CONVERSION IN THE BENEDICTINE AND WESLEYAN TRADITIONS

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SANCTIFICATION OR CONVERSION?

In a symposium on sanctification in our two traditions I have chosen to address the topic of conversion, so I need to spend some little time explaining why I have done so before undertaking it and endeavouring to formulate some questions.

The term sanctification is immediately recognisable as belonging to the tradition of John Wesley and of later Methodism. It has remained central to that tradition in the modern era when the heightened interest in ecclesiology, which it shares with other Christians, might well have lessened the emphasis on the individual quest for holiness. Modern Methodism, in its ecumenical outreach, its contribution to the developing sense of the corporateness of the Christian life, is in a sense re-discovering the earliest, Wesleyan, emphasis which did not allow the pursuit of holiness in isolation from others. John Wesley's dictum: "...no holiness but social holiness," said it all, and still does so, but the word "social" now has a wide and profoundly ecumenical connotation, as Christians explore together the idea of the church as communion. But with all the changes of emphasis there have been, sanctification remains prominent in the Methodist tradition. The convoking of this symposium is an indication that such is the case.

The situation is somewhat more complex in the Roman Catholic tradition

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and, within it, in the monastic one. In fact, among us the term "sanctification" could have a slightly old-fashioned ring about it, harking back to Tridentine Catholicism and its habitual concern with being sanctified by grace, especially sacramental grace, with gaining merit— to use terms familiar from old controversies. Present-day Catholicism uses the language of "conversion" much more readily in connection with the Christian life, and seems more concerned with the process of change than with discerning in a quantitative way the stage reached, the degree of sanctification. The word *metanoia* crops up not just in textbooks but in practical parish manuals, and it belongs too in the terminology of monastic ascesis. What is understood here, however, is not simply a conversion event of the kind antecedent to justification by faith in the Reformation tradition but a process which belongs or realises itself in a liturgical context and by that fact has an ongoing and communitarian aspect. It thus merges into a phase of the Christian life which in the later Reformation tradition is called sanctification.

An excellent example of how this thinking has affected the post-conciliar reform of our liturgy may be seen in the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults, which provides the ritual for the stages of conversion in the life of an adult who wishes to be baptised into the Roman Catholic Church. This is often presented as having relevance for Catholics baptised in infancy, and so may be used in modified form for the reconciliation of those who, while baptised, have never been practising members of the church or have long been lapsed. That it should have this wider relevance follows from the way initiation is understood in the rite itself. The conversion of the adult is presented as an essentially ecclesial event, occurring through the development of a network of relationships within the community. It is seen too as a comprehensive life process involving gradual maturation through a series of stages, though this does not exclude a possible sudden moment of illumination. In any case, the person's transformation embraces the dimensions of cognitive development, affective growth and behavioural change. Clearly, when a person exhibiting these characteristics seeks gradual assimilation into, and is welcomed by, a community which is itself in via, those who are already members are challenged to reflect in their own lives a similar programme of conversion, so that the journey of the neophyte becomes one shared with the community. The R.C.I.A. has as a result come to be seen as an important instrument of renewal in the church as a whole, one which, because it is integrated into its liturgical life, has more profound possibilities than the charismatic movement with its outwardly similar challenge. Consequently, renewal courses based on this notion of conversion are not unknown, especially in the U.S., where the highly developed organizational skills ensure that this interior exercise will have a visible dimension— resulting in evenings spent with programme kits on laps in parish halls.

There's something of a contrast there with early mornings long ago listening to a field-preacher on a hillside, but in a sense it's a shared enterprise. The very evocative word 'conversion' makes one think of those early days, though of course the long gap of the years makes it all the more problematic to establish a basis for comparing like with like. It has been too an ambiguous term in the Evangelical tradition. Wesley himself was troubled over claims made by some about the completeness of conversion in their lives, and its significance among his followers did change in the various periods.
from the Oxford days to the time of field-preaching to the nineteenth-century American camp-meetings. For all that, it is fascinating that the idea of conversion should be a point of contact between our two traditions, a more understandable one than sanctification, I think, in the present state of things. What each of our traditions might learn from that fact is what I should like to explore, while confining myself, on the Roman Catholic side, to considering Benedictine life as a special form of church membership, one which has of course been charged with elitism, from within as well as from without the Catholic tradition. The judgment of David Knowles is I think fair as well as concise: "While in one aspect monasticism is the first great fragmentation of the image of the single Christian family, seen from another angle it is an example of the inevitability and value of development giving birth to a speciality of which the surplus can, so to say, be ploughed back into the common store."9

There are important differences of context between conversion in the monastic life and that of which the progress is marked by the stages of the R.C.I.A. The most obvious one is that the monk, rather than preparing for baptism is seeking to live out the implications of baptism already received. But there is a continuity also between the two ideas of conversion—as already pointed out in relation to the church community which receives a convert in baptism. The monk's search for God derives its constantly developing and communitarian nature from the liturgy by which he is daily nourished: the monk is in fact more dependent than most for his spiritual progress on the liturgy. To see what conversion means in Benedictine life, however, it will be necessary to give first a brief account of the totality of that tradition.

CONVERSION IN MONASTIC LIFE

The Benedictine Tradition

Benedictine monachism is an institutional form of the Christian life based on observance of the Rule of Benedict. Cistercians and some others follow it as well as ourselves, but these remarks are confined to Benedictines. Our monasteries are largely autonomous. A man or woman joins a particular community and in general belongs to it for life. We do not spend some years in one house and then transfer to another as do members of the various religious orders and congregations. Accordingly, membership of the monastic community is initiated, not by the well-known triple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, which are a medieval formulation, but by an older declaration: first, a promise of stability, which is an opting for that particular community as one's choice for life; then, of fidelity to monastic life—the Latin text conversatio has implications of conversion; and, thirdly, of obedience—and all of these say something, I think, about the idea of conversion with which we are concerned. This promise, or triple promise, is given in one sentence of the Rule (RB 58:1), and the Rule remains at the heart of the monastic enterprise. It is not, it should be said, a book of rules, a code of laws, creating an environment of Law rather than Gospel, but an inspirational text, full of Scriptural quotations. To such an extent is this true that nowadays, because of the complexities of modern life, documents known as Constitutions, which serve groups of monasteries, are used to regulate the affairs of a monastery, how it conducts its internal management and external business, though these
Constitutions tend also to have an inspirational as much as a legal character. It could hardly be otherwise, because the Rule itself rarely lays down anything absolutely. Benedict the legislator was always conscious of the importance and the needs of the individual.

The intention of the Rule, the purpose for which it was written, is set out in its prologue. Its very first word is: “Listen.” There follows quickly the exhortation: “If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts...” (Ps. 95:8). and it then asks if there is anyone here who yearns for life (Ps. 34:13). There follows the significant sentence: “Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom” (1 Thess. 2:12).

I think it a pity that just two hundred years after the dissolution of the monasteries, and with copies of the Rule available in the Bodleian Library, John Wesley, the Oxford student, gives no indication of having read it. How much it might have challenged and inspired him if he had been introduced to it by one of his friends as he was to Taylor's Rules for Holy Living, Stanhope's paraphrase of a Kempis and the critically important A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life of William Law.

The Rule is a call to life in a community under the leadership of an abbot, a life characterized by prayer in community several times a day, prayerful reading, especially of Scripture, work, much of it simple domestic work necessary to sustain the life of a community which tried to be self-sufficient. Down through the ages what the observance of the Rule has tended to make of a man has been variously described. Newman's description of the life in the early centuries is very beautiful, and gets to the heart of the matter: “To the monk, Heaven was next door: he formed no plans, he had no cares... He went forth in his youth to his work and to his labour until the evening of life... He ploughed and sowed, he prayed, he meditated, he studied, he wrote, he taught, and then he died and went to Heaven.” That was said of the early centuries of monasticism. By the middle ages, the monastic life had become much more cultic, monks spent a great part of their day in choir, at the liturgy, and the word conversus, “converted,” enters the vocabulary of the monasteries with the introduction of a new type of membership designed for those of limited educational attainment and unsophisticated spirituality who performed the manual work, leaving the choir monks free to devote themselves to protracted liturgical services. These lay brothers were called the conversi and were thought of as having been “converted” from the world. The choir monks were usually people brought up in the school system of the monasteries and could be thought of as growing into the idea of sanctification through the round of liturgical offices and of course of ascetical practices, especially humble obedience.

To simplify matters greatly and condense a great deal of history, let me say that the choir monk came thus to be seen as a vir liturgiae. The liturgy had become his special task. Many monasteries were in fact founded and endowed by noble patrons precisely so that this round of prayer might bring blessings on the founder and his family and territories here, and come to their aid hereafter. This role came gradually to subsume the entire identity of the monk. Even in the last century, the monasteries' contribution
to the liturgical revival strengthened that impression, not least in the minds of monks themselves.

But the modern desire for the return to sources, sparked off both by the Second Vatican Council and by the celebration in 1980 of the fifteenth centenary of Benedict’s death, has led to the realisation that this is not quite the vision of the Rule itself. There is a good deal of detail in the Rule about what psalms are to be said and when, but the core teaching in the Rule is about something else: the monk’s response to God in humility and obedience, good works, as well as, of course, community prayer. It says little about private prayer.

Conversion and Humility

I said that the monk responds to God in humility and obedience. In the Rule there is a wonderful interplay between these two distinct yet inseparable qualities, but if a priority has to be established between humility and obedience I think it clearly belongs to humility. A chapter is given to each and each is referred to in the chapter given to the other, but that on humility (RB 7) is more fundamental, and sums up the preceding chapters of ascetical teaching. In it the way of humility is presented as a double movement of ascent and descent, the genuine “ascent” extending over a descending movement of self-emptying (Cf. Phil. 2:5-11). This way of describing humility is found in the tradition of monastic literature, and draws upon the biblical episode of Jacob’s ladder (Gen. 28:12). To recount RB 7’s treatment of the twelve steps of humility would be beyond the scope of this study. But it is important to note that they describe a transition from fear to love: the first step on the ladder of humility is that a man “keeps the fear of God always before his eyes” (RB 7:10). I think the last, the twelfth, step will be familiar and attractive to Methodist ears: “after ascending all these steps of humility the monk will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear…. All this will the Lord by the Holy Spirit graciously manifest in his workman now cleansed of vices and sins” (RB 7:67, 70).

The gift of perfect love was the subject of dispute within Methodism in the 1750s as many who were converted through field-preaching claimed to have received it instantly, and the same problem arose later on in American Methodism. Wesley himself was cautious about accepting such claims. He recognised the complexity of the issue. He had no timetable for the emergence of this gift and neither does the Rule in its much-quoted reference, at the end of the prologue, to progress in the monastic life and in faith: “we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delights of love” (RB PrOf. 49). Wesley was more concerned with the newly converted showing evidence of their conversion in the steadfastness of their faith and in their style of life. The Rule too, and the tradition of the desert fathers on which it draws, is concerned above all else with the conversion of the monk, in the sense of the re-creation of his heart by the power of the Spirit.

But if we were to analyse the whole chapter concerned with this conversion it might not appear to turn on the notion of faith, and therefore not be in accord with the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. In fact, the word faith does not occur even once in the entire chapter, but I would still think that the teaching is in
accord with that of Wesley on reconciliation and re-birth, and justification and sanctification. The basis of the Rule's teaching on humility, and, to speak more generally, on conversion is the conviction, inherited from the desert fathers, that because of the fall of our race the human heart needs to be recreated. This need remains even when the person is baptised, has received the benefit of Christ's redeeming death and thus has the Spirit of God within; in fact it becomes possible because the person is baptised. All of this could be considered a paraphrase of Wesley's sermon on "The Circumcision of the Heart" where he says:

...that the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ, of one who is in a state of acceptance to God, is not either outward circumcision, or baptism, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him that created it; is one of those important truths that can only be spiritually discerned... Circumcision of heart implies humility, faith, hope, and charity."

The monk's recognition of this need for "circumcision of the heart" underlies all the steps of humility but is particularly clear in step no. 7: "...a man not only admits with his tongue but is also convinced in his heart that he is inferior to all and of less value..." (RB 7.51). Recognising that this is the case is the critical step towards recreating the heart. It is enough to allow the Spirit to make a "break-through" in his life. Until the final breakthrough between the two parts of the new Channel Tunnel between France and England had taken place all that had been done up to that could not achieve the desired result—travel from one side to the other. But once that was made the situation changed fundamentally. In the monk the breakthrough by the Spirit occurs when the grace of God comes up against his self-will and conquers it, and he acknowledges his helplessness. Wesley put the same truth in this way: "At the same time we are convinced that we are not sufficient of ourselves; that without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing but add sin to sin." There is much bating to be done before that break-through occurs, however. It's interesting that the great penitential psalm, Psalm 51, uses the term "contrite" for the heart acceptable to God; contrite comes from "commiserate," to batter. "Batter my heart, three-personed God," John Donne said.

Break-through does tend to give the impression of suddenness, but in the monastic tradition the idea is rather more a decisiveness which need not be inconsistent with gradual progress and the upward struggle involved in the twelve steps of humility. Another favored image is of the Holy Spirit planting new life in the human heart and breaking up the hard soil it finds there in order to send its roots deeper. There's a strong suggestion there of how painful and gradual the whole process is.

WESLEY'S "CONVERSION"

Can all that be thought to have anything in common with Wesley's own journey and the teaching which emerged from his reflection on his own experience and on the manifest results of his preaching in the lives of others? At first sight the differences appear significant. The Rule and the monastic tradition are concerned with recognizing
the need for the Spirit's decisive though possibly gradual action. Wesley, for his part, distinguished between justification and sanctification, a distinction introduced in the second generation of the Reformation and developed particularly by Calvin. According to this, justification is instantaneous but sanctification gradual. A look at the story of what is traditionally described as Wesley's own 'conversion' experience may be helpful, however. If we may concentrate here on the period beginning with his return journey from the United States in January 1738, we note that his diary entries were typically: "I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh, who will convert me? Who, what is it that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief?" His quest is for conversion but is expressed very much in terms of faith, of which, as noted above, there is no mention in the decisive teaching on conversion in the Rule. I would suggest though that the thought pattern of an eighteenth-century Anglican, one who was attracted by the Moravian understanding of grace, would be much influenced by the insistence in the Reformation tradition on the believer's adhesion to his own act of faith. The Catholic reservation about this approach, as you know, is to consider that the act of faith can thereby become unduly reflexive, a preoccupation with the act of belief, so that instead of resting simply on its object, Christ, it remains in some sense centered on its subject, the believer. I think that can give rise to a very subjective view of reality and this seems to have been the case with Wesley. A few days after the climactic, "heart-warming," experience at Aldersgate Street, when he felt that now he did trust in Christ, he informed the company in James Hutton's house that "five days before he was not a Christian," and for his trouble received Hutton's rebuke: "Have a care, Mr. Wesley, how you despise the benefits received by the two sacraments." As an Anglican he should not have forgotten his baptism; but it is true too that his attitude was based on a distinction he made between the sacrament and its effects. I hesitate over such criticism, however, because of the demonstrably beneficial effects Wesley's new experiential grasp of faith had on his subsequent life and teaching. Certainly, I do not wish to deny the reality of the assurance of faith he received in that experience, nor its significance as the point of departure in the pneumatological soteriology he was to develop, but I make the point in order to suggest that while he was wedded to a particular theological view, the human and spiritual reality was that he was engaged in the same process of surrender and acceptance of the mercy and grace of God as the monk who endeavours to practice humility. His own description of what had happened, as opposed to his analysis of his prior state, was that he did now trust in Christ.27

CONVERGENCE AND QUESTIONS
I think Methodists may find reason to be pleased with this comparison. The monastic asceticism of humility and obedience, which it has not been possible to describe in detail here, is much concerned with the breaking up of the ground, the destruction of the 'flesh', so that the new life may send its roots deeper. I think this is in accord with Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace and repentance, which I believe to be an important contribution of his to, and development of, the Reformation doctrine of justification. The imagery used by our two traditions is interesting. There is the attractive
description by Wesley himself of repentance, faith and holiness, as it were, respectively porch, door, and the reality of religion.\(^{14}\) The prologue to the Rule sees the conversion I have been describing as the narrow way leading to pure love, but the distinction between repentance and faith (porch and door) is not clear, the conscious act of faith not critically important. The monk progresses almost imperceptibly from fear to love, and the community dimension of his life, one senses, figures largely in defining the narrow path (RB Prol. 48). The promise of stability (of commitment to a community), and of obedience, concern the exterior context in which the inner journey of conversion takes place.

The question of works in relation to justification is in the background to any comparative discussion of the process of conversion in our two traditions. I quoted earlier from the prologue: “Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom” (RB Prol. 21). “The performance of good works…”

It is interesting in this regard to recall Wesley’s instinct, after his return from a visit to the Moravian community at Herrnhut in the autumn of 1738, to look again at the Anglican doctrine of justification by faith.\(^{25}\) By 1744, as the Minutes of Conference indicate, he had reached an understanding of the place of works after justification, and he could say in the Minutes of 1770: “every believer works for as well as from life.”

These Minutes did prove controversial but the ensuing clarification, in 1771, shows that while Wesley held fast to justification by faith, he knew that “no one is a real believer who doth not do good works, where there is time and opportunity….”\(^{30}\) Like the author of the Rule, and like St. James, he knew that faith must be evidenced in the lifestyle of the believer. Wesley was not so much concerned with the performance of good works as with the attitude of obedience to God in which they were done.\(^{31}\) He would have appreciated the significance of a subtle phrase in the prologue to the Rule: it refers not to the obedient works of the monk as having saving significance, but to the “work of obedience” (RB Prol. 2).\(^{32}\)

The value of works in the life of the justified, has always been a sensitive issue in the relationship between the Reformation and Roman traditions.\(^{33}\) It would obviously be less of a problem if there were more common ground established at the level of justification and sanctification. In this area, the report of the English R.C. Methodist Committee on Justification (1988) is helpful. It holds that “difference of usage with regard to terms like justification and sanctification does not appear to indicate any real difference in overall belief,”\(^{34}\) though it acknowledges that difficulties remain with the category of “merit.” These are difficulties at a very theoretical level, however. Historically, Methodism as well as monasticism has had a tradition of work as well as prayer and it is true to say that not only did the good works for which Wesley and his group became well-known, notorious if you like, in Oxford continue as his followers increased to vast numbers, but Methodists in his lifetime and afterwards became universally known for their social consciousness. In every study of the recent times much social progress in England has been attributed to the influence of Methodism.

This fact establishes a clear point of contact with the monastic tradition, which at least in earlier centuries contributed much to the rebuilding of a Christian civilization
in Europe. As a result, the perennial debate in monasticism, about the need to be concerned with the world outside our walls, appears in a new light and we can pose this question: whether our emphasis on monastic seclusion amounts at times to an expression of community egoism, concerned about our affairs only, to the neglect of the sufferings of the world at our gate.

And there is a challenge for Methodism in the fact that the Rule of Benedict remains a normative document for monks. Do the foundational documents of Methodism hold the same place? We, like Methodists, produce up-dated constitutional documents but the Rule somehow does not lose its primary place. One can ask to what extent is that true of Methodism, but as there is in Methodism no single, original legislative document which would have a role corresponding to Benedict’s Rule; perhaps it is better to speak of structures rather than documents, and ask what place now for the classes and select societies and bands which were so important to creating and regulating and inspiring the original Methodist community? This would be an important issue should the question arise once more of Methodism re-establishing links with Anglicanism, especially if this were now to be envisaged in terms of a society within the worldwide communion of Anglicanism, and as a preliminary step towards the emergence of a communion embracing all of our traditions.

These are questions which tend towards our ecumenical horizons. But the more immediate question which follows from the analysis of the idea of conversion in our two traditions is whether there is in the end a fundamental difference between the monastic tradition’s understanding of the life of grace, expressed at a particular moment in history in the formulas of the Council of Trent, and that of John Wesley, articulated in those of the Reformation.

NOTES
4. Cf. D. Power, ”Life in the Catechumenal Stream: A North American Experience,” Doctrine and Life, vol. 35 (October 1985), p. 436: ”The United States, especially in urban centres, has a host of modern problems, such as alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce... and it was remarked that parishes that adopted the adult catechumenate often became much more conscious of what it meant to be a Christian community in the midst of such reality. They learned both from sharing their faith with catechumens and from sharing the catechumens’ own spiritual journey.”
5. ”But we do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart.” A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, section reproducing Preface to the Hymn Book of 1741, Works, vol. XI, 380. In 1740 he wrote and published a sermon on Christian perfection. ”In this I endeavoured to show (1) In what sense some Christians are not, (2) In what sense they are, perfect.” Ibid., p. 374. For the American experience, see D.L. Watson, ”Methodist Spirituality,” in F.C. Senn, ed., Protestant Spiritual Traditions (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 253.
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9. He read Taylor in 1725, when he was 22, à Kempis in 1726 and Law 'a year or two after.' Works, vol. XI, p. 367.
11. D. Knowles, op. cit., p. 64.
12. For a brief but excellent discussion of the recovery in contemporary monasticism of the idea of the monk as vir Dei rather than vir liturgiae, see A. Kavanagh, 'Notes on the baptismal ethos of monasticism,' in E. Carr et al., eds., EUOCHHEMA, Essays in honor of Robert Taft SJ, Studia Anselmiana 110, Analecta Liturgica 17 (Rome: Centro Studi S. Anselmo, 1993), pp. 235-44.
15. At the Conference of 1759 he published "Thoughts on Christian Perfection" with a preface which included: 'Not that 'to feel all love and no sin' is a sufficient proof of Scriptural holiness. Several have experienced this for a time, before their souls were fully renewed. None therefore ought to believe that the work is done, till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification, as clearly as his justification.' Ibid., pp. 401-2. In a later version of this text he noted: 'In the year 1762, there was a great increase of the work of God in London... and a considerable number of persons believed that God had saved them from all sin,' p. 406. In "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," he wrote: 'But some who have much love, peace, and joy, yet have not the direct witness; and others who think they have, are, nevertheless, manifestly wanting in the fruit.' Ibid., pp. 424-25. Cf. D.L. Watson, art. cit., pp. 253-63.
16. From his Journal for 19 November 1739: 'I earnestly exhorted those who had believed, to beware of two opposite extremes—the one, the thinking while they were in light and joy, that the work was ended, when it was just begun; the other, the thinking when they were in heaviness, that it was not begun, because they found it not ended.' The Works of John Wesley, vol. 19, Journals and Diaries 1735-38, W.R. Ward and R.P. Heussenrater, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 122.
18. Worth noting here is Wesley's brief statement in a Pamphlet of 1762: 'True humility is a kind of self annihilation; and this is the centre of all virtues.' Works, vol. XI, p. 437.
19. While this is the teaching of the desert fathers, a personal element entered into Benedict's formulation of it, according to A. Lauf: 'Benedict had undergone the searing experience of his own weakness during his first years in solitude when, tempted by the flesh—'I quote literally
Conversion in the Benedictine and Methodist Traditions 93

from St. Gregory—'he already considered leaving the desert, being overcome by desire; but suddenly divine grace looked on him and he came back to himself' (ch. 2). This near defeat, this semi-victory, in which not he but the grace of God finished by triumphing in his weakness, remained in Benedict's memory. In his Rule, the monk would be a man of broken and humbled heart, but always rejoicing in the mercy of God. "St. Benedict: A man of God for all times," Cistercian Studies, vol. XV, 1980, p. 225-26.

20. Sermon on the "Circumcision of the Heart," Works, vol. V, pp. 203-4. Cf. C. Peifer, "Reclaiming the Monastic Tradition," American Benedictine Review, 42:2 (1991), p. 213: 'Hence the prerequisite for spiritual growth is the 'redimis ad cor,' the 'return to the heart. The monk has to 'come to himself,' like the prodigal son (Luke 15:17) and become conscious of his own inner disintegration and misery, the emptiness of a heart that has squandered its energies pursuing things that cannot satisfy the deepest void.'

21. Cf. C. Peifer, art. cit.: 'This (the return to the heart) is the essential conversion, an ongoing dynamism rather than a one-time enthusiasm. It opens the heart to the continual inner action of the Holy Spirit and sets us on the path of the return, the re-making of the likeness of God in us." p. 213.

22. 'Justifying faith implies not only a divine conviction that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, but a sure trust and confidence that God died for my sins, that he loved me and gave himself for me. And the moment a penitent sinner thus believes, God pardons and absolves him.' "Principle of Methodism Further Explained," Works, vol. VIII, p. 428. But he also held: 'Neither dare we affirm, as some have done, that all this salvation is given at once. There is indeed an instantaneous, as well as a gradual work of God in his children." Ibid., vol. XI, p. 380. Cf. C. Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (London: Epworth Press, 1960), p. 40.


24. From the journal of 29 February 1738: "The faith I want is, 'A sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God.'... I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it." Works, vol. I, p. 77. In the course of his conversations with the Moravian, Peter Böhler, (up to April 1738) he could not understand how this faith could be given in a moment, but he searched the Scriptures and 'found scarce any instances there of other than instantaneous conversions, to my utter astonishment." Ibid., p. 234.


26. "There is a justification conveyed to us in our baptism or, properly, this state is then begun." Works, vol. VIII, p. 430. This needs to be read in conjunction with his saying in a sermon on The New Birth: "...as the new birth is not the same thing with baptism, so it does not always accompany baptism. They do not constantly go together. I do not speak now with regard to infants. It is certain our Church supposes that all who are baptised in their infancy are at the same time born again..." Works Sermons II, vol. VI, p. 74. His view of what occurred in his own life was expressed in the "Preliminaries" to the events of May 24, 1738. "I believe, till I was about 10 years old, I had not sinned away that 'washing of the Holy Ghost' which was given me in baptism." The Works of John Wesley, Journals and Diaries 1735-1738, vol. 18, W.R. Ward and R.P. Heitzenrater eds. (1988), p. 46.

27. Since this was written, Methodist friends have kindly brought to my attention the volume of essays commemorating the 250th anniversary of Aldersgate, Aldersgate Reconsidered, R.L. Maddox, ed. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990). These essays, of revisionist intent, analyze comprehensively the nature and significance of Wesley's experience. I am gratified that their scientific findings, especially those of R. Heitzenrater in "Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidence of Genuine Christianity," do not appear to invalidate my simple observations made from a Roman Catholic theological standpoint, and so the comparison I suggest may perhaps
stand. My comments appear to be supported by one of R. Heitzenrater’s statements: “But one soon discovers that Wesley is often more facile at describing his experience than at analyzing it,” p. 51.


30. “True faith must be lively, productive of good works, which are its proper fruits, the marks whereby it is known... These may be considered as internal or external... (Outward works) will be necessary conditions of preserving our justification.” He had not used “conditions” until now, being “more scrupulous than was necessary.” “Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained,” Works, vol. VIII, p. 430. Cf. C. Williams, op. cit., p. 63.

31. In a set of “Cautions and Directions given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies,” by which he meant warnings to the antinomian party led by G. Bell and W. Maxfield, he declared that “...the Holy Spirit works the same in our hearts, not merely creating desires after holiness in general, but thoroughly inclining us to every particular grace, leading us to every particular part of ‘whatever is lovely.’ And this with the greatest propriety: For as ‘by works faith is made perfect,’ so the completing or destroying of the works of faith, and enjoying the favour, or suffering the displeasure, of God, greatly depends on every single act of obedience or disobedience.” Works, vol. VIII, p. 432.

32. “… ut ad easm per obedientiam laborum reddas, a quo per insobdientiam desidiam recederas.”

33. Cf., for example, his A Roman Catechism... With a Reply Thereunto, Section II: Of Repentance and Obdience. “Truly to deserve it to make God our debtor.” He quotes Rom. 4:4. “If a man has work to show, his wages are not considered as a favour but as his due.” Works, vol. X, p. 95.


35. Wesley, of course, considered them “the very sinews of our Society,” Works, vol. XI, p. 433—text of a pamphlet of 1762.