

Understanding John Wesley's Complicated Wickedness

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At a recent Edinburgh 2010 assembly honouring the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, a thousand international delegates gathered in Scotland to listen as John Senamu, the Archbishop of York, issued a common call to mission. In his plenary address, Senamu stated, "Disturbed by the asymmetries and imbalances of power that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures."¹ Senamu's remarks resonate with contemporary sociologists and theologians calling the church to recognize and deal with social sin. Yet, sinful social structures are not new phenomena. After briefly advancing a contemporary definition of social sin, this paper will seek to explore how this concept has been understood in the life and thought of Methodist leader, John Wesley.

Social Sin: A Definition

In recent decades, Canadian Catholic theologian Gregory Baum has been a harbinger in discussion regarding social sin. In his seminal work, *Religion and Alienation*, Baum introduces the term "social sin" to describe concealed and institutionalized pathogens embedded in dominant societal structures. His analysis of social sin begins with an identification of dehumanizing trends embedded within formational contexts and traditions.² Living in a world marred by human wickedness, the potential exists for individuals to accept destructive habits embedded in social,

Historical Papers 2011: Canadian Society of Church History

political, economic, and religious institutions.³ Additionally, by embracing harmful ideologies, Baum argues that we commonly legitimize forms of social sin that serve to protect the power and privilege of society's dominant individuals and structures.⁴ Baum contends that social sin is further characterized by a menacing false consciousness through which “people involve themselves collectively in destructive action as if they were doing the right thing.”⁵ By both subordinating and oppressing members of society, this self-delusion exacerbates cruel and unjust behaviour.⁶ Finally, social sin is comprised of the collective decisions, exemplified in laws, policies, and norms that provide the reinforcement for certain injustices to be embraced without any volition.⁷

Social Sin in Wesley's Era

Baum's definition of social sin functions as an analytical tool in discerning some significant societal concerns in eighteenth-century Britain. While this period represented the dawning of a new age in which Enlightenment rationale provided tremendous possibilities for some, eighteenth-century Britain saw the emergence of various dehumanizing trends, some of which still persist.⁸ In particular, harmful class stratification and destructive treatment of the working poor exemplify two societal injustices. Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi describes the devastating situation in the latter half of the 1700s by noting, “It happened for the first time that a boom in trade was remarked to have been accompanied by signs of growing distress of the poor.”⁹

In addition to dehumanizing trends, an ideology of individualism served self-interest, created aspects of alienation, and reinforced unjust systems. Alexis de Tocqueville, an important early nineteenth-century thinker, observed that a “new individualism” fueled the Industrial Revolution and separated people from their environment.¹⁰ In similar fashion, German sociologist Ferdinand Töennies, expressed concern that the autonomous spirit surrounding this era gave way to *gesellschaft* – the alienation of people from each other.¹¹

False consciousness is also observable during this period in Britain. As society promoted increased personal comfort and capital gain, members of the upper classes demonstrated a false consciousness that prevented them from seeing how their actions subordinated others. From an affluent perspective, the plight of the poor was commonly viewed as either the will of God or the result of poor morals and behaviour among the lower

classes.¹² Yet, a false consciousness typified those in the oppressed working classes as well.¹³ Surrounded by hopelessness, pain, and deplorable employee conditions, the working poor became increasingly anesthetized to the oppression they themselves endured.¹⁴

Baum's final factor in social sin, harmful collective decisions, was also a sociological phenomenon in eighteenth-century Britain. Those in authoritative positions of employment used ruthless institutional decision making to dehumanize people in the lower strata of society. Those in the ascending classes, who wanted to take advantage of the economic climate, were able to influence decisions and increase their power, wealth, comfort, and overall standard of living. Two examples, child labour and enclosure acts, demonstrate how destructive trends, ideology, and false consciousness were perpetuated via dehumanizing institutional and collective decisions.¹⁵

Obviously, this brief application of Baum's model to an eighteenth-century context is by no means exhaustive. Still, the historical landscape of Britain in the mid-to-late eighteenth century offers considerable sociological evidence resonant with Baum's fourfold descriptor of social sin. Dehumanizing trends concerning societal stratification and treatment of the poor were firmly embedded into the context of this industrializing society. These trends were fueled by an ideology that championed the individual and blinded both the oppressed and oppressor. Further, collective decisions endorsed by institutional leaders exacerbated problems and perpetuated the social sin implanted in the structures and organizations of the eighteenth century.

Wesley and Social Sin

Having considered the pervasiveness of social sin in eighteenth-century Britain, another question can be raised: How did Wesley handle this phenomenon? As this section will seek to show, some ambiguity exists both within Wesley himself and among historical scholars regarding his ability to address the complexities of social evil. Some scholars argue that he served as a shining model for his age, and was able to critique successfully the structured complexities of social sin. Others, however, are more cautious in their appraisal. They express concern that his response to systematic evil was overly simplistic, individualistic, and, in some cases, more damaging than constructive.

Wesley on Dehumanizing Trends

A disregard toward the poor by members of the upper classes serves as an example of an eighteenth century destructive social trend. In response to this dehumanizing trend, proponents of Wesley suggest he was a voice for the marginalized and underprivileged. For example, after observing the way the poor were being oppressed in his day, he preached a sermon entitled, "On Divine Providence," in which he remarked, "[i]t is hard, indeed, to comprehend this; nay, it is hard to believe it, considering the *complicated wickedness* and the *complicated misery* [emphasis added], which we see on every side."¹⁶ As he addressed the problem of poverty, in the midst of gross prosperity among the affluent British population, it became commonplace for Wesley to refer to "complicated wickedness" and "complicated villainy" as descriptors for the problematic social deadness, greed, and general disrespect for human life he observed around him.¹⁷ Beyond merely speaking against these injustices, Wesley also acted to alleviate the burden forced upon the lower members of society. Some Wesley scholars, such as Christina Pohl, argue he was a lively pursuer of employment for those who were unemployed. For example, when work was in short supply, he initiated cottage industries in activities such as cotton processing and knitting.¹⁸

Wesley also attacked the injustices of class stratification that, he argued, did not merely neglect, but actually promoted poverty. One of his most consistent assaults against the stratifying trends he observed came in the form of a critique against the accumulated wealth and property he observed in the upper classes of society.¹⁹ To ignore the plight of the poor while accumulating wealth and spending it on unnecessary things represented an injustice that significantly distressed Wesley. To those who spent money, for example, on "elegant" clothing and "delicate" food, he wrote, "[y]ou bind your own hands. You make it impossible for you to do that good which otherwise you might. So that you injure the poor in the same proportion as you poison your own soul . . . And so this wasting of thy Lord's goods is an instance of *complicated wickedness* [emphasis added]; since hereby thy poor brother perisheth, for whom Christ died."²⁰

Perhaps his most direct commentary on stratification was expressed in "Thoughts upon the Present Scarcity of Provisions." Supporters of Wesley argue that this short editorial offers a convincing example of his critical dealing of poverty, unemployment, and social stratification.²¹ He began this commentary by asking rhetorically, "Why are thousands of

people starving, perishing for want, in every part of the nation . . . Now why is this? Why have all these nothing to eat? Because they have nothing to do. The plain reason why they have no meat is, because they have no work.”²² From this, Wesley attempted to provide answers for the rising unemployment rate, arguing that high food and land costs and taxes were largely to blame.²³ He further indicted those in the ascending classes who were living luxuriously at the expense of others. Wesley wrote:

Another cause (the most terrible of all, and the most destructive both of personal and social happiness) why not only beef, mutton, and pork, but all kinds of victuals, are so dear, is luxury. What can stand against this? Will it not waste and destroy all that nature can produce? If a person of quality will boil down three dozen of neat's tongues, to make two or three quarts of soup (and so proportionably in other things), what wonder that provisions fail? Only look into the kitchens of the great, the nobility and gentry, almost without exception; (considering withal that “the tow of the peasant tread upon the heel of the courtier;”) and when you have observed the amazing waste which is made there, you will no longer wonder at the scarcity, and consequently dearth, of the things which they use so much art to destroy.²⁴

Thus, while it has been held by some that the Protestant work ethic adversely contributed to the development of a stratified, capitalistic society, supporters of Wesley contend that he served as an exception to this attitude. His strong language leads some to herald him as a robust representative for the poor within an ascending populace embracing dreams associated with the glory of newfound capitalism.

Despite these accolades, however, other scholars believe he did not go far enough in his critique of dehumanizing trends that privileged the rich at the expense of the lower class members of society. Argentinian Methodist José Bonino, for example, argues that Wesley’s solutions to the complex social problems of poverty and stratification were, by today’s standards at least, far too simplistic. In fact, he interprets Wesley’s article, “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions,” as an attempt to exemplify his reductionist tendencies and inability to fully understand the more systematic and complex aspects of evil in his day.²⁵ Bonino posits, “[h]is attempt to work with hard data, statistics, prices, and market conditions is extraordinary for a religious leader. But when he attempts to find causes and remedies, he remains totally within the premises of the

mercantilist system and completely unaware of the structural causes of the crises."²⁶

Furthermore, there are those who contend Wesley's inability to see the complex nature of the social problems around him ultimately prevented those in the lower social classes from addressing their deep-rooted problems and led them to accept their role in society without adequately challenging "the rules of the game."²⁷ Detractors of Wesley refer to the Halévy thesis for this argument.²⁸ French philosopher and historian Elie Halévy asserted that Britain's avoidance of civil revolution was correlated to the suppression that emerging British Methodism invoked upon the general population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He concluded, "England was spared the revolution toward which the contradictions in her polity and economy might otherwise have led her, through the stabilizing influence of evangelical religion, particularly Methodism . . . The despair of the working class was the raw material to which Methodist doctrine and discipline gave a shape."²⁹ In other words, it is argued Wesley birthed a movement so conservatively numbing that liberating and revolutionary impulses were minimized while nonviolent and politically accommodating positions were internalized in their place.

Thus, while some scholars consider Wesley to have effectively dealt with the destructive social trends of poverty and stratification, we must also acknowledge there are those who consider his approach on these issues to have been less than ideal and even detrimental in dealing with contextual social sin. I make no attempt to shy away from this ambiguity. Still, as we consider the diagnostic tools at Wesley's disposal and the unchecked optimism concerning human advancement in the eighteenth century, I am inclined to argue that Wesley's approach to dehumanizing trends, though not flawless, had some redeeming qualities.

Wesley on an Ideology of Individualism

Those who claim Wesley adequately addressed the ideological individualism that characterized the early British Industrial Revolution interpret his writings as evidencing a soteriology focused on the atoning work of Christ for all humanity. They argue his words and actions typified a constant battle against the increasingly individualistic focus of modern economic thought.³⁰ In his sermon, "Fourth Discourse upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," for example, he remarked, "Christianity is

essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary one, is to destroy it . . . When I say this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all, without society – without living and conversing with other men.”³¹ From this, it is argued that Wesley clearly insisted upon a form of Christianity that makes a clear connection between a relationship with God and a relationship with fellow human beings. Referring to the social ethics of Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification, economist Thomas Madron writes:

The love of which Wesley speaks is completely inclusive, extending to all classes and states of people . . . The doctrine of perfection was at once profoundly theological and ethical, which led his thinking into the problems of political and social reform. The love concept was first a social concept, rather than an individualistic one, and as such led to social and political criticism.³²

Nonetheless, Wesley has been criticized by others who consider his philosophies and actions firmly entrenched within eighteenth-century ideological individualism. While prepared to concede that he spoke of social holiness, some still criticize Wesley for possessing an anthropology that was incurably individualistic and incapable of dealing with the complexity of social sin.³³ Wesley scholar Rupert E. Davies argues that “salvation for Wesley concerned an individual’s personal life and personal relations, first with God and then with neighbors and friends and fellow Christians. This was as far as Wesley looked for the whole self.”³⁴

A close scrutiny of his words also reveals that his understanding of the human predicament reflects a convenient arrangement of terms (e.g., social religion) that ultimately describes sin, manifested in social expression, as little more than a projection of individual sins.³⁵ Thus, critics argue that while his doctrine of holiness was social in the narrow sense (i.e. it related persons with one another), it still suffered from the influence of a contextual ideology in which the individual, in the end, is the primary focus.³⁶ Methodist scholar Theodore R. Weber notes:

There is nothing in Wesley of the notion that the individual is a societal epiphenomenon, a cog in the machine, a drop in the ocean of liquid society. Nor, conversely, is there anything to suggest belief in the concept of social as a person, with unified organs of reason and will i.e. the presuppositions of personal responsibility. Neither does one find in Wesley a concept of collective guilt of the kind necessary

to make the transfer. He knows that the people collectively are guilty, and he tells them so, but they are guilty of a collection of various types of sins; they are not guilty of acting wrongly with one mind and will as a solidary people.³⁷

Any attempt, then, to provide an analysis of Wesley's treatment of the prominent individualistic mindset of his time must take into account the conflicting views regarding his effectiveness, message, and legacy on this issue. I prefer not to shy away from these inconsistencies. We cannot deny the potential impact that a culture obsessed with individual, human agency had upon Wesley any more than we can deny this influencing fixation among us today. Nonetheless, I argue it can be said he was among the very few theologians in his day that made attempts, at the very least, to consider the social aspect of both the Christian faith and societal norms. In that respect, I believe there are significant qualities in Wesley's thought to address what is called social sin today.

Wesley on False Consciousness

Inevitably, any assessment of false consciousness in Wesley's day leads us into the realm of an analysis of his hamartiology. Those who suggest he dealt adequately with the blinding nature of social sin are also prone to argue that his longest single essay and only explicit doctrinal opus is a strong defense of the doctrine of original sin.³⁸ This 1757 essay was, in part, a response to the claims of John Taylor, an individual considered by Wesley to be "easily persuaded to think favourably of himself."³⁹ Against the common view that the doctrine of human depravity was a bothersome and irritating "superstitious error," Wesley was adamant that all humans are born inherently dead in trespasses and sin.⁴⁰ Taking this main doctrinal treatise and condensing it into a sermon entitled, "Original Sin," he wrote, "So long as a man born blind continues so, he is scarce sensible of his want: Much less, could we suppose a place where all were born without sight, would they be sensible of the want of it. In like manner, so long as men remain in their natural blindness of understanding, they are not sensible of their spiritual wants."⁴¹ In another sermon, called, "The Christian Treasure," he wrote:

Let a musician be ever so skillful, he will make but poor music if his instrument be out of tune. From a disordered brain (such as is, more or less, that of every child of man) there will necessarily arise

confusedness of apprehension, showing itself in a thousand instances; false judgment, the natural result thereof; and wrong inferences; and from these, innumerable mistakes will follow, in spite of all the caution we can use.⁴²

It is held by some scholars that these references to blindness, insensibility, deafness, and disorder of the human condition reveal a keen responsiveness in Wesley's writings to the unconscious nature of social sin.

Some scholars further interpret his strong denunciation of oppression against the poor as evidence of his thorough understanding of the blinding characteristic of social sin. They contend that a large amount of his writings and preaching invoked urgency for those in the privileged classes to overcome the blindness that prevented them from seeing their own selfishness and the suffering of others.⁴³ For example, in a sermon labeled, "The Fall of Man," he tenaciously proclaimed to Britain's affluent population:

Open your eyes! Look round you! See darkness that may be felt; see ignorance and error; see vice in ten thousand forms; see consciousness of guilt, fear, sorrow, shame, remorse, covering the face of the earth! See misery, daughter of sin. See on every side, sickness and pain, inhabitants of every nation under heaven; driving on the poor, helpless sons of men, in every age, to the gates of death!⁴⁴

In another sermon titled, "On Visiting the Sick," Wesley chastised the rich, in particular, for accepting a blinded approach toward the poor. He wrote, "[h]ence it is that . . . one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know because they care not to know: They keep out of the way of knowing it and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart."⁴⁵ Some argue from sermonic excerpts such as these that Wesley exemplified a comprehensive understanding of what social scientists today refer to as false consciousness.

On the other hand, I cannot overlook that Wesley's treatment of the doctrine of sin is the locus of much debate among theologians. Whether or not he adequately handled the blinding nature of original sin, some scholars argue that false consciousness, proposed as a feature of social sin, is nowhere to be found in his theology. In particular, his commentary entitled, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," is commonly referenced by critics. In this article, Wesley made a clear distinction

between sin as “voluntary” and “involuntary” disobedience. He wrote, “[t]o explain myself a little farther on this head: Not only sin, *properly so called* (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law), but sin, *improperly so called* [emphasis added] (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown), needs the atoning blood.”⁴⁶ By making this distinction, some scholars insist that Wesley departed from a more absolute definition of sin and drew upon the classical (Augustinian) and medieval distinction that only voluntary transgressions should be properly called sin and incur a sense of guilt.⁴⁷

Critics suggest this clear distinction in Wesley’s definition of sin reinforces a strident individualistic line that makes any notion of blinding social sin extremely difficult to reconcile with Wesleyan theology. In other words, if distinctions can be made between “properly so called” sin and “improperly so called” sin, then it becomes very difficult to build an argument for a theology of systemic social evil, that, by nature, is often expressed involuntarily and hidden elusively in social structures.⁴⁸ In this regard, detractors argue that Wesley presented a naïve understanding of systematic blindness and personal guilt that does not transmit beyond a cursory level of human ignorance.⁴⁹ Wesley critic, R. Newton Flew, for example, charges that Wesley’s stress on the conscious and deliberate intention of sin represents the most formidable defect in his doctrine of hamartiology.⁵⁰

This argument against Wesley is substantial. However, I contend this criticism fails to take into account the polemic and exacting purpose of the commentary, “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” which was written specifically for Christians dealing with the residual effects of sin.⁵¹ In addition, claims that Wesley either ignored or disregarded “involuntary” sin are not substantiated by his overall actions, or by an extensive appraisal of his writings. In another sermon titled, “Spirit of Bondage and Adoption,” Wesley appears to argue that sin, more broadly defined, is utterly reprehensible. He writes, “[i]f thou dost [commit sin], is it willingly or unwillingly? In either case God hath told thee whose thou art – ‘He that committeth sin is of the devil.’”⁵² Admittedly, his inconsistency on this issue requires us to take Wesley beyond his own work if we are to apply to him a response to social sin that includes the notion of false consciousness. Still, substantial underpinnings remain for an understanding of the blinding character of systemic injustice and societal evil.

Wesley on Collective Institutional Decisions

Finally, an examination of Wesley's dealings with unjust collective decisions inevitably leads scholars to focus on his peculiar engagement with political issues in his day.⁵³ While he may well have said, "I am no politician; politics lie quite out of my province. Neither have I any acquaintance, at least no intimacy, with any that bear that character,"⁵⁴ his life and writings reveal he was prone to involve himself in decisions of a political and economic nature.

Supporters contend it was not beyond him to challenge Parliament in areas he considered unjust and discriminatory. One example of this is illustrated by a 1776 journal entry in which he appears surprised that someone would not consider it appropriate to petition government for change regarding food-price inflation. He writes, "[i]n [sic] my way to Exeter, I read over an ingenious tract, containing some observations I never saw before . . . that to petition Parliament to alter [food inflation] is to put them upon impossibilities, and can answer no end but that of inflaming the people against their Governors."⁵⁵ From this, advocates conclude he was not above calling and challenging government for intervention in complex problems facing Britain. Wesley supporters also invoke other examples where he challenged government policy. Regarding the issue of government-sponsored land enclosures, he objected to them strongly in his writings because of the way in which enclosures edged smaller farmers in Britain out of business. In his sermon, "Thoughts on The Present Scarcity of Provisions," he argued:

But why are pork, poultry, and eggs so dear? Because of the monopolizing of farms; perhaps as mischievous a monopoly as was ever introduced into these kingdoms. The land which was some years ago divided between ten or twenty little farmers, and enabled them comfortably to provide for their families, is now generally engrossed by one great farmer. One farms an estate of a thousand a year, which formerly maintained ten or twenty.⁵⁶

It is likewise contended that, later in his life, Wesley invested considerable energy acting and speaking out against the exploiting institution of slavery.⁵⁷ His journal entry from 12 February 1772 reads, "In returning, I read a very different book, published by an honest Quaker, on that execrable sum of all villainies, commonly called the Slave Trade. I read of nothing like it in the heathen world, whether ancient or modern: And it infinitely exceeds, in every instance of barbarity, whatever Christian slaves suffer in Mahometan countries."⁵⁸ Later in 1774, he published a counter-

cultural pamphlet entitled, "Thoughts upon Slavery," which outlined his position concerning institutionalized slave trade. Concerning slave owners, he accusingly wrote:

Are you a man? Then you should have an human heart. But have you indeed? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do you never feel another's pain? Have you no sympathy? No sense of human woe? No pity for the miserable? When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, or the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-creatures, was [sic] you a stone, or a brute? Did you look upon them with the eyes of a tiger? When you squeezed the agonizing creatures down in the ship, or when you threw their poor mangled remains into the sea, had you no relenting? Did not one tear drop from your eye, one sigh escape from your breast? Do you feel no relenting now? If you do not, you must go on, till the measure of your iniquities is full. Then will the great God deal with you as you have dealt with them, and require all their blood at your hands.⁵⁹

Such diatribes established him among the first in Britain to speak forcefully against the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Consequently, advocates of Wesley regard him as a leader who consistently battled against dehumanizing collective decisions imposed by societal structures in his day.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that his strong allegiance to the British monarchy exemplified a more acquiescent approach when dealing with institutionalized social and political problems. Wesley scholar, Theodore Jennings notes that:

Wesley's political views seem to make him a most unlikely advocate of anything remotely like a radical social ethic. He was devoted to the king, wrote vigorously in favour of the institution of the constitutional monarchy, opposed democracy, attacked the American Revolution – even appears to have offered to raise an army in support of the king when the revolution threatened to spread to England – and maintained that his preachers should deal with politics only to defend the king against slander.⁶⁰

Critics suggest that, given the option to either challenge or comply with governmental decisions, Wesley's approach regularly evidenced a political

compliance, bolstered by his Christian faith. Particularly, they suggest that Wesley demonstrated his kingly loyalties in several important articles written in the 1760s and 1770s, the first of which was, "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs." Speaking of the rising discontent among the British populace with the decisions made by King George, he wrote:

His Majesty's character, then, after all the pains have been taken to make him odious, as well as contemptible, remains unimpeached; and therefore cannot be, in any degree, the cause of the present commotions. His whole conduct, both in public and private, ever since he began his reign, the uniform tenor of his behaviour, the general course both of his words and actions, has been worthy of an Englishman, worthy of a Christian, and worthy of a King.⁶¹

Detractors contend that if there was any question where his political allegiances lay, he made them abundantly clear in a 1777 tract entitled "A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England," which, incidentally, was a follow-up to a highly controversial earlier tract called, "A Calm Address to Our American Colonies." In "Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England," he wrote, "[d]o any of you blaspheme God or the King? None of you, I trust who are in connexion with me. I would no more continue in fellowship with those who continued in such practice, than with whore-mongers, or Sabbath-breakers, or thieves, or drunkards, or common swearers."⁶²

Consequently, while some scholars suggest Wesley championed a countercultural position against governmental and economic decisions, we must allow that his allegiance to the monarchy, which, incidentally, was the common standard for all clergy in the Church of England until 1841, may have compromised his positions at times. Once again, I do not intend to deny or disregard this tension. Nevertheless, I am inclined to argue that his life and writings present certain features which are estimable and redeeming in his opposition of institutional collective decisions.

Conclusion

In this essay I have endeavoured to provide a balanced critique of Wesley using a contemporary definition of social sin elucidated by Catholic theologian, Gregory Baum. In doing so, I have not overlooked Wesley's critics. Having explored the views of various scholars, however,

I take particular interest in those scholars who interpret his actions and writings as providing ample and convincing witness to a critical address of complex, social sin within an eighteenth-century context. From my own readings of Wesley, I conclude he was effective, in varying degrees, at dealing with dehumanizing trends, destructive ideology, harmful false consciousness, and unjust collective decisions. Although I must also admit, for some, his actions and writings also evidence a simplistic, inconsistent, and compromising approach to social sin, ultimately, I conclude that, for all of his apparent limitations, there are admirable and praiseworthy aspects of his life and writings that can help to inform our contemporary struggle against social sin.

Endnotes

1. John Senamu, Common Call Address at Edinburgh 2010, June 2010, www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/files/edinburgh2010/files/conference_docs/Common_Call_final.pdf (accessed 9 May 2011)
2. Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (Toronto: Novalis Publishing Inc., 2006), 174.
3. The Methodist Church of Bolivia in its *Manifiesto a la Nacion* (1970) affirmed: "Social, political, cultural, or economic structures become dehumanized when they do not serve 'all men and the total man,' in other words, when they are structured to perpetuate injustice. Structures are products of men, but they assume an impersonal character, even a satanic one, going beyond the possibility of individual action."
4. Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 175.
5. Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 175.
6. "To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law" (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* [London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1974], 173).
7. Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 175.
8. Charles Dickens' novels provide vivid pictures of the deplorable living conditions of the proletariat in this time.
9. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 97.

10. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), 2:104-106.
11. See Ferdinand Töennies, *Community and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).
12. Thomas W. Madron, "John Wesley on Economics," in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 110.
13. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 109-14.
14. Theodore Runyan, "Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyan (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 42.
15. Though enclosure acts existed in varying degrees in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed a new wave of acts which coincided with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. Subsequent Factory Acts in 1819, 1833, 1844, 1847, 1850, 1874, and 1878 became increasingly stringent with regard to exploiting child labour.
16. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, "On Divine Providence," ed. Albert C. Outler, *et al.*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Grand Rapids Book House, 2002), 2:317 (hereafter cited as *Works*).
17. Christina Pohl, "Holy Living and Complicated Wickedness," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 42, no. 1 (2007): 8-11.
18. Oscar Sherwin, *John Wesley: Friends of the People* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961), 132.
19. See Wesley, *Works*, "Dangers of Riches," 7:1ff; and "Increasing Riches," 7:355ff.
20. Wesley, *Works*, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," 8:190.
21. Pohl, "Holy Living and Complicated Wickedness," 14.
22. Wesley, *Works*, "Thoughts Upon the Scarcity of Provisions," 11:53-54.
23. Wesley, *Works*, "Thoughts Upon the Scarcity of Provisions," 11:55-56.
24. Wesley, *Works*, "Thoughts Upon the Scarcity of Provisions," 11:56-57.
25. Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 206.

26. José Miguez Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification From a Liberationist Perspective," in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 57.
27. Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," 58-59.
28. See Élie Halévy, *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1963).
29. Élie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1, 70.
30. Pohl, "Holy Living and Complicated Wickedness," 3.
31. Wesley, *Works*, "Fourth Discourse upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," 5:296.
32. Madron, "John Wesley on Economics," 106.
33. Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," 55.
34. Rupert E. Davies, "Justification, Sanctification, and the Liberation of the Person," in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 78.
35. Theodore R. Weber, "Breaking the Power of Cancelled Sin," *Quarterly Review* 11, no. 1 (1991):7.
36. Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," 54-55.
37. Weber, "Breaking the Power of Cancelled Sin," 9.
38. See Wesley, *Works*, "The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience," 9:191-464.
39. Wesley, *Works*, "Original Sin," 6:55.
40. John Tyson, "Sin, Self and Society: John Wesley's Hamartiology Reconsidered," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 44, no. 2 (1989): 78.
41. Wesley, *Works*, "Original Sin," 6:58.
42. Wesley, *Works*, "The Christian Treasure," 7:347.
43. Pohl, "Holy Living and Complicated Wickedness," 4.
44. Wesley, *Works*, "The Fall of Man," 6:223.

45. Wesley, *Works*, "On Visiting the Sick," 7:119.
46. Wesley, *Works*, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," 11:396.
47. Tyson, "Sin, Self and Society: John Wesley's Hamartiology Reconsidered," 78.
48. Incidentally, Baum makes a similar indictment against Roman Catholic believers based on the way the sacrament of penance is celebrated. He argues that Catholics are prone to see sin as exclusively being a conscious and free decision that violates a divine commandment (Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 198).
49. William Hasker, "Holiness and Systemic Evil: A Response to Albert Truesdale," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19, no. 1 (1991): 62.
50. R. Newton Flew, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 333.
51. Many Wesley scholars, such as Theodore Runyan, grant that "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" is not well-reasoned or developed. Rather, many see it as a defensive and polemical article written by Wesley in response to years of criticism and perceived misunderstanding of the term "Christian perfection." Some Wesleyan scholars admit the article should never have been written or printed due to the mass confusion it has created.
52. Wesley, *Works*, "Spirit of Bondage and Adoption," 5:109.
53. Bonino, "Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective," 58.
54. Wesley, *Works*, "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs," 11:14.
55. Wesley, *Works*, "Sept 2nd, 1776," 4: 85-86.
56. Wesley, *Works*, "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions," 11:56.
57. Less than a week before his death, Wesley was reading *The Interesting Narrative* by the prominent and pioneering African abolitionist Olaudah Equiano.
58. Wesley, *Works*, "Feb, 1772," 3:453.
59. Wesley, *Works*, "Thoughts on Slavery," 11:77.
60. Theodore Jennings Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 199.
61. Wesley, *Works*, "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs," 11:20.

62. Wesley, *Works*, "A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England," 11:139.