THINKING ABOUT ECONOMICS AND ETHICS LIKE A WESLEYAN

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to contribute to Wesleyan thinking about ethics in one field--economic activity and policy.

However, the attempt to develop Wesleyan ethics provokes a couple of questions: What are the prospects for devising such an ethics and Is the notion of distinctively Wesleyan ethics desirable? Responses to the first question are provided by several recent Wesleyan theologians who believe that John Wesley's theology gives some guidance for reflection on the ethical issues. James C. Logan has characterized Wesley's theology of culture as transformation because of Wesley's belief that the doing of God's perfect will is a realizable goal within history. This belief is, he believes, capable of unleashing "an ethical dynamic" (Logan, 368). His point about the ethical optimism of Wesleyan theology is endorsed by Theodore Run on, who has developed the idea of cultural transformation by annexing to it Wesley's concept of sanctification. He holds that for Wesley

> sanctification [is] the active presence of love expressed not only in word but in deed. . . . This is the power of the Kingdom that begins to exercise its humanizing impact in the present age. . . . Sanctification is the enlisting of the individual in God's own work--the redemption of his creation (Runyon, 34).

For Wesley human ethical activity is an indispensable part of the divine salvation that is being worked out within the world (Runyon, 28).

So the prospects are promising for developing Wesleyan ethics. The entire direction of John Wesley's theology and ministry points to the importance of ethical inquiry. However, the development of Wesleyan ethics has not yet been accomplished, especially as that ethics is to be applied to economic activity. Wesley himself did not fashion one. Although he occasionally made pronouncements on economic issues, they are helpful today mainly for their humanitarian spirit (Madron, 115). His specific analyses are out of date, being responses to the economic systems of his day, systems that were chiefly mercantilist in character and only incipiently capitalist (Haywood, 314-321). Wesley's followers have

not fashioned one; their zeal has been more evident in social action than in social theory (Schilling, 197 and Wogaman, 391), an imbalance that suggests the need of more intellectual work to match the often impressive practical endeavors of Wesleyans.

As to the second question (Is the notion of distinctively Wesleyan ethics desirable?), one salient fact is that John Wesley made no claim to originality and, far from seeking a distinctive theology or ethics, sought only to be faithful to the heritage of Christian faith and practice. In other words, it is most un-Wesleyan to seek distinctively Wesleyan ethics. Wesley's idea of the catholic spirit impels the Wesleyan to recognize the ecumenical character of theology and to eschew narrow parochial approaches. As a result, Wesleyan ethics draws on the wisdom to be found within the entire Christian tradition.

What, then, does Wesleyan ethics when applied to economics, look like? Above all, love must be the central concept, for if Wesleyan theology stands for anything, it stands for the centrality of love (Hynson, To Reform the Nation, 56; Madron, 105-6). The New Testament, especially the First Letter to the Corinthians, insists that love is a matter of seeking the common good. In particular, love guards against a selfish view of economic activity. Love also points toward the proper goal of economic activity--human good. Economic activity and policy must be constantly directed toward the satisfying of human needs and the securing of the material conditions of human good.

However, love is not sufficient as an ethical principle. In fact, it is more than a little bit vague, for it does not specify how to calculate the common good--whether all should receive equal amounts of the common good, or whether some may receive more than others. It is better to conceive of love as a compendium of values such as justice and stewardship. These supplementary values give specificity to love and are far more useful for directing ethical activity.

Justice, as applied to economics, compels recognition that every person is due the minimal goods necessary to conduct human life in a way befitting a being created in God's image. Of course, no one knows in advance what this minimum is; justice demands that there be public discussion and

agreement on this issue. Also undecided in advance is how the goods that a society produces beyond its needs are to be distributed and used. In other words, what sort of gap, if any, between rich and poor can justice tolerate? It is an open question whether justice requires that every member of society receive equal shares of that society's goods or only equal opportunity to acquire those goods.

Love also comprises stewardship, which suggests duties toward God and future generations. Because of these duties, humanity bears a responsibility for the wise use of the earth's resources. Here Wesleyan ethics touches on environmental ethics, which is grounded in duty to God the Creator and which also implies the importance of using the world's resources in such a way that future generations will be able to enjoy a standard of living consonant with being's created in God's image. The principle of stewardship is an alternative to merely humanistic ethics and provides a universal context for Christian ethical inquiry--universal in space because it relates Christian ethics to the material world as well as to human society; universal in time because it forces consideration of future generations, both of humans and other living beings.

Wesleyan ethics must also take into account the doctrine of sin. This is the case not only because without sin there would be no need of ethical inquiry, but also because, in a sinful world, none of these values--love, justice, stewardship--can be maximally achieved without diminishing the others. That is, although in theory there is a prefect harmony of these values, in practice there is no harmony. The implementing of one value necessarily involves the diminishing of another. As a result, decisions must be made as to which values will be subordinated and which will be emphasized.

This fact introduces another aspect of Wesleyan ethics--its pragmatic character. The adjudication of values and their implementation in the practical sphere are political decisions; they always involve negotiation and compromise. On the one hand, Wesleyans, with their perfectionist heritage, may be repelled by the idea of compromise; on the other hand, John Wesley's well-known pragmatic attitude toward the practical affairs of church and life suggest that Wesleyan ethics is the sort of ethics that stands for accomplishing as much good as is possible in any given situation. As a result,

Wesleyan ethics is essentially political ethics, for it is concerned with actualizing certain values to the extent that they can be actualized. It does not remain content with describing the ideal realm of values but is instead prepared to use appropriate political means to bring about good.

In this essay I will review the following issues: first, how the Bible should be used in ethics; then the central values that compose love--stewardship and justice--and their application to the subject of human labor; next, a case study in the conflict of values--the debate about the merits of the free market and its relation to secondary values like freedom and private property; finally, some directions for further inquiry that are necessary if Wesleyan ethics is to be more completely articulated.

The Use of the Bible in Ethics

Wesleyan ethics is forthrightly based on the Bible. Scripture remains a storehouse from which the Christian ethicist takes new as well as old treasures. However, it is one thing to assert the importance and authority of the Bible; it is another thing to have a coherent account of the precise way in which the ethicist should employ the Bible. On this point ethicists extensively disagree. Nevertheless, there are some constants in the Wesleyan tradition that provide for a measure of agreement. Wesleyans acknowledge that the Bible provides the point of departure for ethical thinking. Further, Wesleyans agree that Scripture can by understood and confirmed only when tested with experience and reason and with the help of the larger Christian tradition. This appeal to experience, reason and tradition underlies some characteristic features of Wesleyanism: First, Wesleyans will refuse to be dogmatic about a supposed teaching of the Bible if it cannot be confirmed in the experience of the people of God. Second, the Wesleyan ethicist will not hesitate to use his or her critical and rational abilities in order to discern Scripture's meaning and to test interpretations of the Bible. Third, the Wesleyan will have an ecumenical openness to insights from other streams of the Christian tradition and will be eager to learn from the history of Christian thought.

These general principles will probably command widespread acceptance in Wesleyan circles.

However, they do not offer much in the way of specific prescription for ethical activity. The question of how the Bible is to be used in specific cases is still unanswered. Wesleyans may be tempted to adopt the opinion of some Christian writers who assert that Biblical prescriptions can be applied directly to modern economic issues without much interpretive fuss. They argue that the Bible is nothing less than a blueprint for national economics (North, 27 and 33-34). Others less obdurately insist that the Bible provides at the very least a particular direction for a nation's economic policy (Gish, 138-140 and 145-146).

However, Wesleyans should resist this temptation to find in the Bible a blueprint for national economic and social policy, lest they rashly assume that employing the Bible in ethics is an easy and direct matter. Economic realities change over time with the result that Biblical precepts appropriate to ancient economic realities may not be directly and specifically helpful today (Halteman, 36-37). For example, there has been a great change in the idea of wealth since Biblical times. Ancient people

> thought there were only so many goods and services available to be distributed to the people. Increasing the economic pie by expanding productivity over time was not part of their thinking. . . . They thought this constant pie of production was fixed permanently at roughly an amount equal to what it took to keep the population alive and well but not expanding (Halteman, 54-55).

Because of this view, wealth was regarded as "hoarded future consumption that contributed nothing to future production." What ancient people lacked was the capitalist notion of wealth that produces new wealth (Halteman, 56). As a result, the teachings of an ancient document like the Bible should not be lifted, without further consideration, out of their original social context and forced into a modern context.

In summary, while no one can know in advance what the Bible will say about this or that issue in economics, we can at least be sure that Wesleyans will take the Bible with the utmost seriousness and use all available resources to understand it rightly. Following John Wesley's lead, they will refrain from wooden literalistic interpretations of the Bible and will keep in mind the overall purpose of Scripture instead of fashioning precepts on the basis of isolated bits of the Bible.

Ethical Norms Commonly Used in Christian Ethics Today

Instead of seeking to apply particular Scriptural passages to today's ethical issues or nostalgically longing for a return to Biblical law, Wesleyans will most likely draw certain ethical norms from the Bible that indicate God's will generally for humanity.

Contemporary Christian authors and denominations appeal mainly to two such norms: stewardship and justice. Protestants are especially attracted to the idea of "stewardship," perhaps because of the predominance of the idea of covenant in Protestant theology. Roman Catholics tend to use the idea of "justice" more than stewardship since their ethics relies on the ideas of natural law and the social nature of human being. In general Protestant ethics rests more on humanity's obligation to God while Roman Catholic ethics rests more on human beings' obligation to each other.

Where do Wesleyans stand on this subject? That is not easy to determine, for neither covenant nor natural law has been a mainstay of Wesleyan theology. Besides that, John Wesley himself engaged in no sustained ethical thinking and his followers have historically proved quite eclectic. However, in view of the claim made by Wesleyans to be neither Roman Catholic nor Protestant exclusively, perhaps the wisest policy, or at least the most Wesleyan, will be to acknowledge the claims of both stewardship and justice as leading norms and to give up the attempt at a single dominant norm that should characterize Wesleyan ethical thinking.

Stewardship

Stewardship implies that responsibility for something has been delegated by one individual to another. Familiar examples of it include the oaths of office taken by public officials and the appointing of trustees to oversee an estate. In each case the steward is given a duty to perform on behalf of another. In moral discourse, stewardship implies that the steward does not have absolute authority over the object of his or her care. So a trustee has discretion in the disposition of an estate but not the freedom that comes from ownership.

The Bible neither defines 'stewardship' nor applies it systematically to economics; however, there are Scriptures in abundance that presuppose the idea of stewardship. The most notable of these is Genesis 1:28 according to which God, having created humans in the divine image, commanded them to rule over the world. The idea of stewardship is present in the notion of delegation: God has delegated rule over the earth to humanity; therefore, human use of the earth lies within the bounds of God's providence and is subject to God's moral demand. This point is reinforced by Psalm 24 which asserts "The earth is the Lord's." Genesis 1:28 and this Psalm together imply that while ownership belongs to God, use and its concomitant responsibility are given to humanity.

This responsibility makes humanity answerable for the use of such gifts as freedom and power, a responsibility that places moral limits upon their exercise. It is also a matter of wisely using the resources of the earth to provide materially for humanity's material well-being. Since humanity has the use but not the ownership of the earth, it should not use the earth's resources in any arbitrary way. Instead, God establishes limits on what may legitimately be done with the created world and demands that its use be in accord with God's own desires. Furthermore, not only the redeemed people of God bear this responsibility; stewardship pertains to humans as created beings, not as redeemed being and so it is a universal duty. Everyone must answer to God the creator for the use of what God has provided.

The idea of stewardship finds a clear resonance in Wesleyan theology emphasis on human responsibility. Admittedly, Wesleyans have more often exercised the idea of responsibility as a buttress for the notion of freedom than as a means of discerning our ethical duty. Nevertheless, there are resources here for Wesleyans to exploit for constructive thought about economics and ethics. Human responsibility and responsiveness suggest both our ethical duties and our interconnectedness with God and with each other.

Justice

However, the idea of stewardship in itself, apart from other norms, does not indicate how to allocate resources or in what measure, or to what extent it is permissible to exploit natural resources, or which goods and services to produce. In itself stewardship functions mainly as a limiting concept in economic analysis by disclosing that there are moral limits to actions. It prohibits certain actions (e.g., selfishly squandering what God has provided), but does not expressly state what should be done. Other norms such as justice are required for more specific ethical prescriptions. Wesleyans, with their renowned and socially progressive activism, should be naturally inclined toward issues of justice.

The problem is that justice is a much controverted subject among Christian ethicists. The disagreement extends even to the meaning of the word justice. Some hold that, in Scripture, justice is a virtue that the individual exercises (e.g. by helping the poor), not a prescription for a nation's economic policy. Such a definition would discourage the state from entering the economic arena with the aim of ensuring a predetermined distribution of goods. This definition likens justice to individual righteousness and rejects its application to politics and the idea of distribution (Nash, 21-22).

However, most Christian ethicists embrace a wider meaning of justice, acknowledging that it includes the proper distribution of goods. For these ethicists, the question is, "Which economic system comes closest to bringing about this proper distribution?" Some display considerable confidence in the free market, stipulating only that it can ensure justice when supplemented by such Christian virtues as concern for the poor and simplicity of life (Diehl, 91 and 102). Others are more guarded about the free market's ability to bring about justice. Their reservation is based on the observation that, while the market may allow rational agents to transfer goods fairly, it excludes those who, because of past injustices, have no goods to transfer. In other words, the market is merely a mechanism of transfer; action by the state is required to redress the effects of unjust distribution of the past (Beversluis, 40 and 46). The contemporary debate about affirmative action illustrates this problem. If the state merely ensures that current economic transactions are fair, justice may still not be served, for unequal possession of wealth in the present may result from unjust acts of distribution in the past. Guarding

current transactions could serve only to protect the results of these unjust acts. So, according to this view, the state should seek to compensate those in the present who suffer from past unjust acts because the market is unable to provide compensation. Others are even more critical of the market, holding not only that the market cannot ensure justice, but also that it is an obstacle to justice--that it is an instrument of injustice (Gathered for Life, 84, 86 and 90).

Wesleyans have historically been sympathetic to the call to justice; however there has never been a consensus among Wesleyans as to the precise meaning of 'justice' or its social consequences. A recent book by Theodore Jennings, Jr. has sought to remedy this lacuna in Wesleyan ethics by stating in unequivocal terms that Wesleyan theology should attack "the principles of capitalism and the ethos of accumulation and consumption of wealth" (Jennings, 116). Wesley, he suggests, questioned the identification of the church with the propertied and powerful and thus opened "the way to a fundamentally radical socioeconomic ethic" (Jennings, 43). Wesley's ministry to the poor indicates that "the welfare of the poor should be the litmus test of all activity" (Jennings, 66). Holiness, in this view, consists in standing apart from the world, especially in its addiction to wealth (Jennings, 148-149). Holiness also implies evangelical economics, because it is a matter of devoting to God the whole of life and because the economic sphere is "the sphere of human agency par excellence" (Jennings, 154-155). This opinion holds wealth to consist in whatever goods one possesses beyond what is required for well-being. Jennings asserts that such wealth in truth belong to the poor--keeping it for oneself is in fact theft (Jennings, 106-110).

There is no question that Jennings has represented an idea that was important to John Wesley. Wesley was concerned not only for the material condition of the poor but also for the spiritual condition of the wealthy. He shared the New Testament's teaching that wealth is a great spiritual danger and wanted Methodists to embody monastic simplicity and even poverty. However, can Jennings' otherwise laudable view serve as the basis of Wesleyan social ethics? Can it serve as a national social policy? If all Christians or even all citizens acted according to this prescription, would the pressing national

problem of poverty be alleviated? Regrettably, the answer is probably "No." The redistribution of wealth to those with need for the purpose of raising their level of consumption would result in the postponement but not the elimination of poverty. Jennings scores some good points with his criticism of a consumer-oriented society; however, his admonition that Christians give away their surplus wealth may save them from the perils of riches but will most likely not bring an end to poverty.

For the most attractive treatment of justice, the Wesleyan ethicist will turn to Roman Catholic theology. The Roman Catholic view is that a society's prosperity cannot be measured simply by the sum of its produced goods. Instead the index of prosperity must include justice, that is, the way in which the goods are distributed throughout the society. This is because all economic activity aims at the development and perfection of each individual within the community. Justice demands the removal of immense economic inequalities. It implies that individuals possess the fundamental rights that are essential for dignified life in community. It is, finally, measured by our treatment of those who are powerless--society's treatment of the powerless is the yardstick of its level of justice (Justice in the Marketplace, p. 119; Building Economic Justice, par. 86).

Roman Catholic thinking about justice is grounded in the created dignity of human being and the predominant importance of the human person for economic ethics. Two foundational statements are found in the Vatican II document, Gaudium et Spes:

> The subject and goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person, which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life (Justice in the Marketplace, 174).
>
> There is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. . . . Hence the social order and its development must always work to the benefit of the human person if the disposition of affairs is to be subordinate to the personal realm (Justice in the Marketplace, 175).

The idea of human dignity complements the idea of stewardship and provides direction for action. It affirms the centrality of human good in ethical considerations and emphasizes the importance of justice.

Justice, then, is one of the concrete forms that love takes. It deserves the Wesleyan's highest attention because of John Wesley's own special concern for the poor. Of course, it is one thing to be concerned about the plight of the poor and even to take active steps to alleviate their pain; it is another thing to develop a sound theory of justice. Wesleyans have been a bit slack on the theoretical aspect, but it is precisely to this aspect that requires attention if we are to discern the forms that justice should take.

Human Labor

As a way of showing the application of stewardship and justice in the sphere of economics, I will consider the subject of work from Roman Catholic and Protestant perspectives.

The Roman Catholic view associates the idea of work with the image of God and thus with human dignity: Because humanity is created in the image of God, it seeks to actualize itself through work. In a remote way human labor imitates the creative activity of God. For this reason the value of work depends on the person who works and not on the kind of work performed (Justice in the Marketplace, 298-299). Further, because the value of work has its origin in the worker and not in the product, labor is more important than capital: labor is the primary efficient cause in production; capital is merely an instrument. Capital is simply the accumulation of human labor (Justice in the Marketplace, 308-309). The point here is that capital is not an autonomous factor in production with magical properties but rather a means for humans to actualize their nature.

Protestants have a slightly different view of work. They hold that work is good because it is a means by which stewards use the creativity that God has given to us. They also emphasize the social nature of work, the fact that cooperation is necessary for God's gifts to us to be expressed (Graham, et al., 99-100). Work is far more than a means of obtaining material goods for the sustaining of life. It is also a spiritual activity by which we make ourselves into truly human persons. So, work or working conditions that diminish a person's humanity or which do not allow for the expression of our creativity

conflict with Christian ethics.

As noted above, a Wesleyan theory of labor will draw on both sides of the Roman Catholic-Protestant divide. Wesleyans, neither exclusively Protestant nor Catholic, will gladly appeal to both stewardship and justice in fashioning a view of human labor.

Wesleyan pragmatism will concern itself with bringing the conditions of labor into conformity with these principles. In a modern economic situation, jobs are so specialized that the individual's contribution to a product may be small and work may consist of restricted and repetitious acts. What does it then mean for work to express our created dignity? Some work is so menial as to frustrate the process of becoming truly human through work. At the very least, Christian ethical considerations compel us to support social policies that ameliorate the mind-numbing and body-deforming aspects of physical labor. Examples of such policies include vigorous governmental inspection of the workplace, insuring compliance with safety laws, and the enforcement of child labor laws overseas.

Capitalism: A Case Study in the Conflict of Values

Introduction

In this section I will illustrate the point that in a sinful world there are inevitable conflicts of values. All values cannot be simultaneously affirmed to the same degree; choices must be made and hierarchies of values established, some assuming a superior position, others a subordinate position. The merits of the capitalist system of economics presents a case study in this conflict, for arguments for and against capitalism hinge on the choice between freedom and justice.

Freedom and Justice

Supporters of the free market claim on both historical and logical grounds that only the free market can guarantee individual freedom from undue governmental encroachment. They thus elevate freedom to the highest rank. Critics of capitalism argue that freedom must be balanced by or even made subordinate to justice.

On the one hand are those Christians who advocate capitalism as a bulwark of human freedom (Griffiths, 89-90). First, they define freedom as absence of unnecessary governmental intrusion into the private sphere. One can observe here the classical liberal fear that unless there is some counterweight (like the free market) to the state, the result will be governmental totalitarianism. Second, they support their association of capitalism and freedom by criticizing the post-World War II communist regimes of eastern Europe. That is, they draw attention to those countries where private property was most thoroughly eliminated and individual freedom minimized and draw the conclusion that there is an inseparable connection between politics and economics. They regard the totalitarian communist regimes as proof of the demerits of socialism and of the need of a free market.

On the other hand are those Christians who are critical of the classical liberal notion of freedom, holding it to be incompatible with Biblical values. They want freedom to be balanced by an emphasis on social obligations (Hay, 162). Some go so far as to reject the liberal valuation of freedom by contrasting it with the Kingdom of God's emphasis on the total welfare of all people. They point out the contrast between the free market's auction-based system of pricing goods and the need-based voluntary sharing characteristic of God's Kingdom (Halteman, 51).

The dilemma is that neither freedom nor justice can attain a maximum without diminishing the other. Complete freedom would threaten justice by allowing the powerful and wealthy to establish their own rights at the expense of others. Perfect justice could only occur by a presumably coerced curbing of freedom. As a result, an adjudication of this conflict of values is necessitated, an adjudication that must remain an open question as long as people disagree on the relative values of freedom and justice.

Private Property

This question of freedom and justice is given concrete form by the idea of private property. Advocates of the free market commonly associate freedom with private property. They argue that freedom from the overweening power of government can be maintained only if individual possess

wealth-making property and the power that results from it. Christians who agree with this view offer Biblical arguments for private property. They assert that the right of private property is supported by Old Testament law and custom, which granted to each family autonomous use of their property within the limits of stewardship responsibility (Griffiths, 56). The fact that land was the principal means of producing wealth in ancient Israel confirms, the advocates assert, Old Testament support of private property.

Other Christians have attacked the priority of property rights, arguing that such rights are not absolute. Although conceding the right of private property, they deny that it is so important that it should be the foundation of economic ethics. Instead of emphasizing the prerogatives of private property, they stress the obligations of stewardship (Hay, 78-79). Further, they challenge the assumption that present-day distribution of property rests on just distributions in the past. Finally, they believe the Old Testament idea of the Jubilee (Leviticus 25) refutes the thesis that property may be owned absolutely by stipulating that land was eventually to revert back to its original owners (Hay, 161).

The Roman Catholic document Gaudium et Spes provides a balanced view of property rights and freedom. It denies absolute freedom with respect to private property. It teaches that all material goods including property should be used in light of the fact that God created the earth for the common good. Material goods have a social, not merely a private, function. Even the right to private property is violable, for those in extreme poverty are morally justified in taking what they need from the riches of others (Justice in the Marketplace, 190-191).

However, it also recognizes the value of private property, which contributes "to the expression of the personality" and furnishes the individual "an occasion to exercise his function in society." It also safeguards the autonomy and freedom of the person and is a condition of civil liberties. Consequently, it can be appropriated by the state, in socialization, "only by the competent authority, according to the demands and within the limits of the common good and with fair compensation" (Justice in the Marketplace, 192). The Roman Catholic church is here stating that neither governmental authority nor

private property is absolute: private property is a legitimate check to governmental power, but must be relinquished if the interests of the larger political community are compelling.

We can see the dilemma between justice and freedom at work in the current debate about governmental foreclosure of private lands needed for ecological restoration and the need to provide fair compensation for lands so designated. Wesleyan pragmatism compels recognition that in an imperfect world, every political decision will involve a compromise of values. Wesleyans will attempt to bring about as much good as is possible under these conditions while maintaining the vision of the perfect realization of God's will even in the midst of hard choices and difficult decisions.

Concluding Wesleyan Postscript

In this postscript, I will sketch out some of the issues that Wesleyans should address if Wesleyan ethics is to attain completeness.

One issue is deciding which theological doctrines Wesleyans should employ as the basis of Wesleyan ethics. Scholars are undecided as to whether John Wesley's ethics is based mainly on the doctrine of creation and concomitant ideas like the image of God, natural law and prevenient grace (Hynson, "Implications," 380-381 and Logan, 365) or on the doctrines of redemption and Christology (Schilling, 205 and 208, Hynson, To Reform the Nation, 52 and 56). Fortunately, there is no need of an either-or choice between these options; however clarity is needed regarding the foundation of Wesleyan ethics.

Another issue concerns certain theological issues that are troublesome. Two that are especially problematic to Wesleyans (because they have never been the object of sustained reflection) are the Kingdom of God and the interpretation of the Old Testament. Understanding of the Kingdom is important for clarifying the motivation for ethical Christian activity in the world; greater appreciation of the Old Testament is required because the Bible's teaching about justice and stewardship is located almost exclusively in the Old Testament.

Wesleyan theology must come to terms with the idea of the Kingdom of God and the theological issue of eschatology. Wesleyan denominations have wisely avoided making pronouncements about the end of the world; however, Christian ethics must build on some conception of the Kingdom of God. In particular, a tradition's view of the Kingdom and of eschatology at least partially determines the tradition's stance toward social and political issues. For example, apocalyptic sects have been understandably reticent to become involved in political action and economic issues because of their conviction that all such things will soon pass away. So Wesleyans, if they are to contribute to Christian ethics, must think hard about eschatology and the consequences of their eschatology for social and political involvement. I suggest that we regard the Kingdom as those occasions when people do what is pleasing to God. The Kingdom is already present to the extent that people obey God; however, the full measure of its presence lies still in the future because we do not obey God continuously and consciously. Further, the Kingdom can be found outside the bounds of the Christian churches, just as the good Samaritan (Luke 10) and Cornelius (Acts 10) were pleasing to God while standing outside the historic people of God. According to this view, the political arena is not cut off from the Kingdom--indeed, the kingdom may be just as present in government as in the church. This does not mean that political activity is equivalent to building the Kingdom. It does mean that the church should not ignore the potential presence of the Kingdom outside the boundaries of the visible church and should recognize political activity as a legitimate expression of the ethics of love.

Wesleyans must also come to terms with the Old Testament's concern for justice. This presupposes a grasp of how the Old Testament relates to the New. Some streams of the Protestant tradition, notably those of the radical reformation (the "Anabaptists") have emphasized the New Testament's differences from the Old; others, especially Reformed Christians, have regarded the Old and New Testaments as two forms of the same covenant. Anabaptists have been somewhat suspicious of the Old Testament; Reformed Christians have regarded the Old Testament as a fully valid source of revelation. Not surprisingly, Christians of the radical reformation have tended to eschew direct political

involvement while Reformed Christians have eagerly encouraged involvement in social activism and political efforts.

Wesleyan churches, especially the smaller ones, have uneasily combined these two historic traditions, leaving to the individual the decision as to what sort and level of social and political involvement is appropriate. There is a certain strength to this position, for a denomination as such should not be directly involved in the political sphere. Such involvement would constitute ecclesiastical encroachment on public policy-making. Nevertheless, by leaving the matter up to individual choice entirely, the churches risk giving the impression that social and political involvement is unimportant. For this reason, it is imperative that the Wesleyan churches consider their corporate responsibility to inquire into social and political matters; however, before this can happen there must be some understanding of the relation of the Old Testament to the New. The point of departure should be the fact that the New Testament writers regarded the New and the Old as different, yet continuous. The New does not cancel the Old; it continues and perfects the Old. As a result, we should regard the Old Testament's concern for justice and stewardship as fully a matter of revelation as any teaching of the New Testament.

In broad outline, then, Wesleyan ethics as applied to economic theory and practice begins with the Bible. It seeks there its foundations. It is also sensitive to the difficulties of interpreting the Bible and applying it to present-day ethical issues. It accordingly takes into account the importance of rational coherence in ethics, the role of experience in confirming the results of Biblical interpretation, and the wisdom of the Christian heritage. It avoids narrowly provincial approaches and instead makes common cause with Christians of other traditions, seeking agreement wherever possible.

At the center of Wesleyan ethics is the command to love God and neighbor. However, it implements love concretely by attending to the Bible's message of justice and stewardship. Thereby it avoids abstract theses and keeps in mind the importance of fashioning ethics in the context of contemporary issues.

Wesleyan ethics is also pragmatic. On the one hand, this pragmatic character implies mindfulness about the need of practical involvement and activism--ethics is not just theory; on the other hand it suggests recognition of the fact that in political activism compromise is inevitable. Wesleyan pragmatism always seeks the greatest amount of good possible, using its principles of love, justice and stewardship as guides. It tempers the optimism inherent in the Christian view of the Kingdom with a sober acknowledgment of the imperfection and sinfulness of the world.

Thus conceived, Wesleyan ethics can be just the sort of apologetics that the church today needs. Gone are the days when theologians could imagine that intellectual arguments for Christianity were the main task. Today, in addition to the necessary job of defending Christianity intellectually, the church must open up another apologetic front--a practical one, consisting in good works and love of neighbor and based on sound theory. Such practical apologetics should be part of the face that the church presents to the world and a means by which it may compete against the religious challenges of the day.

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