THE MOTIF OF REAL CHRISTIANITY IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN WESLEY

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In 1963, on the 225th anniversary of John Wesley’s Aldersgate experience—an experience which many scholars mark as the Oxford don’s evangelical conversion—Albert Outler made the unsettling and largely unsupported claim that “Aldersgate was not the time when John Wesley became a ‘real Christian.’”¹ Likewise, and more recently, Theodore Jennings maintained not only that Wesley was a Christian prior to May 24, 1738, but that “nothing [had] changed with Aldersgate.”² And Randy Maddox, for his part, repeatedly decried the “reigning” standard interpretation of Aldersgate which has contended, among other things, that Wesley was converted in 1738 “from a pre-Christian moralist into a true Christian believer.”³

What is truly remarkable about the preceding generalizations, beyond their forcefulness, is that they have not been substantiated by a cautious, reasoned and historically sensitive examination of the motif of “real Christianity” in the writings of John Wesley—a motif which is integral to any assessment of the spiritual trajectory of this eighteenth-century leader. Furthermore, not one of these scholars has considered, in any depth, Wesley’s conception of “the faith of a servant” and the whole question of Christian assurance as they relate to this broader motif. Indeed, the general, though erroneous, view among many Methodist scholars today seems to be that Wesley either abandoned the motif of real Christianity as he developed the distinction of the faith of a servant or else he reduced this motif so greatly as to include the latter.⁴ In contrast to these assumptions, and also in order to offer an alternative perspective for historians

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to consider, this present essay will track all of these themes just cited (real Christianity, the faith of a servant, and Christian assurance) which fed into John Wesley’s *mature* conception of the Christian faith. Moreover, in order to display the subtle shifts of Wesley’s thought over time, the essay will be divided into three major periods. Interestingly, what will emerge from such labor should prove troubling to many popular beliefs, but it will, no doubt, further the debate among contemporary Methodist historians.

I. SIGNIFICANT MODIFICATIONS IN THE THEME OF REAL CHRISTIANITY: 1725 - 1747

Even as a young man, John Wesley realized that great national churches, like the Church of England, though they insured the numerical predominance of a particular version of the faith, often left nominal Christianity in their wake. Indeed, for many in the eighteenth century, to be an English person was to be a Christian. However, as early as 1725, the year in which Wesley clearly saw the end or goal of religion which is holiness, he challenged such glib assumptions among his compatriots and entreated John Griffiths, for example, “to let me have the pleasure of making him a whole Christian, to which I knew he was at least half persuaded already.”5 And a few years later, in an important letter to his father, Samuel, the young son complained that the bane of piety is “the company of good sort of men, lukewarm Christians (as they are called), persons that have a great concern for, but no sense of, religion.”6 Not surprisingly, during the year 1738 in which Wesley encountered a gracious and redeemptive God, he exclaimed: “Oh how high and holy a thing Christianity is, and how widely distant from that (I know not what) is so called...”7

So concerned was John Wesley with the idea of being a real Christian in his early years that he noted in retrospect in 1739 that his reason for undertaking the arduous work of a missionary in Georgia as well as his subsequent visit to the Moravians at Herrnhut was his “desire to be a Christian.”8 But it was not until two years later that the Methodist leader focused his thoughts on this topic by producing the sermon *The Almost Christian* which he delivered before the venerable of Oxford at St. Mary’s church. However, as will be apparent shortly, much of what Wesley had to say about “altogether Christians” in this homily was later modified. Nevertheless, the theme of real Christianity remained a vital one for him during this period as demonstrated by its repeated emergence in his writings during the 1740s. In 1747, for example, Wesley cautioned against “that abundance of those who bear the name of Christians [who] put a part of religion for the whole—generally some outward work or form of worship.”9

A. The Faith of a Servant

In order to discern clearly the subtle (and not so subtle) modifications which Wesley made in his understanding of real or true Christianity, it is necessary to consider this motif against the backdrop of what Wesley called “the faith of a servant” and also in terms of his doctrine of assurance. Indeed, the reigning view in Wesley Studies today is that the Oxford don basically put aside the language of real
Christianity once he began to use the language of the faith of a servant. However, this is a judgment which cannot be sustained by an appeal to the primary sources as this present essay will demonstrate.

But first of all it must be asked, how did Wesley define the faith of a servant during the years 1725 to 1747? Remarkably, the exact phrase “the faith of a servant” is not really developed during this initial period. Nevertheless, since Wesley later linked this phrase with a key distinction which he did indeed make at this time, namely, the distinction between the spirit of bondage and the spirit of adoption, this period does, after all, illuminate many of the characteristics of the faith of a servant. In particular, the identification of the “faith of a servant” with the “spirit of bondage” is revealed in the sermon, The Discoveries of Faith, produced in 1788. In it, Wesley observes:

Exhort him to press on by all possible means, till he passes ‘from faith to faith’; from the faith of a servant to the faith of a son; from the spirit of bondage unto fear, to the spirit of childlike love.

What then are the traits of the spirit of bondage displayed in the homily The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption and which were later identified with the faith of a servant? Those under a spirit of bondage, Wesley argues, feel sorrow and remorse; they fear death, the devil, and humanity; they desire to break free from the chains of sin, but cannot, and their cry of despair is typified by the Pauline expression: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” In fact, in this sermon Wesley specifically identifies “this whole struggle of one who is ‘under the law’” with the spirit of bondage and with the spiritual and psychological dynamics of the seventh chapter of Romans. More to the point, these traits just cited are hardly the attributes which constitute real Christianity according to John Wesley since he defined true Christians, at the very least, as those who believe in Christ such that “sin hath no more dominion over him.”

B. The Doctrine of Assurance

In Wesley Studies today, it is well known that when John Wesley was under the strong influence of the English Moravians, he closely identified justifying faith with full assurance. However, by the summer of 1740, he began to realize that there are both degrees of faith and degrees of assurance and that a child of God may exercise justifying faith which is mixed with both doubt and fear. Nevertheless, a second issue, which can be differentiated from the one just cited, concerns the question of whether Wesley ever lowered or abandoned the standard of real Christianity in light of his newly articulated distinctions. This time, however, the question will be considered not with respect to the spirit of bondage, and its implications, but with respect to the whole matter of assurance.

On the one hand, the initial answer to this question must be “yes” since Wesley obviously modified his earlier erroneous views in two key respects: First of all, the English Moravians, who exercised a strong, early influence on Wesley, propounded a view of redemption which, according to Heitzenrater, “essentially equated conversion with perfection.” In time, however, Wesley distinguished freedom from sin in terms
of its guilt, power and being, and thereby repudiated the Moravian doctrine on this score.\textsuperscript{18} Simply put, for Wesley, redemption or initial sanctification entailed freedom from the guilt (justification) and power (regeneration) of sin, but not freedom from its being (entire sanctification). In other words, the carnal nature or inbred sin remained even in the children of God.

Second, and more importantly for the task at hand, Wesley likewise modified his earlier view which had associated full assurance with justifying faith as just noted above. Indeed, a little more than a year after he began the practice of field preaching, Wesley conceived the doctrine of justification by faith no longer in terms of full assurance but in terms of a \textit{measure} of assurance. But is this qualified assurance, occasionally marked by doubt and fear, necessary for redemption, for what constitutes real Christianity? Here the picture becomes somewhat complicated. For example, at the first Methodist conference in 1744 it was affirmed by all present that \textit{"all true Christians have such a faith as implies an assurance of God's love."}\textsuperscript{19} However, by the time of the next conference in 1745 the question was reconsidered and a slightly different answer was offered. Wesley wrote:

Q. Is a sense of God's pardoning love absolutely necessary to our being in his favor? Or may there be some exempt cases?
A. We dare not say there are not.
Q. Is it necessary to inward and outward holiness?
A. We incline to think it is.\textsuperscript{20}

In a similar vein, the conference Minutes of 1747 noted that there may be exempt cases, that justifying faith may not always be accompanied by a measure of assurance. But the conference then offered this caution: \textit{"It is dangerous to ground a general doctrine on a few particular experiments."}\textsuperscript{21} In addition, although this conference, like the one in 1745, recognized that there are, after all, exceptional cases, it nevertheless clarified its meaning and affirmed: \textit{"But this we know, if Christ is not revealed in them [by the Holy Spirit], they are not yet Christian believers."}\textsuperscript{22} In fact, in 1747, Wesley, for the most part, still identified the assurance that one's sins are forgiven as a vital ingredient of the proper Christian faith. Thus, for example, in a revealing letter to his brother Charles, written a month after the 1747 conference, John illustrates his doctrine of assurance by pointing out: \textit{"(1) that there is such an explicit assurance; (2) that it is the common privilege of real Christians; (3) that it is the proper Christian faith, which purifieth the heart and overcometh the world."}\textsuperscript{23} In other words, the observation that there are exceptions to Wesley's normal association of justification by faith and a measure of assurance is accurate; however, that he identified this faith which lacks the witness of the Spirit with real, proper Christianity is not. The distinction is important.

II. THE THEME OF REAL CHRISTIANITY DEVELOPED: 1748 - 1770

Historically speaking, John Wesley's preoccupation with the theme of real Christianity was undoubtedly reminiscent of the work of Johann Arndt and of such
early German Pietists as Spener and Francke. Arndt, for instance, had highlighted the themes of personal reform, the repudiation of stale intellectualism, criticism of doctrinal provincialism, and the importance of sanctification more than a century prior to Wesley in his Wahres Christenthum (True Christianity), a work which the latter saw fit to include in the first volume of his Christian Library in 1749. In particular, observe the opening lines of Arndt’s work and the emphasis which they place on the practice of the Christian life.

Dear Christian reader, that the holy Gospel is subjected, in our time, to great and shameful abuse is fully proved by the impenitent life of the ungodly who praise Christ and his word with their mouths and yet lead an unchristian life that is like that of persons who dwell in heathendom, not in the Christian world.

In a similar fashion, Wesley cautioned against nominal or “mouth Christians” and was not above sarcasm as evidenced by the following account which appeared in his journal during the year 1755:

One spent the evening with us who is accounted both a sensible and a religious man. What a proof of the Fall! Even with all the advantages of a liberal education, this person, I will be bold to say, knows just as much of heart religion, of scriptural Christianity, the religion of love, as a child three years old of algebra.

Nevertheless, the major emphasis of Wesley during this middle period as he developed the motif of real Christianity was his insistence, to the consternation of some of his Anglican peers, that a Christian “while he keepeth himself...doth not commit sin.” Accordingly, in his sermons The Marks of the New Birth and The Great Privilege of Those Who are Born of God, both produced in 1748, Wesley refused to depreciate this standard of teaching. In the former piece, for instance, he reasoned that “an immediate and constant fruit of this faith whereby we are born of God...is power over sin: power over outward sin of every kind....” And in the latter sermon he declared: “But whosoever is born of God, while he abideth in faith and love and in the spirit of prayer and thanksgiving, not only doth not, but cannot thus commit sin...he cannot voluntarily transgress any command of God.”

Two other emphases are also of interest during this period: First, during the decade of the 1760s Wesley, on two occasions, reflected back on his Oxford days and stated not only that the very design of the Oxford Methodists was “to forward each other in true, scriptural Christianity,” but he also revealed, to use his own words, that “when I was at Oxford, I never was afraid of any but the almost Christians.” Second, the distinction between nominal and real Christianity was beginning to take on a paradigmatic flavor such that Wesley now began to speak not only of half Christians but also of half Methodists! Note his comments to Lady Maxwell in 1764:

And I entreat you do not regard the half-Methodists—If we must use the name. Do not mind them who endeavour to hold Christ in one hand and the world in the other. I want you to be all a Christian....
A. The Faith of a Servant

Interestingly enough, it was not until this second period that the exact phrase “the faith of a servant” was explored in any significant detail. In 1754, for example, in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley defines the faith of a servant in terms of the spirit of bondage and fear that cleaved to the old covenant. Elsewhere he associates the phrase with those who “fear God and worketh righteousness” as in his commentary on Acts 10:35. However, this latter usage makes clear that the faith of a servant was conceived in a very general way by the English leader and included all those believers of whatever religious tradition who endeavored to worship God according to the light and grace which they had. Wesley explains:

But in every nation he that *feareth God* and *worketh righteousness*...is *accepted of him*—through Christ, though he knows him not.... He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not.

Continuing this line of thought, since those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted even though they may be ignorant of Christ, the Holy Scriptures, and the sacraments, this demonstrates that such acceptance is not indicative of the real, proper Christian faith, as is often supposed, but instead is an important implication of Wesley’s doctrine of prevenient grace which is both universal and Christologically based. In fact, in this same commentary, but this time on the book of Romans, Wesley cautions his readers and affirms that “real Christians have not the spirit of bondage.” Moreover, his letters to Ann Bolton in 1768 and in 1770 illustrate the notion that the faith of a servant, though earnest and virtuous, falls far short of the promises which pertain to all real Christians. “I am glad you are still waiting for the *kingdom of God,*” Wesley writes to Ms. Bolton in 1770, “although as yet you are rather in the state of a servant than of a child.” In short, the acceptance of those who fear God and work righteousness must not be confused with the status of the proper Christian faith.

B. The Doctrine of Assurance

In his correspondence to Richard Tompson during 1755, Wesley clarified his doctrine of assurance in two key respects: on the one hand, he argued that there is an intermediate state between a child of the devil and a child of God and that those who are not assured that their sins are forgiven may have a degree of faith and, therefore, may be admitted to the Lord’s Supper. On the other hand, Wesley continued to emphasize the importance of assurance for the Christian faith and asserted: “But still I believe the *proper Christian faith* which purifies the heart implies such a conviction.” Indeed, in this same piece Wesley pointed out with regard to assurance that “the whole Christian Church in the first centuries enjoyed it.” And again he exclaimed: “If that knowledge were destroyed, or wholly withdrawn, I could not then say, I had Christian faith.”

Moreover, Wesley’s subsequent letters to Richard Tompson the next year contained even further clarification on this topic and one significant, though seldom understood, exception. Concerning this last point, Wesley admitted to Mr. Tompson
on February 18, 1756, in a way reminiscent of the 1747 conference, that one may be in a state of justification and yet lack assurance. Thus, when the Oxford don posed the question in his letter, "Can a man who has not a clear assurance that his sins are forgiven be in a state of justification?" he replied, "I believe there are some instances of it." However, it was not until much later that Wesley indicated the reason for this exception. In a letter to Dr. Rutherford in 1768, Wesley elaborates:

Yet I do not affirm there are no exceptions to this general rule [of the association of a measure of assurance with justification]. Possibly some may be in the favour of God, and yet go mourning all the day long. But I believe this is usually owing either to disorder of body or ignorance of the gospel promises."

Two issues need to be separated here which are often confused by contemporary scholars. On the one hand, the elderly Wesley still did not identify nor confuse the faith of a servant, and its measure of acceptance, with the assurance that one’s sins are forgiven; since being under "the spirit of bondage," a servant, properly speaking, lacks justifying faith. On the other hand, the Methodist leader recognized that in some exceptional cases those who are justified and regenerated (and hence children of God) may lack an assurance that their sins are forgiven due to either ignorance or bodily disorder. However, in this second instance, since these believers are justified, they are more suitably referred to not as servants, but as the sons and daughters of God. Put another way, all servants lack assurance and are under a spirit of bondage, but not all who lack assurance are thereby servants, nor are they all under a spirit of bondage. There are, after all, exempt cases. Consequently, Wesley's mature designation of his own faith as that of a servant prior to May 1738 is much more revealing than many scholars have imagined.

III. THE MOTIF OF REAL CHRISTIANITY RESPLENDENT: 1771-1791

It is well known among Methodist historians that when John Wesley was en route to Georgia aboard the Simmonds the powerful Atlantic storms revealed to the young aspiring missionary his fear of death. What has been less noticed, however, is that it was precisely the mature Wesley who continued to identify fearlessness in the face of death with being a real Christian. On June 8, 1773, for example, Wesley wrote to Ms. Cummins in the following fashion:

O make haste! Be a Christian, a real Bible Christian now! You may say, ‘Nay, I am a Christian already.’ I fear not. (See how freely I speak.) A Christian is not afraid to die. Are not you? Do you desire to depart and to be with Christ?"

So then, if the elderly Wesley affirmed in 1773 that a real Christian is one who is not afraid to die, then what does that make him while he was in Georgia? The implication is clear.

Yet another characteristic of real Christianity which Wesley developed during this last period was that of "[having] the mind which was in Christ and [walking] as He walked." Real Christians, in other words, are those whose inward (and outward) lives have been transformed by the bountiful grace of God. "Unless they have new
senses, ideas, passions, [and] tempers.”  Wesley counsels, “they are no Christians.” 48 Unfortunately, on the other hand, “English Christians in general,” Wesley wryly notes in 1776, “know no more of Christian salvation [and hence of this inner transformation] than Mahometans or heathens.” 49

Beyond this, during the decade of the 1780s Wesley continued to highlight the distinction between nominal and real Christians, and pointed out in his sermon, The New Creation that the former “have the form of godliness without the power.” 50 Moreover, as in an earlier period, he once again reflected back on the Oxford Methodists and avowed that their design was nothing less than to be “Bible Christians,” 51 that their goal was above all to help each other to be “real Christians.” 52 But perhaps the most noteworthy accent during this late interval of Wesley’s life was his strong identification of real, scriptural Christianity with the new birth and, therefore, with all the marks of the new birth—like faith, hope and love—as well. Accordingly, in his sermon, Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith Wesley proclaims:

How short is this description of real Christians! And yet how exceeding full! It comprehends, it sums up, the whole experience of those that are truly such, from the time they are born of God till they remove into Abraham’s bosom. For who are the ‘we’ that are here spoken of? All that are true Christian believers. I say ‘Christian,’ not ‘Jewish’ believers. All that are not only servants but children of God. 53

And a year later, in 1789, Wesley’s strong identification of real Christianity with regeneration, with the children of God, is again unmistakable. “How great a thing it is to be a Christian,” he declares in his sermon On a Single Eye, “to be a real, inward, scriptural Christian! Conformed in heart and life to the will of God! Who is sufficient for these things? None, unless he be born of God.” 54

A. The Faith of a Servant

In a letter to Alexander Knox during 1777, Wesley, once again, clearly articulates an intermediate state between a child of God and a child of the devil, namely, a servant of God. 55 “You are not yet a son,” Wesley advises Mr. Knox, “but you are a servant; and you are waiting for the Spirit of adoption.” 56 Similarly, in his sermon On Faith, written in 1788, the Methodist leader displays what properly constitutes the difference between a servant and a child of God: “He that believeth as a child of God ‘hath the witness in himself.’ This the servant hath not.” 57 As in the preceding period, Wesley contends that he or she who is a servant of God, who “feareth God and worketh righteousness,” is accepted of God even now, although he now states much more pointedly that they are accepted to a degree as illustrated in his sermon On Friendship with the World, produced in 1786:

Those on the contrary ‘are of God’ who love God, or at least fear him, and keep his commandments. This is the lowest character of those that ‘are of God,’ who are not properly sons, but servants. 58

To be sure, in his early ministry, John Wesley had not fully appreciated the notion that those who fear God and work righteousness are indeed accepted of him, and
because of this failure in understanding, he and his brother caused great harm among those who were attentive to the early Methodist preaching. And in 1788, reflecting on this unfortunate situation, Wesley confessed:

Indeed nearly fifty years ago, when the preachers commonly called Methodists began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith; they were not sufficiently apprised of the difference between a servant and a child of God. They did not clearly understand that even one ‘who feared God, and worketh righteousness’, is accepted of him.59

That Wesley in 1788 (and much earlier) had a greater appreciation of the faith of those “who feared God and worked righteousness” is clear, but this last point of acceptance must, once again, not be mistaken for justification or with being a real Christian which is quite a different matter. Observe that the Oxonian holds two ideas together: on the one hand, he or she who fears God is not a rank unbeliever; but on the other hand, “One that fears God is [still] waiting for His salvation.”60 In other words, though the servants of God lack the proper Christian faith—and hence cannot enjoy the privileges of the sons and daughters of God—they yet have a measure of faith which, as noted earlier, arises from the prevenient and convincing grace which precedes it, and are for that reason not to be discouraged. Consequently, Wesley’s seasoned and relatively favorable estimation of the faith of a servant probably emerged from his consideration that such a faith, in the normal course of spiritual development, would in time become the faith of a son. In fact, in his sermon On Faith, Wesley highlights just such a consideration:

And, indeed, unless the servants of God halt by the way, they will receive the adoption of sons. They will receive the faith of the children of God by his revealing his only-begotten Son in their hearts.... And whosoever hath this, the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.61

Likewise, Wesley’s appreciation of a degree of acceptance and his exhortation to the servants of God to improve the rich grace of God is revealed in a homily produced in 1788, On the Discoveries of Faith, in which Wesley counsels:

Whoever has attained this, the faith of a servant...in consequence of which he is in a degree (as the Apostle observes), ‘accepted with him’...Nevertheless he should be exhorted not to stop there; not to rest till he attains the adoption of sons; till he obeys out of love, which is the privilege of all the children of God.62

Simply put, the faith of a servant of God is valued not only for the measure of faith that it is, but also for what it will soon become: the qualitatively different faith of a child of God.

The Doctrine of Assurance

By 1771, Wesley had distinguished full assurance, which excludes doubt and fear, from initial assurance which does not;63 he had come to a greater appreciation of the faith of a servant and its degree of acceptance; and he had realized that in exceptional cases one may even be justified and yet lack assurance due to either ignorance of the
gospel promises or due to bodily disorder. Nevertheless, the theme which Wesley chose to develop during this last period of his life was none other than a strong identification of assurance with the proper (real) Christian faith. To illustrate, in his sermon On the Trinity Wesley declares:

But I know not how anyone can be a Christian believer till 'he hath (as St. John speaks) 'the witness in himself'; till 'the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit 'that he is a child of God'—that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of the Son....

Similarly, in January 1787, Wesley acknowledged that "To believe Christ gave Himself for me is the faith of a Christian," and a year later he not only once again clarified the distinction between the faith of a servant and that of a son, but he also maintained that assurance is an integral component of the proper Christian faith. In his sermon, On Faith, Wesley reasons:

Thus the faith of a child is properly and directly a divine conviction whereby every child of God is enabled to testify, 'The life that I now live, I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.' And whosoever hath this, the Spirit of God witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.

Even more significantly, there is nothing in Wesley's often-quoted letter to Melville Horne in 1788 which detracts from this identification and emphasis. Thus, in this correspondence, Wesley maintains that the servants of God who lack assurance are not thereby condemned, a commonplace by now, but he then goes on to assert—and this is what has been missed by current scholarship—that "we preach assurance as we always did, as a common privilege of the children of God...."

IV. SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

For the sake of greater clarity and also in order to display the comprehensive view which emerges from this brief study of the motif of real Christianity in the writings of John Wesley, the following theses are offered for consideration:

Theses Relevant to Future Discussions

I. The Faith of a Servant

A.) Wesley specifically identified the faith of a servant with the spirit of bondage. 1.) The characteristics of the spirit of bondage are sorrow and remorse; fear of God, death, the devil, and humanity; and the desire, but not the ability, to break free from the chains of sin.

B.) The faith of a servant lacks assurance (the witness of the Spirit).

C.) Though Wesley eventually came to realize that the faith of a servant involves a degree of acceptance, such faith does not constitute justifying faith (See thesis # II.B.1 below).

D.) Wesley taught that the faith of a servant, in the normal course of spiritual development, should in time become the faith of a son or daughter of God.
II. Assurance

A.) By the summer of 1740, Wesley realized that justifying faith does not imply full assurance since it is often marked by both doubt and fear.

B.) At least by 1747 (and possibly as early as 1745), Wesley maintained that assurance does not always accompany justifying faith. Nevertheless, he repeatedly affirmed that assurance is the common privilege of the children of God.

1.) In 1768, Wesley reasoned that the exceptions to the normal association of justifying faith and assurance are usually the result of bodily disorder or of ignorance of the gospel promises. However, since these believers are both justified and regenerated, they are more suitably referred to not as servants, but as the sons and daughters of God.

Therefore:

C.) All servants lack assurance and are under a spirit of bondage, but not all who lack assurance are thereby servants nor are they all under a spirit of bondage. There are, after all, exceptional cases.

III. Real Christianity

A.) Wesley developed the motif of real Christianity from the time he saw the goal of religion in 1725 until his death in 1791.

B.) At its minimum, real Christianity entails regeneration (and therefore freedom from the power of sin), as one of its principal characteristics. In fact, it was precisely the mature Wesley who stressed this identification in his sermons Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith (1788) and On a Single Eye (1789).

C.) Since Wesley taught that justification occurs simultaneously with regeneration (although they can be distinguished logically), then real Christianity must also entail justification by faith (and therefore freedom from the guilt of sin).

D.) In almost every instance where the mature Wesley employed the phrases “real Christianity” or “proper Christianity” or “Scriptural Christianity” he was referring to the theological complex of justification and regeneration by faith and a measure of assurance. In other words, the Methodist leader almost never identified a faith which lacks assurance (the faith of a servant) with the real, proper Christian faith.

E.) By his own definition, then, Aldersgate was the time when John Wesley became a real Christian.

Given the preceding evidence which has been carefully culled from Wesley’s entire literary corpus, recent—and some not so recent—pronouncements on the subject of Wesley’s understanding of the motif of real Christianity as well as the value he placed on his Aldersgate experience in light of this motif must now be reassessed by the scholarly community. Indeed, since the elderly Wesley continually defined real Christianity in terms of justification, regeneration, and a measure of assurance, then his Aldersgate experience, contrary to Albert Outler, must now be viewed as the time when the Oxonian became a real, true, scriptural Christian. In fact, even if Aldersgate is simply deemed the time when the last piece of the puzzle, so to speak, was put in place, namely, assurance, as Maddox and others seem to suggest, the conclusion
remains the same: that is, May 24, 1738, was the time when John Wesley had the faith, not of a servant, but of a son; when he had the faith, in other words, of one who had finally entered into "the kingdom of God."[60]

Endnotes
4. Jennings, who is typical of this tendency, writes: "Neither before nor after [Aldersgate] did Wesley find it possible to 'love' the God he so vigorously served. Yet serve he did, whether as servant or as son; and in the end that was all that mattered to him." Cf. Jennings, "Against Aldersgate," p. 19.
6. Ibid., p. 400.
8. Ibid., p. 285.
12. Ibid., 1:258.
13. Ibid. Observe that the servants of God are awakened, but they see not a God of love, but One of wrath. It is, therefore, important not to confuse the issue of awakening with regeneration (and conversion).
14. Baker, Letters, 25:575. Also note that although Wesley eventually made the distinctions between freedom from the guilt (justification), power (regeneration), and the being (entire sanctification) of sin, as evidenced in his sermon On Sin in Believers, he continually maintained that even a babe in Christ has freedom from the power of sin. Cf. Outler, Sermons, 1:314ff.
16. Ibid., p. 89.
17. Ibid., pp. 68-69.
20. Ibid., 8:232.
21. Ibid., 8:293.
22. Ibid. Bracketed material is added.
25. Ibid., p. 21.
28. Outler, Sermons, 1:419.
29. Ibid., 1:436.
30. Telford, Letters, 4:120. Moreover, in A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists Wesley maintains that the Methodists had one point in view, namely, "to be altogether, scriptural, rational Christians." Cf. Telford, Letters, 5:153-154.
31. Ibid., 5:137.
32. Ibid., 4:263-264. See also Curnock, Journal, 5:87, where Wesley refers to the Methodists of "the old stamp" in terms of the larger motif of real Christianity.
33. John Wesley, Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament (Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers), p. 646. In this commentary on Jude, Wesley also defines a servant in a second sense as one who has the spirit of adoption, but note that this is a definition which is rarely used and is not the one which forms the first prong of the distinction the faith of a servant/the faith of a son since only the latter prong is marked by the spirit of adoption. Cf. Wesley, Notes, p. 646.
34. Ibid., p. 304.
35. Ibid.
36. See Wesley's sermon On Conscience for more details on this aspect of prevenient grace in Outler, Sermons, 3:480ff.
37. Ibid., p. 382.
39. Baker, Letters, 26:579. Observe, however, that Wesley slipped back into his all or nothing language a few years later in 1759 when he wrote: "Is He not still striving with you? Striving to make you not almost but altogether a Christian? Indeed, you must be all or nothing—a saint or a devil, eminent in sin or holiness!" Cf. Telford, Letters, 4:52.
40. Ibid. Emphasis added.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Telford, Letters, 3:163. Nevertheless, not even this significant exception undermined Wesley's strong association of real Christianity and assurance. Indeed, a month later, in March 1756, Wesley wrote to Richard Tompson: "My belief in general is this—that every Christian believer has a divine conviction of his reconciliation with God." Cf. Telford, Letters, 3:174.
44. Ibid., 5:358.
45. In addition, Wesley wrote to Dr. Rutherforth in 1768: "Therefore I have not for many years thought a consciousness of acceptance to be essential to justifying faith." Cf. Telford, Letters, 5:359. See also Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), pp. 68-69.
47. Outler, Sermons, 2:467. Bracketed material represents a change of verbal form.
48. Ibid., 4:175. Bracketed material is added.
49. Telford, Letters, 6:201. Bracketed material is added.
50. Outler, Sermons, 2:501. See also 3:152.
52. Outler, Sermons, 3:452-453.
53. Ibid., 4:49.
54. Ibid., 4:121-122. Emphasis is added. For a technical, detailed and critical discussion of Outler's argument that the later Wesley moved away from his earlier exclusivist standards of
true faith and salvation see chapter six in my forthcoming book Evangelical Christianity: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology.

56. Ibid.
57. Outler, Sermons, 3:498.
58. Ibid., 3:130.
61. Outler, Sermons, 3:497-498. The first emphasis is added.
62. Ibid., 4:35.
63. For two important references to Wesley's doctrine of full assurance Cf. Outler, Sermons, 3:549, and 4:36.
64. Ibid., 2:385. Emphasis added.
67. Robert Southey, The Life of John Wesley 1 (New York: W.B. Gilley, 1820): 258. Emphasis added. That Wesley maintains that assurance is the common privilege of the sons and daughters of God suggests that it is rare when assurance, marked by doubt and fear, does not soon follow the new birth.
68. Maddox, Aldersgate, p.145.
69. Telford, Letters, 5:207. Even if one argues that Wesley was justified and born of God by faith well prior to Aldersgate—not a likely hypothesis by the way—and that he was simply waiting for assurance on May 24th, it must be pointed out that, technically speaking, one who experiences justification and regeneration apart from assurance, although this represents an exceptional case and although this believer is rightly called a child of God, yet without this assurance such a believer lacks a vital ingredient of what the later Wesley termed the real, true Christian faith.