typical expectation that children should, as soon as possible, act like adults. Within this framework, success in child rearing could be measured by how early children actually did become "grown-up." According to Philippe Ariès, the "discovery of children" culminated in the eighteenth century.⁴ This shift in view, however, was not necessarily a good thing for the children themselves. If the previous view put unnecessarily great expectations on young children, the new view gave them very little credit for any good possibilities. Children, now seen as inferior to adults and needing to be governed strictly by them, fell prey to a repressive and tyrannical concept of the family, typified by the harsh Puritan view.⁵ Lloyd De Mause characterizes this eighteenth-century stage in the evolving treatment of children in Western civilization as "the intrusive mode."⁶

Behind these views of childhood, however, lies a theological debate on the nature of humanity that has consequences for the way young people were treated — are children by nature innocent, good beings, or are children by nature evil, depraved beings? Are children to be distinguished by their inherited corruption, marked by an inability to know or do what is "right" in a proper (adult) sense? Or are children characterized by a natural purity and innocence that provides a different conception of moral boundaries that should apply during their early years? The former view, characteristic of Puritans and evangelicals, could result in severe discipline as the parents tried to "bend the twig" into a religious shape. The latter view, attributed to Rousseau, might result in more allowance of "childish behavior" and a concomitant reduction of strictness.

Although Puritans and evangelicals typically stressed original sin and had a reputation for being hard on their children, the correlation of these views is neither simple nor universal. Nor are their attitudes toward children, in what-

3. Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1962), 33.

4. Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, 398-404; for criticisms of and alternatives to this view, see 12-13, 110, 120-21, and 162-63 in this volume.

5. See Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1-3, characterizing Ariès's views.

6. Lloyd De Mause, *The History of Childhood* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

ever combination, necessarily new in the eighteenth century.⁷ While many evangelicals could easily demonstrate total depravity, both theoretically and practically, in the lives of children, many others also held to the belief that even unbaptized children who died would go to heaven. And while a concern for salvation did seem to drive the stereotyped harshness of the attitudes within these groups toward child rearing, an idealized positive image of childhood also emerges within the traditional religious terminology of these groups — “to become as a little child,” “to believe as a child,” “teachable as a little child,” “innocent as a child.” These phrases, echoing biblical language, appear throughout Puritan and evangelical rhetoric.⁸ In fact, this literature often refers to the soteriological goal in terms of one becoming “a child of God.”

Although the publications of major writers within groups such as the Puritans during this period may reflect a particular view of children, the practices of the parents in that same group, as reflected in their private diaries, rely much less on theological argument and are less harsh than one might expect.⁹ Even the use of total depravity to understand the child’s inclination to rebellion might lead a parent to sympathize with the child’s plight rather than to hate or punish the child.¹⁰ The Puritans signal a new interest in children by giving non-traditional names to their children, such as Prudence, Chastity, and Tribulation, and by creating a separate body of literature for children.¹¹ In this literature, the Puritans explicitly stress the necessity of redemption and the rejection of worldliness, a perspective that, while it may have contrasted markedly with the Anglican inclination of the time to promote maintenance of the social order, was not exactly innovative.¹² And while the Puritan portrayal of children as exemplars of a true and living faith does in fact turn the tables on the view of children as “little adults” — in these cases, giving lessons to adults on the manner

7. A useful survey of these critiques is found in Susan Willhauck, “John Wesley’s View of Children,” Ph.D. diss. (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1992), 68-71.

8. Wesley uses most of these terms, such as “teachable,” “innocent,” “helpless,” “believeth as,” “be directed as.”

9. Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, 103, 148. Philip Greven makes a similar point in his study of American patterns of child rearing, pointing out that one should look at experience more closely than doctrine. See *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 5.

10. C. John Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 127-30.

11. Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, 125-26.

12. Willhauck, “John Wesley’s View of Children,” 88; Greven sees Anglican and Puritan (Evangelical) as the two main concepts of childhood during this period (*The Protestant Temperament*, 12-14).

of true religion¹³ — it was not a totally new development in the evolving attitudes toward children.

In most cases, writers in this period who tried to explain proper methods of child rearing expressed major concern for two things: the education of children and the example provided by persons in contact with children. Most leaders felt that religious education did play an important role in the training of children and that parents were important in the process. As might be expected, however, one of the areas of dispute was the question of just what role religion might play in both situations — whether it should be the main feature of, or merely supplemental to, the educational process, and whether proper profession of faith by the parents was essential to their children's salvation.

The Puritan concern for children and their education resulted in the foundation of several educational institutions. Some of the Dissenting academies became well-known for their rigor and excellence. John Wesley's parents, Samuel and Susanna, were both raised in Dissenting ministers' families, and Samuel was educated at Dorchester School, one of the Dissenting academies. But both parents became staunch Anglicans in young adulthood, so that the family in which John was raised bore the influence of both traditions.

Susanna Wesley's Views on Child-Rearing Methods and Education

In his last years, Samuel Wesley indicated that his wife, Susanna, had given him "eighteen or nineteen children." One would have thought his count would have been more precise, he being both the father and the parish priest who was responsible for keeping the parish baptismal records. What is known for sure, however, is that ten of the Wesley children survived infancy. With the aid of wet nurses, maids, cooks, gardeners, butlers, and other help, the Wesley family managed to survive on the income of a country rector. The image of Susanna Wesley overwhelmed by the responsibility of taking care of nineteen children at any given time is by no means accurate. Of the ten who survived, no more than five or six resided at home during any given period.

Susanna's method of raising these children left a positive impression on her son John, and during his days as a tutor at Lincoln College, he solicited from her a description of her techniques and rules, which he published in his

13. See James Janeway's *Token for Children*, republished by JW (Bristol: Farley, 1749).

journal at her death.¹⁴ This account, published as well in his *Arminian Magazine* in 1779, provides an important source for John's own views on child rearing and education.

Much of Susanna's method is a reflection of typical eighteenth-century theory, found in Locke and Milton.¹⁵ Mrs. Wesley's primary interest in religious education fits very much into Milton's view of education, that the end of learning was to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining the knowledge of God aright.¹⁶ And Susanna's aim to "conquer the will" of children exhibits a similar intention as Locke's concern for the necessity of teaching children "compliance" to parental will.¹⁷ Many of her specific instructions exhibit what might be called imposed formation. Pushing this point very hard over several paragraphs, she sees that an indulgent parent will lead to a headstrong child, which will result in sin and misery.¹⁸ Although she recommends teaching children to "fear the rod," which she seems on occasion to have used, she does not appear to have been a severe disciplinarian.¹⁹ And although Locke does assume

14. The entry dated August 1, 1742, in *Journal and Diaries II*, in *Works*, 19:286-91.

15. Alfred H. Body, *John Wesley and Education* (London: Epworth Press, 1936), 34, 49. "In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them to an obedient temper." See the entry dated August 1, 1742, in *Journal and Diaries II*, in *Works*, 19:287.

16. Body, *John Wesley and Education*, p. 34. See her comment that when the will is thoroughly conquered, "then a child is capable of being governed by the reason of its parents" (*Susanna Wesley*, 370), which is rather close to Locke's argument that obedience to parents is important, because by submitting "his will to the reason of others," the child prepares for adulthood, when he will "submit to his own reason, when he is of an age to make use of it." See John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 145; see Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society since 1500* (London: Longman, 1995), 63.

17. Willhauck, "John Wesley's View of Children," 96. See also Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 147; and Philip Greven, *Child-Rearing Concepts, 1628-1861* (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock, 1973), 28.

18. "I cannot yet dismiss this subject. As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children, insures their after-wretchedness and irreligion: Whatever checks and mortifies it, promotes their future happiness and piety" (*Susanna Wesley*, 370).

19. "Fear of the rod" is a common phrase used by many people, including Susanna Wesley and John Locke, to indicate a positive instrument of child rearing, but as Greven points out, firsthand accounts seldom indicate the actual practices used to conquer the children's wills (*The Protestant Temperament*, 38). Susanna Wesley does not, in fact, say how such fear was implemented or how often the rod might have actually been used. In a more recent work, Greven appears to have forgotten his earlier caution and portrays an exaggerated view of Susanna as an exceedingly cruel woman in whose home "beatings were a normal part of daily life." Given the lack of actual evidence (there are no firsthand accounts to indicate the

"correction by the rod" as an acceptable method of punishment, he seems to have more moderate views than Susanna on the propriety and frequency of corporal punishment.²⁰ Neither one, however, seems to have ignored the possibility that excessive punishment could result in what we now call child abuse.

Some of Susanna's regulations, such as expecting the children always to cry softly, may seem unreasonably harsh to us today, but they were in keeping with the traditional Puritan view of her day. Her feelings on the matter are often quoted: "When turned a year old (and some before), they were taught to fear the rod, and to cry softly; by which means they escaped abundance of correction they might otherwise have had; and that most odious noise of the crying of children was rarely heard in the house; but the family usually lived in as much quietness, as if there had not been a child among them."²¹ Locke makes these points as well: "Crying is a fault that should not be tolerated in children. . . . [Obstinate crying] requires severity to silence it, and where a look or a positive command will not do it, blows must."²² Susanna realized that the use of the rod was not acceptable to some parents, but she was convinced that the truly cruel parents were those who, "in the esteem of the world . . . pass for kind and indulgent." For, as she pointed out, allowing stubbornness and obstinacy to develop in a child would result in consequent punishment, the severity of which would be as painful to the parent as to the child.²³

On the other hand, some of Susanna's ideas seem very modern, such as not punishing a child more than once for the same infraction and not succumbing to a child's desires in order to stop the crying.²⁴ Perhaps her most progressive design was to promote the education of the girls in the home on an equal footing with the boys. Susanna's eighth "by-law" was perhaps her most forward-looking: "That no girl be taught to work till she can read very well; and then that she be kept to her work with the same application, and for the same time, that she was held to in reading. This rule also is much to be observed; for the putting children to learn sewing before they can read perfectly is the very reason why so few women can read fit to be heard, and never to be well understood."²⁵

actual daily practices in the Wesley household), his rhetoric is unjustifiably prejudicial: "her hostility toward her infant children," her "assaults and violence," her "persistent use of pain," etc. See *Spare the Child* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 19-20.

20. Locke, however, is much more explicit that corporal punishment should be used sparingly, for cases of obstinacy, and does not believe that "fear of the rod" results in long-term success; see *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 148-50.

21. *Susanna Wesley*, 369.

22. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 218.

23. *Susanna Wesley*, 370.

24. *Susanna Wesley*, 370, 372.

25. *Susanna Wesley*, 373.

Typical of the period, Susanna was responsible for the education of the ten Wesley children in their home. Susanna began with her children on their fifth birthday, teaching them the alphabet and then teaching them to read the Bible. Although her own aptitude in foreign languages has been exaggerated, her learning was remarkable for the times and is best exhibited in the theological comments in her correspondence with her children.²⁶ This interest in learning she seems to have successfully transmitted to most of her children. John Wesley went on to Charterhouse School, and his brothers were both educated at Westminster School, these schools being among the finest in England. All three of the Wesley boys followed in their father's footsteps by attending Oxford University. Samuel Jr. became a schoolmaster at Blundell's School at Tiverton in Devon. His sister, Emily, became a schoolteacher in Lincoln and eventually opened her own school in Gainsborough. And another sister, Hetty, published poetry in at least four periodicals, including *The Poetical Register* and *The Gentleman's Magazine*, a leading London literary rag.²⁷

John Wesley's Views on Child Rearing

John Wesley's views on child rearing appear to be largely derived from his mother.²⁸ His sermon "On Obedience to Parents" repeats her views on the necessity of obedience ("breaking the will") of the child in order to allow for learning. He seems convinced of the need for this conquest to happen as early as possible, most effectively by the age of two:

Why did not you break their will from their infancy? At least, do it now; better late than never. It should have been done before they were two years old: It may be done at eight or ten, though with far more difficulty. However, do it now; and accept that difficulty as the just reward for your past neglect.²⁹

26. For example, see *Letters I*, in *Works*, 25:159-60, 164-67, 172-73, 178-80, 183-85, etc.

27. Frederick E. Maser, *The Story of John Wesley's Sisters; or, Seven Sisters in Search of Love* (Rutland, Vt.: Academy Books, 1988), 22, 66.

28. Although he had no offspring himself, John Wesley incorporated the topic of raising children into several sermons, most notably Sermons 94-96: "On Obedience to Parents," "On the Education of Children," and "On Family Religion" (*Works*, 3:333-72). Although he follows many of his mother's ideas regarding child rearing and commends her for governing her children so well, Wesley states that he had never met a woman who could manage grandchildren, including his own mother, who "could never govern one grandchild" (*Works*, 3:358).

29. Wesley, Sermon 96, "On Obedience to Parents," II.5, in *Works*, 3:370. See also

Locke presents a very similar argument for early discipline when he talks of settling the authority of the parent over the child, keeping "a strict hand" over them "from the beginning." As he says, "Fear and awe ought to give you the first power over their minds." The resultant "compliance of their wills" will bring awe and respect in the beginning, but should hopefully evolve into love and friendship after the time for the correction of the rod is past.³⁰ But Wesley's view is much more explicitly directed toward the production of a good Christian than a fine gentleman, as was Locke's intention. Wesley's suggestions for child rearing are much more directed toward religious and spiritual growth of the child, as are his views on the education of children.

John Wesley's Educational Views

Since John Wesley married late in middle age and never had any children of his own, his ideas about the education of children must be derived from his writings about education and from the programs of education he established. Wesley produced several explicit publications on education. His "Thought on the Manner of Educating Children" (1783) stresses the importance of discipline and the significance of true religion to a good education. His sermon "On the Education of Children" (1783) is an extended comment on parental responsibilities for education in the family, reminiscent of his mother's letter on educational methods in the Epworth rectory. His "Address to the Clergy" (1756) outlines the necessary elements of a well-furnished mind for the clergy, echoing the tone and details of his father's "Letter to a Young Clergyman," which John published in 1735.³¹ His *Plain Account of Kingswood School* is a combination of historical reflection and pedagogical comment. Wesley also wrote and published materials specifically for use in the educational process, including five grammars (in English, Greek, Latin, German, and French), a four-volume *Con-*

The Doctrine of Original Sin, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 14 vols., ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Nichols, 1872), 9:232.

30. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 146-47. When Locke recommends instilling "fear and awe" through "correction of the rod," does he thereby recommend "beating," as Greven would have us believe Susanna Wesley's use of such terminology would imply? It appears, in fact, that neither Locke nor Wesley ever actually recommended beating anyone of any age.

31. Under "acquired endowments" that Wesley feels are necessary, he lists knowledge of the ministerial office, of the Scriptures, of the original tongues, of profane history, of the sciences (logic, metaphysics, natural philosophy, geometry), of the Fathers, and of the world (of humankind). See *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 10:482.

cise (!) *History of England*, a fifty-volume *Christian Library*, and a *Compendium of Logic*, as well as other textbooks for Kingswood School.³²

In addition, Wesley published many other works that relate in one way or another to his educational program. In part, his monumental publishing enterprise itself was part of his educational mission. He published nearly five hundred works on all sorts of topics (many of them multivolume works), including *A Short History of Rome*, *Natural Philosophy* (three volumes), and many others. And he didn't have to publish all this in order to get tenure at Oxford. He was trying to educate his people. In his attempt to make these books available to all Methodists, his connection of preachers served as a network of colporteurs, each of them book agents in their local societies.

Wesley's interest in improving the mind (as part of the whole person) included an interest in both supporting and founding educational institutions. His early interest in charity schools is evidenced by his financial support of the Grey Coat School at Oxford in the 1720s. In the 1730s, he and his friends provided a schoolteacher and supplies for many of the orphans and poor children in Oxford in a school started by William Morgan, one of the Oxford Methodists. Wesley also showed interest in and provided support for a school in Georgia, encouraging his compatriot William Delamotte to teach the children. The conditions at many of the schools in England shocked Wesley. He saw several causes for the problems, such as the tendency for schools to be located in large cities, where corruption abounded. He also felt that most schools were not selective enough, either in choosing students who were not already corrupted or in choosing teachers who had adequate learning as well as virtue.³³ Unable to find a school "free from these palpable blemishes," Wesley decided to start one himself. His educational principles became embodied first in Kingswood School near Bristol, then in the Foundery day school in London, and later in a school at Woodhouse-Grove. His followers and compatriots also established schools with similar programs at Leytonstone (Mary Bosanquet, Ann Bolton, and so on), Trevecca (Lady Huntingdon), and High Wycombe (Hannah Ball).

A survey of the curriculum at Kingswood reveals Wesley's practical implementation of his principles in the area of secondary education. His intent was to include every area of "useful" learning, or practical studies. The main course of study was designed to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic; English, French, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; history, geography, and chronology; rhetoric and logic; and geometry, algebra, physics, music, and ethics. Other topics were soon added, such as painting and astronomy. This scheme was based on the

32. He produced some two dozen works for Kingswood School.

33. Wesley delineates these problems in his *Plain Account of Kingswood School*, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 13:290-92.

typical public-school curriculum, but added music, physics, Hebrew, religious biography, the Bible, and Christian classics. Many of the textbooks Wesley designated for dual use, both for reading and for translation.³⁴

Although most of the students at Kingswood School started the program between the ages of six and nine,³⁵ Wesley also provided "a course of academical learning," which he considered to be comparable to a university curriculum. Wesley's own evaluation of this academical curriculum is unflinching: "Whoever carefully goes through this course will be a better scholar than nine in ten of the graduates at Oxford or Cambridge."³⁶ What others noticed, however, and what is most often remembered, is the strong element of religion, and the rigor of the schedule and discipline. The rules for the children at Kingswood meant rising at four A.M. and retiring at eight P.M.; starting the day with two hours of private and public devotion and ending the day with an hour of private devotion and an hour of public evening prayers; having no time during the day for play; and spending from seven to eleven A.M. and one to five P.M. "in school." Students should at all times be in the presence of a teacher and never be allowed to roam free or have contact with the colliers' children in the neighborhood.³⁷

Wesley was, of course, criticized by some for his approach:

A gentleman with whom I was conversing a while ago . . . on the manner of educating children . . . objected strongly to the bringing them up too strictly; to the giving them more of religion than they liked; to the telling them of it too often, or pressing it upon them whether they will or no. . . . I knew [all this] was quite agreeable to the sentiments of Rousseau in his "Emilius;" the most empty, silly, injudicious thing that ever a self-conceited infidel wrote.³⁸

But I knew it was quite contrary to the judgment of the wisest and best men I have known. I thought, If these things are so, how much mischief have we

34. This curriculum is charted in his "Short Account of the School in Kingswood," in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 13:287-88.

35. *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, XIV.3, in *Works*, 9:278; and "Letter to Joseph Benson" (October 5, 1770), in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 8 vols., ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 5:202.

36. "Short Account of the School in Kingswood," in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 13:389. In the *Plain Account of Kingswood School*, he says, "And as to the knowledge of the tongues, and of arts and sciences, with whatever is termed academical learning; if those who have a tolerable capacity for them do not advance more here in three years, than the generality of students at Oxford or Cambridge do in seven, I will bear the blame for ever" (13:296).

37. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences* (London: John Mason, 1862), 1:164.

38. In 1770 Wesley read Rousseau on education and commented, "How was I disappointed. Sure a more consummate coxcomb never saw the sun!" *Journal and Diaries V* (February 3, 1770), in *Works*, 22:214.

done unawares! . . . how much mischief has been done, and is now doing, at Kingswood, where (if this hypothesis be true) we are continually ruining fifty children at a time!³⁹

In spite of his critics, Wesley stuck by his plan:

Meantime, I can only say, as a much greater man said, *Hier stehe ich: Gott hilffe mich!* By His help I have stood for these forty years, among the children of men, whose tongues are set on fire, who shoot out their arrows, even bitter words, and think therein they do God service. . . . Now, especially, I have no time to lose: If I slacked my pace, my grey hairs would testify against me. I have nothing to fear, I have nothing to hope for, here; only to finish my course with joy.⁴⁰

On one of the touchstone issues of the day, Wesley was very firm — children could be ruined if allowed free rein to play. Here again he is following his mother's lead. Susanna was very clear that close supervision was absolutely necessary. She permitted no loud talking or playing during the hours when her children were being taught, and they were not to run out into the yard or street without permission: "Every one was kept close to their business, for the six hours of school."⁴¹ The rules for the pupils at Kingswood were equally clear: "The children ought never to be alone, but always in the presence of a master" (otherwise they will "run up and down the wood"), and "They ought never to play."⁴² Proper recreation for the children consisted of such activities as walking or working or singing, which gave them respite from their books but also had creative and useful ends.⁴³

Another of Wesley's main principles was that education entails the joining of knowledge and piety, wisdom and holiness. This point is not always clearly understood, just as the phrases associated with this idea are not always accurately quoted: "Unite the pair so long disjoin'd, knowledge and vital piety." This Charles Wesley phrase is often misattributed to John Wesley, but does represent both of their views.⁴⁴

39. "A Thought upon the Manner of Educating Children," in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 13:474.

40. *Plain Account of Kingswood School*, 13:300.

41. *Susanna Wesley*, 372.

42. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 1:164.

43. "Working" seems to have included such activities as gardening and carpentry. Apparently this rule forbidding play no longer applied at the university level. Wesley's diary reveals that he played all sorts of games after he reached twenty years of age, including backgammon, quoits, tennis, and a variety of card games.

44. The phrase comes from one of the hymns in Charles's *Hymns for Children*

The more important point, however, is what the Wesleys meant when they used the terms "knowledge" and "vital piety." Both terms conjure up recognizable caricatures — the thinker and the saint. For the Wesleys, however, there was no disjunction between the two. For them, knowledge is not a purely intellectual attribute but rather a channel of self-understanding, which is crucial for salvation. And vital piety entails not only a devotional stance based on love of God but also a social outreach exemplified by love of neighbor. Wesley reinforces this relationship between the two concepts when he reiterates the idea that "without love, all learning is but splendid ignorance."⁴⁵ John's own use of parallel phrases, such as "wisdom and holiness," also helps to reveal his understanding in this regard.⁴⁶

Wesley's Program of Education

Wesley's approach to education also entailed a particular method and discipline. His program involved a set curriculum of study and strict rules of operation, not unlike the classical scheme of the English public schools but with some innovations. Seven aspects of his design went beyond the typical approach of his day. (1) Wesley's interest in epistemology was reflected in the stress that he placed on the students' understanding of the material they studied. To this end, he encouraged reflection and comprehension rather than rote learning.⁴⁷ (2) He also allowed for students of all ages, including "grey-headed" scholars. His interest in adult education was simply an extension of his own education, which continued throughout his lifetime.⁴⁸ (3) Following

(1763), entitled "At the Opening of a School in Kingswood" (v. 2 of #344 in the 1968 United Methodist Hymnal; v. 5 of #461 in the *Collection of Hymns*, 1780, in *Works*, 8:644).

45. Some scholars attribute this phrase to Augustine, but no one has yet identified the actual source. Wesley makes the point even stronger in a letter to Bishop Lowth (August 10, 1780): "My Lord, I do by no means despise learning: I know the value of it too well. But what is this, particularly in a Christian Minister, compared to piety? What is it in a man that has no religion? 'As a jewel in a swine's snout'" (*The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 13:143).

46. John Wesley uses this phrase at least six times in his writings, though he never quotes Charles's phrase.

47. This is a position in keeping with one of Locke's concerns; see *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 285-88.

48. In the last ten years of his life, Wesley's reading included descriptions of the interior of America and the Chinese empire, recent autobiographies by Voltaire and Olaudah Equiano, classics by Virgil and Dante, and works by William Shakespeare and Alexander Pope. See Richard Heitzenrater, *Faithful unto Death: Last Years and Legacy of John Wesley* (Dallas: Bridwell, 1991), 72-77.

his mother's lead, Wesley promoted female education. As the century wore on, the Methodist connection provided financial support for girls as well as boys who attended school.⁴⁹ (4) Wesley tried very hard to link parents to the educational process. They were expected to meet with the Stewards, or overseers, at school regularly to discuss their children's progress.⁵⁰ (5) The schools were to have a low student/teacher ratio (about 5 to 1) and to allow for the contact of students and teachers in extracurricular activities. (6) Besides boarding schools such as Kingswood, Wesley also started day schools for children who lived at home, such as the Foundery School in London. (7) And Wesley was concerned for children across the boundaries of social and economic class, and was willing to mix them together in the same schools. Wesley felt strongly that all people were children of God and that no one was beyond the need for learning.⁵¹

From the sources available, assessing the differences (assuming that there were differences) between the education provided to boys and to girls is difficult. The number of students supported each year after 1780 by the Methodist connection was nearly equally divided between the two sexes. And the cost per annum, as noted in the *Minutes* of the Wesleyan annual conferences, was equal for both — six pounds.⁵² Evidence from the London charity schools indicates that 75 percent of the poor children, both boys and girls, were able to read.⁵³ Some individual benefactors of the charity schools had a persistent unease about teaching the poor how to read. They feared it might lead to upward mobility or unrest. But they were often assured that the poor children, when they

49. See *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 1:114 (1774): "If any [daughters of preachers] were sent to M. Owen's school (perhaps the best boarding-school for girls in Great Britain), they would keep them at as small an expense as possible." Two girls were sent to M. Owen's school in 1775, but the next year the girls were sent to Publow School. By 1778, girls were admitted to Kingswood. After 1780, if there was no room at Kingswood for the preachers' children, they (both boys and girls) were given six pounds toward their education elsewhere; see *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 119, 124, 135, 145, 156, 164.

50. The Stewards at Kingswood were instructed "every Wednesday morning to meet with and exhort [the students'] parents to train them up at home in the ways of God" (*A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, XIV.3, in *Works*, 9:279).

51. The radical nature of this assumption is underscored by Wesley's design to instruct the slaves on the plantations in America and his personal conversation with a young slave girl in South Carolina. See *Journal and Diaries I* (April 23-27, 1737), in *Works*, 18:180-81.

52. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 1:150, 220.

53. Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Education in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Woburn Press, 1971), 173. The figures were for the parish of St. Mary's, Islington, for the years 1767-1810.

were able to read the Bible, would learn to be pious, remain content with their station in life, and be grateful to their "betters."⁵⁴ Wesley, however, seems to have had no compunction about improving the lot of poor children, so long as they maintained a vital Christian life.

Wesley's approach to education focused on God but relied upon people as instruments of God's will and exemplars of godly minds and lives, as imitators of Christ.⁵⁵ The key individual in Wesley's formula was the teacher, who should be a person of piety and understanding.⁵⁶ In spite of all the lists of regulations for the schools, the emphasis was not so much on rules as upon virtues (we might say values). This combination of an obligation and a virtue ethic resulted in a perspective that allowed for decisions made not only on the basis of right and wrong but also on a scale of good to bad. A virtue approach is based on a model of the good, is impelled by imitation, and results in transformation. This process of spiritual and intellectual formation can be seen in many of the Methodist autobiographies of the period.⁵⁷

Another feature of Wesley's educational program was that it involved changing the whole person — body, mind, and spirit.⁵⁸ Wesley wished that people would always push the boundaries of sin and ignorance, discovering the possibilities of what one might know and become. Self-knowledge is at the heart of this transformative process — people must know that they are ignorant and sinful before they can change. This approach is in tune with John Locke's ideas, as well as those of Johann Amos Comenius and John Milton.⁵⁹ Comenius, who also influenced August Hermann Francke and provided the

54. See, for example, the annual reports of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which supported many charity schools. "An Account of the Origin and Designs of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," in John Heylyn, *A Sermon Preached at St. Sepulchre's* (London: J. Downing, 1734), 3, 15. See also Victor E. Neuburg, *Literacy and Society* (London: Woburn Press, 1971), vi.

55. "Having the mind that was in Christ and walking as he walked" (see Phil. 2:5; 1 John 2:6) was one of Wesley's continuing descriptive explanations of Christian Perfection (another echo of the combination of wisdom and love).

56. See his letter to Joseph Benson (December 26, 1769) in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 5:166.

57. Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*, a monthly publication he founded in 1778, soon became filled with stories of holy living and holy dying by figures historic and contemporary who provided examples for his people to emulate.

58. In his sermon entitled "The Good Steward," Wesley points to this unity with poignant imagery in the midst of some questions that he suggests Christ might ask each believer at the final judgment, including whether he or she had presented his or her "soul and body, all thy thoughts, thy words, and actions, in *one flame of love*, as a holy sacrifice, glorifying [God] with thy body and thy spirit" (in *Works*, 2:296).

59. *Works*, 2:278.

model for Moravian education in Wesley's day,⁶⁰ like Milton, felt that the goal of education was to acquire not only knowledge but also virtue and piety. Wesley aligned himself with these forms of idealism when he quoted William Law's view that "education is to be considered as reason borrowed at second hand, which is, as far as it can, to supply the loss of original perfection."⁶¹ Perfection or holiness, for Wesley, was pure love — love of God and neighbor, made possible by a total reordering of fallen human nature. Wesley never dropped this doctrine of perfection from his theology and never abandoned this ideal for his schools. Education can thus be seen as one means of grace by which the original perfection of creation (a creature of wisdom and holiness), lost in the Fall, could be restored.⁶² The goal of this transformation in the believer is nothing less than a recovery of the image of God, the "one thing necessary."⁶³ As Wesley pointed out,

Scripture, reason, and experience jointly testify that, inasmuch as the corruption of nature is earlier than our instructions can be, we should take all pains and care to counteract this corruption as early as possible. The bias of nature is set the wrong way. Education is designed to set it right.⁶⁴ This, by the grace of God, is to turn the bias from self-well, pride, anger, revenge, and the love of the world, to resignation, lowliness, meekness, and the love of God.⁶⁵

For Wesley, then, the end of education is in some sense the same as the goal of religion. Knowledge and vital piety, wisdom and holiness, learning and love are essentially linked in his vision of God's purpose for humanity.

60. Body, *John Wesley and Education*, 49; see also the essay in this volume by Marcia Bunge, 248-49.

61. "On the Education of Children," in *Works*, 3:348, quoting Law's *A Serious Call to a Devout Life*.

62. "There was still wanting a creature of a higher rank, capable of wisdom and holiness. *Natus homo est*. So 'God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him!'" (from the sermon entitled "The Fall of Man," in *Works*, 2:409). In Sermon 95, "On the Education of Children," §3, Wesley quotes William Law's *Serious Call* on this point: "The only end of education is, to restore our rational nature to its proper state" (*Works*, 3:348).

63. *Works*, 1:310.

64. See Locke's similar comment: "Few of Adam's children are so happy as not to be born with some byass in their natural temper, which it is the business of education either to take off or counter-balance" (*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, 244); quoted by Sommerville, who, on this point, misinterprets the evangelical position, which also sees the corruption of nature in the Fall (*The Rise and Fall of Childhood*, 141).

65. "A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children," §7, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 13:476.

Religious Experience among Methodist Children

Two of the questions that confronted Wesley concerning religious education and spiritual experience were these: What is the basic nature of children, and at what age could a child have a bona fide conversion experience?

Anglican theology taught that baptism, infant or otherwise, resulted in justification, forgiveness of sins, especially in the first instance the guilt of original sin. Therefore, the image of the terrible child as proof of original sin does not necessarily follow. But the alternate image — of childish innocence — also presents problems within a theology that speaks of being “justified and yet a sinner.” Wesley does not have a consistently clear position on this matter. He does on occasion speak of evil in children, such as when he analyzes the question of suffering, which he sees as a penalty from God for human evil:

Why do infants suffer? What sin have they to be cured thereby? If you say, “It is to heal the sin of their parents, who sympathize and suffer with them”; in a thousand instances this has no place; the parents are not the better, nor anyway likely to be the better, for all the sufferings of their children. Their sufferings, therefore, yea, and those of all mankind, which are entailed upon them by the sin of Adam, are not the result of mere mercy, but of justice also. In other words, they have in them the nature of punishments, even on us and on our children. Therefore, children themselves are not innocent before God. They suffer; therefore, they deserve to suffer.⁶⁶

On the other hand, there are a few occasions when Wesley slips into the rhetoric of innocence. Take, for example, his observation at the home of an English gentleman and his family in Holland: “Here were four such children (I suppose seven, six, five, and three years old) as I never saw before in one family: Such inexpressible beauty and innocence shone together!”⁶⁷ These momentary expressions of anthropological optimism seem to be grounded more in the immediate impressions given by young personalities rather than in any consistent theological reflection on their soteriological condition by Wesley. In any case, based on his own experience, Wesley was convinced that any grace received by an infant at baptism would soon be sinned away, and the child would stand in need of God’s forgiveness again: “I believe, till I was about ten years old, I had

66. *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part III, Sec. II, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 9:318.

67. *Journal and Diaries VI* (June 15, 1783), in *Works*, 23:273-74. The previous day he also observed the women and children in Rotterdam, “who were surprisingly fair and had an inexpressible air of innocence in their countenance” (272).

not sinned away that 'washing of the Holy Ghost' which was given me in baptism."⁶⁸

On the basis of firsthand observation and personal experience, Wesley presumes that a child can "know God" and thus be truly happy. Looking back on his years at school in London, when he was ten to seventeen years old, he observed that he was not then in such a state of assured salvation.⁶⁹ On the other hand, he records in his journal several accounts of children who have had what he considers to be an authentic religious experience by as early as the age of three.⁷⁰

Occasionally revivals broke out among children in the Methodist societies and at Kingswood School. Elizabeth Blackwell sent Wesley an account of one such revival in Everton under John Berridge in 1759. Among those who experienced great spiritual struggle, and in some cases justification, were three young people, ages eight, ten, and twelve. The eight-year-old boy was said to have "roared above his fellows and seemed in his agony to struggle with the strength of a grown man."⁷¹ John Walsh's account of this continuing revival a few weeks later includes notice of children, ages six and eight, who were "crying aloud to God for mercy."⁷² He also notes that one eleven-year-old girl, "who had been counted one of the wickedest in Harston," was "exceedingly blessed with the consolations of God," and a "beggar-girl" of seven or eight "felt the word of God as a two-edged sword and mourned to be covered with Christ's righteousness."⁷³

Young people were often the core of local revivals, and Wesley occasion-

68. *Journal and Diaries I* (May 24, 1738), in *Works*, 18:242-43.

69. He recalled that while he was at school, he was not in this condition, since he did not remember one week that he would have gladly repeated. See Sermon 77, "Spiritual Worship," III.2, in *Works*, 3:98.

70. See *Journal and Diaries III* (June 28, 1746), in *Works*, 20:143; see also 9:470-71. There are several similar accounts of children under age six, such as the following: "I buried, near the same place, one who had soon finished her course, going to God in the full assurance of faith, when she was little more than four years old" (20:39 [September 16, 1744]).

71. *Journal and Diaries IV* (May 30, 1759), in *Works*, 21:196. One account, describing the revival at Weardale, uses adult imagery to describe the demeanor of children who were converted: "Phebe Teatherstone, nine years and an half old, a child of uncommon understanding; Hannah Watson, ten years old, full of faith and love; Aaron Ridson, not eleven years old, but wise and stayed as a man; Sarah Smith, eight years and an half old, but as serious as a woman of fifty; Sarah Morris, fourteen years of age, is as a mother among them, always serious, always watching over the rest, and building them up in love." See *Journal and Diaries V* (June 5, 1772), in *Works*, 22:334.

72. *Journal and Diaries IV* (May 30, 1759), in *Works*, 21:214.

73. *Journal and Diaries IV* (May 30, 1759), in *Works*, 21:215, 219.

ally noted that their transformed lives became models for the adults. In February 1779 he notes in his journal that he preached at Lowestoft, where there had been "a great awakening, especially among youth and children; several of whom, between twelve and sixteen years of age, are a pattern to all about them."⁷⁴ Five years later, after describing the work of God in Epworth, he again emphasized his view that children often play a crucial role in revivals: "God begins his work in children. Thus it has been also in Cornwall, Manchester, and Epworth. Thus the flame spreads to those of riper years; till at length they all know him, and praise him from the least unto the greatest."⁷⁵

Wesley's Views of Children in the Bible

Ironically, Wesley does not carry this view of the significant role of children in the Methodist revivals into his commentary on the New Testament,⁷⁶ even in places where there seems to be a natural opening for such observations. Wesley's comment on one central passage (Matt. 19:14: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven") diffuses the possible impact by pointing to a possible double meaning of "children" — "either in a natural or spiritual sense."⁷⁷ His view of the sinfulness and ignorance of children is evident in his commentary on Matthew 18:4. Wesley there points out that, to enter the kingdom of heaven, we must become as little children, which he explains is to be "lowly in heart, knowing yourselves utterly ignorant and helpless, and hanging wholly on your Father who is in heaven for a supply of all your wants."⁷⁸ His comment on the nasty children in Luke 7:32 is also expectedly harsh: "So froward and perverse, that no contrivance can be found to please them." But he does not hold to such a view consistently. "In wickedness be ye infants" (1 Cor. 14:20) he understands to mean "Have all the innocence of that tender age."

In matters related to spiritual development, then, Wesley portrays a number of different views of the condition and role of children. But in matters of physical well-being, Wesley is consistently pro-active in trying to provide for their health and welfare.

74. *Journal and Diaries VI* (February 18, 1779), in *Works* 23:117.

75. *Journal and Diaries VI* (June 8, 1784), in *Works*, 23:315.

76. The following references can be found in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, first published in 1755.

77. See also his comment on Mark 9:37 — "either in years, or in heart."

78. See also his comment on the parallel verse in Mark 10:15: "As a little child — as totally disclaiming all worthiness and fitness, as if he were but a week old."

Wesley's Programs to Assist Children

Children were, for Wesley, not only potential exhibits of both original sin and personal piety but also special targets of educational and revival activities. They were also a special object of his charitable activities. From the beginning of the Wesleyan movement at Oxford in the 1720s, children were one of the primary focuses of concern, primarily children of the poor. Wesley's financial accounts from 1725 to 1735 record that he contributed to the local charity schools, that he purchased wool and yarn for the children in the workhouses, that he paid a teacher to staff a school for children, that he visited children in prison, and that he bought food for poor families.

These activities became part of the Methodist program as the movement developed during the century. In addition to the establishment of schools for children, including Sunday schools, Wesley's broad interest in helping the poor in general also included the poor children in many specific ways. His medical clinic, loan program, subsidized housing, and collections of money, food, and clothing were primarily aimed at helping poor families. And these were not simply channels for dispensing resources to "others" — the poor were more often than not associated with the Methodist societies. Wesley felt it was very important to take the food and clothing directly to the poor, to visit them "in their hovels," to eat with them and come to know their plight firsthand.⁷⁹

During his travels, Wesley often made a special effort to visit workhouses, orphanages, poorhouses, and prisons, as well as schools, to check on the plight of the children and poor families in those regions. His writing does not contain the typical vindictive rant of the period against the ineffectiveness of the parish charity system.⁸⁰ Rather, he directed his time and effort to soliciting funds from known benefactors (he called it "begging") in order to support his own program of activities to improve the lot of the poor.

79. This principle can be seen in his comments on the subsidized housing he established: "In this (commonly called The Poor House) we have now nine widows, one blind woman, two poor children, two upper servants, a maid and a man. I might add, four or five Preachers; for I myself, as well as the other Preachers who are in town, diet with the poor, on the same food, and at the same table; and we rejoice herein, as a comfortable earnest of our eating bread together in our Father's kingdom." See *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, XIII.2, in *Works*, 9:277. See also his letter to Miss March (June 9, 1775) in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 6:153.

80. There is a whole literature of criticism of the poor laws, workhouses, and other aspects of the parish charity system, typified by the pamphlet by a onetime Calvinist Methodist preacher named Joseph Townsend, *Dissertation on the Poor Laws, by a well-wisher to mankind* (London, 1786), and a more extensive work by William Bailey titled *A Treatise on the Better Employment, and more Comfortable Support, of the Poor in Workhouses* (London, 1758).

Conclusion

Although not a father himself, John Wesley took his work with children seriously. He was concerned enough about their intellectual and spiritual welfare that he also warned the Methodist preachers under his supervision either to spend regular time with the children in their societies or else to cease being Methodist preachers and go back to their trade.⁸¹

Wesley's view of children follows no previously established program or theory. Much of what he taught and practiced he learned at home as a child himself. Some of what he believed about children he had read or learned from colleagues. His views are not fully consistent or complete. He could as easily use children as empirical proof for the reality of sin as use them as models for the type of faith that Christ requires of us all. Wesley realized that children had limits, that they should not bear the burden of being considered the same as adults. And yet he also knew that some children had a capacity for knowledge and love that exceeded that of some adults.

Much of Wesley's terminology and methodology for discipline is presently out of vogue and frequently interpreted in exaggerated forms by modern eyes and norms. As is the case with many of the rules for his movement, however, the goals and principles of discipline and education should not be overlooked because of the dated nature of the practices used to implement them at that time.

The goal of Wesley's work was not simply to improve the level of education in England or to reduce the level of poverty. His main concern for child rearing was not so much to improve the psychological health of parents or to create a class of genteel adults in the country. His primary concern for children was the same as his concern for the rest of humankind — to help them know and love God. This knowledge and piety could result in children's and adults' lives that exhibited a faith that works through love. This goal was not part of an intellectual or doctrinal program that was primarily educational or social or religious. Wesley's actions were propelled by his own desire to love God and neighbor, which is simply the heart of what he called holiness or "Christian perfection."

Although Methodism today has largely lost this theological terminology, it continues to press the traditional Wesleyan program of educational and social programs that reflect this concern for all of God's children. Methodism in

81. His rule was for the preachers to spend at least an hour a week with the children, if there were at least ten in any society. If the preacher claimed he had no gift for that work, Wesley's response was, "Gift or no gift, you are to do it, else you are not called to be a Methodist Preacher." See *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 1:69.

John Wesley and Children

America, beginning early in the nineteenth century, became notable for its establishment of colleges and universities, hospitals and homes, and social programs for unfortunate and disadvantaged persons. One current program, for instance, known as the Bishops' Initiative for Children in Poverty, has provided a worldwide effort to improve the condition of children around the globe. This effort is just one of many, but is typical of the legacy of John Wesley.