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ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR: A STUDY OF  
THE HISTORICAL FORMATION, THE  
THEOLOGICAL DETERMINATION, AND  
THE PRACTICAL MANIFESTATION  
OF JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD  
WAR AND ITS PLACE IN METHODISM.

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Emory University, Ph.D., 1960  
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THE THEOLOGICAL DETERMINATION,  
AND THE PRACTICAL MANIFESTATION  
OF JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR  
AND ITS PLACE IN METHODISM

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Emory University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

1960

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AND ITS PLACE IN METHODISM

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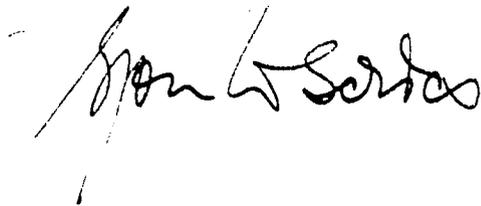
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## ABBREVIATIONS

of frequently quoted Wesley sources

- J The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. Nehemiah Curnock. Standard Edition, 8 vols., London: The Epworth Press, 1909-16.
- L The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. John Telford. Standard Edition, 8 vols., London: The Epworth Press, 1931.
- S Wesley's Standard Sermons, ed. Edward H. Sugden, 2 vols., London: The Epworth Press, 1921.
- W The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. Thomas Jackson. Third Edition, 14 vols., London: John Mason, 1829-30. (Or the identical editions)

The Works of John Wesley. Reproduction of the third edition as edited London: The Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872. 14 vols., Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958-59.

Only those portions not included in J, L, or S are used in W, and that either as WS or as W in conjunction with another abbreviated title as follows:

WS	Works, Sermons: the non-standard sermons of the Works.
Calm Am	<u>A Calm Address to our American Colonies.</u>
Calm Engld	<u>A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England.</u>
Comp Ireld	<u>A Compassionate Address to the Inhabitants of Ireland.</u>
Englishman	<u>A Word in Season: or, Advice to an Englishman.</u>
Locke	<u>Remarks upon Mr. Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding".</u>
Necessity	<u>Thoughts upon Necessity.</u>
Obs Lib	<u>Some Observations on Liberty.</u>
Orig Sin	<u>The Doctrine of Original Sin.</u>
Power	<u>Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power.</u>
Preface	<u>To the Reader.</u> In: Preface to the Third Edition.
Publ Aff	<u>Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs.</u> Usually quoted in the L edition.
Scarcity	<u>Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions.</u>
Seas Gr Brit	<u>A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great Britain.</u>

Ser Engld      A Serious Address to the People of England.  
Slavery        Thoughts upon Slavery.  
Th Lib         Thoughts upon Liberty.

INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR  
IN THE PAST AND PRESENT

## CHAPTER I

### WAR AND THE HERITAGE OF METHODISM

At no time in history does the monster of war seem to have threatened mankind as it does in our days. Some of the reasons are obvious. Until not too long ago wars usually took place on locally restricted geographical areas. Today technical progress makes the whole world a possible battlefield. Progress in the field of communication has drawn the inhabitants of the earth closer together. Developments in the field of armaments have made the destruction, if not of all, at least of most life on earth conceivable. Formerly, hired mercenaries, for the most part, were directly involved in the events of war which, after all, was their profession. In these days, however, through the invention of total war, everybody has become a possible actor in this drama. Whereas war then concerned individual people at particular places, today it threatens everybody everywhere. Two world wars have given a most terrible prelude to what still may be expected.

The more the monster of war has grown in the course of the years the more it has challenged those who are in a particular way

responsible for the moral guidance of mankind.

Among these the state must be mentioned in the first place. However such a decision may turn out, it will never be only the result of a rational and practical consideration - for then wars would have died out long ago - but it will at the same time also root in a certain conception of war. If, however, every political decision about war is based upon a certain conception of war, then it is in any case most important to ask who shaped that conception.

At all times various people have offered their help in forming a conception of war. In the most recent past the following may have been the most outstanding groups: the ideologies of political parties which, however, always comprise only a part of the population of a country; the world views of individual philosophers and their schools which, on the whole, are even more subjective than the first group; and the word of the churches which not only intends to confront man with the question of war but rather attempts to confront man, together with his question, with God. In the understanding of their mission the churches thus exceed all other groups. Their word is, therefore, of the greater significance and must be mentioned in the second place, after the decisions of the state.

Among the churches Methodism, as one of the youngest churches, has made a great effort to deal with the problem of war. Among all the various branches of Methodism, Episcopal Methodism, as it developed in America and spread from there over large areas of the world, deserves special attention. For in this section of Methodism the discussion of

war is particularly instructive.

Episcopal Methodism sees the particular question of war embedded in the general social problems of our modern times. The statements on war appear, therefore, always in connection with other pronouncements on the social situation. The idea of a social responsibility of the church emerged in The Methodist Episcopal Church, and it is reflected in the respective resolutions of the General Conferences as they appear in the Church Discipline since 1908.<sup>1</sup>

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which had split from The Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, was not as original as (or more ecumenical than?) her sister church in discussing the social problems. She adopted, since 1918, the "Social Creed of the Churches of Christ in America" and based her subsequent social pronouncements on it.<sup>2</sup>

In the framework of the comments on the contemporary social problems there appear also, in the North since 1924<sup>3</sup>, in the South since 1934<sup>4</sup>, declarations on the question of war.

<sup>1</sup>The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York et al. 1908. - Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York et al. 1912, 1916, 1920, 1924, 1928, 1932, 1936.

<sup>2</sup>The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Nashville et al. 1918, 1922, 1926, 1930, 1934, 1938.

<sup>3</sup>Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York et al. 1924 # 592: World Peace; 1928 # 597: Social Creed of the Churches, # 598: World Peace; 1932 # 561: Social Creed of the Church, # 562: World Peace, # 567: Summary of the Findings of the Sixth Ecumenical Conference of 1931; 1936 # 1463: Social and Economic Questions, # 1464: World Peace.

<sup>4</sup>The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Nashville et al. 1934 # 593: Social Creed of the Churches, # 594: The Church and War; 1938 # 593: Social Creed of the Churches, # 594: The Church and War.

And after the reunification of the two churches in 1939, in which also The Methodist Protestant Church participated, the discussion of the social situation has not only been continued but also intensified. The Church Disciplines published since then demonstrate this in a convincing way.<sup>5</sup>

Since the end of World War II also Methodist Episcopal Churches outside the United States of America joined the declarations of their American mother church on the social situation, as e.g. the Methodist Church in Germany.<sup>6</sup>

In the same way as thus The Methodist Church continued to examine the social situation in general she also continued to draw up pronouncements on the particular question of war.<sup>7</sup>

In this study we cannot present the practical steps which The Methodist Church proposed as the means to eliminate the danger of war,

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<sup>5</sup> Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church, Nashville et al. 1939, 1940, 1944, 1948, 1952, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> Kirchenordnung der Methodistenkirche, Frankfurt/Main 1954.

<sup>7</sup> Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church, Nashville et al. 1939 # 1695: Social Creed, # 1697: Statement on Peace and War; 1940 # 1712: Our Social Creed, # 1716: Statement on Peace and War. - The Shorter Discipline, An Abridgement of Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church, Nashville et al. 1944 # 2010: The Methodist Social Creed, # 2016: The Christian Church and War. - Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church, Nashville et al. 1948 # 2020: The Methodist Social Creed, # 2025: The Church and War and Peace; 1952 # 2020: The Methodist Social Creed, # 2026: The Church and War and Peace; 1956 # 2020: The Methodist Social Creed, # 2024: World Order and International Peace. - Kirchenordnung der Methodistenkirche, Frankfurt/Main 1954 # 139: Das soziale Bekenntnis der Methodistenkirche (This publication is a translation of the American edition of 1952).

to terminate the rage of war, or to overcome the consequences of war. We rather have to point to the theological foundation from which it was possible to give such practical suggestions.

Up to the unification of 1939 the theological foundation of the Methodist declarations on war is exclusively a certain understanding of Christology. In this the Northern and the Southern Churches differ in a way which is most intriguing to the modern reader although this difference can never have been intended. But it seems that the Northern Church attempts to go back to the incarnate, earthly Jesus, in a sense, therefore, to the "historical Jesus"; whereas the Southern Church appears to proceed from the resurrected, heavenly Christ, in a sense, therefore, from the "kerygmatic Christ".

In the opinion of the Northern Church Jesus can be grasped in the "ideals" which He established and which are normative for all questions of individual and social ethics. "We believe in making the social and spiritual ideals of Jesus our test for community as well as for individual life."<sup>8</sup>

This thesis is basic in two ways. On the one hand it leads, according to the main Methodist interest, to the motivation of practical proposals concerning war. On the other hand it leads, however, also to a principal judgment of the phenomenon of war as such.

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Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, New York et al. 1928 # 597; 1932 # 561.

The derivation of practical proposals from the ideals of Jesus is conceived as a "translation". The ideals of Jesus are encountered in the "Golden Rule" of the two commandments of love, they are "crystallized in the two commandments of Jesus: 'Love thy God' and 'Love thy neighbor'". As commandments the ideals are normative and not only can they be, but they must be "translated" into the various social sectors of life. As to the problem of war, the translation of the ideals of Jesus means a translation into "international relations". This is indeed the title under which the practical proposals concerning war are expressed.<sup>9</sup>

The judgment on the phenomenon of war as such was passed in special pronouncements on "World Peace". As early as 1924, war was condemned altogether, without any exception whatsoever. "War is not inevitable. It is the supreme enemy of mankind. Its futility is beyond question. Its continuance is the suicide of civilization."<sup>10</sup>

The next General Conference took a further step and explained in 1928, "the basic principle that war is a crime" saying: "We are convinced that war has become the supreme enemy of mankind. Its continuance is the suicide of civilization. We would utterly repudiate our professed faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, if we held that war is inevitable. War is not inevitable."<sup>11</sup>

In 1936, the final step was taken, and for the first time war was denounced as "sin". The pronouncement states that "war as we now know

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<sup>9</sup>Ib. 1928 # 597; 1932 # 561.

<sup>10</sup>Ib. 1924 # 572.

<sup>11</sup>Ib. 1928 # 598.

it is utterly destructive. It is the greatest social sin of modern times; a denial of the ideals of Christ; a violation of human personality; and a threat to civilization."<sup>12</sup>

That the Southern Church, in contrast to the Northern Church, does not proceed from the pre-Easter Jesus but from the post-Easter Christ appears from the reference to the "Lordship of Jesus Christ" as to be realized through the church. The church is called "to assert the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the social as well as in the individual life." The abstract demand "to assert" the Lordship of Christ means the concrete task "to interpret" the gospel for the modern time. For this is the further call of the church, namely "to interpret the gospel to this age in social as well as individual terms."<sup>13</sup>

It is this correlation of the assertion of the Lordship of Christ and the interpretation of the gospel which makes the impression that the Southern Church is referring to what we call today the "kerygmatic Christ". Christ and his gospel are treated as a unity. "The Church of God is divinely appointed to interpret Jesus Christ and his gospel to each successive generation, and to labor to the end that all things be brought into subjection to him." Where the Northern Church attempted directly to apply Jesus to the present time by translation, there the Southern Church recognized in Christ the authority under which man can

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<sup>12</sup> Ib. 1936 # 1464.

<sup>13</sup> The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Nashville et al. 1934 # 593; 1938 # 593.

"stand" for something, in our case against war. "We stand...for... (the) repudiation of war."<sup>14</sup> The attitude "to stand for the repudiation of war" is a pragmatic attitude. Consequently the Methodist Church of the South does not linger on principal considerations about the essence and nature of war. Thus also the pronouncements on "The Church and War" contain only practical proposals.<sup>15</sup>

The great event of the unification of the Methodist Church in 1939 brought also a new penetration and formulation of the attitude toward the social problems of the time in general and toward the problem of war in particular, the latter undoubtedly encouraged by the approaching clouds of World War II. The theological foundation has continued to be conceived Christologically, even more than before. In addition the Wesley tradition was rediscovered and consulted for its contribution to the social interest of Methodism.

The theological foundation in 1939, subsumed under the "Religious Position"<sup>16</sup> and in 1956, called "Our Theological Basis"<sup>17</sup>, was understood as the foundation of the Methodist "position on social and economic questions". From 1939 to 1952 this "position" appeared simply in the form of a "statement", whereas in 1956 it was felt that "as

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<sup>14</sup> Ib. 1934 # 593; 1938 # 593.

<sup>15</sup> Ib. 1934 # 594; 1938 # 594.

<sup>16</sup> Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church, Nashville et al. 1939 # 1695.

<sup>17</sup> Ib. 1956 # 2020.

Methodists we have an obligation to affirm our position".<sup>18</sup>

The theological foundation presents the "principles"<sup>19</sup> of Methodism as derived from the new Christological conceptions. These may be divided into three main groups according to three important functions of Jesus Christ, namely: Jesus Christ, the Teacher of the Church; Jesus Christ, the Son of God; and: Jesus Christ, The Redeemer of Man. Thus a certain Christological understanding of the Church precedes and mediates between a certain Christological understanding of God and a certain Christological understanding of man.

Jesus Christ, the Teacher of the Church. The Christological understanding of the Church, i.e. in this case of the Methodist Church, is orientated towards the teaching of Jesus Christ as Jesus of Nazareth; in a sense, therefore, as the historical Jesus. At this point we see the heritage of the former Methodist Episcopal Church break through.

The content of the "teachings of Jesus" is again defined in terms of the commandment of love. "Jesus taught us to love our neighbors."<sup>20</sup> The love of the neighbor, in turn, motivates the interest in justice for them. "Because we love them we seek justice for them."<sup>21</sup> This was however, only the early form of putting it. In 1956 the idea of

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<sup>18</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>19</sup>Ib. 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>20</sup>Ib. 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1944 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>21</sup>Ib. 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020.

justice was promoted from the subordination under the idea of love to the coordination with it. It was no longer conceived as a secondary inference but as another primary element of the teachings of Jesus. "Jesus taught us to love our neighbors and seek justice for them."<sup>22</sup>

The impact of the teachings of Jesus, thus interpreted, on the Church, was understood by The Methodist Church in two ways. In the first place, she felt that she ought to speak in the social situation. "We believe that to be silent in the face of need, injustice, and exploitation would be to deny Him."<sup>23</sup> In the second place, she also saw the basis for her speaking to the social situation. "The Methodist Church aims to", she even "must view the perplexing times and problems which we face today in the light of the teachings of Jesus."<sup>24</sup>

Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Christological understanding of God proceeds from the Sonship of Jesus Christ as the second person of the divine trinity. At this point a completely new Christological aspect is introduced into the discussion which not only directly results in a particular understanding of God but which then also indirectly implies a particular understanding of man.

From the belief that "Jesus Christ is His Son" it is inferred "that God is the Father of all peoples and races". The statement that

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<sup>22</sup>Ib. 1956 # 2020.

<sup>23</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 #2020. - In ib. 1956 # 2020 the introduction of "We believe" has been omitted.

<sup>24</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020: "aims to". - Ib. 1956 # 2020: "must".

God is the Father has two consequences for man, a vertical personal and a horizontal social one. Personally it is ascertained that man is the child of God. "Man is of infinite worth as child of God." Socially it is asserted that man is the brother of man. "We and all men are brothers."<sup>25</sup> Both aspects of man are closely interrelated. As there can be no Christian society without a Christian person so there can be no Christian person without a Christian society. "We believe that a Christian society is essential to the full nurture of a Christian person."<sup>26</sup>

It is very important to see that the Christological understanding of God, as we have outlined it, stands and falls with the equation of God the Father and God the Creator, in the early years implicitly assumed, in 1956 explicitly stated as follows. God created the world and man in it. Both the world as a whole and man as a part of it are qualified by creation in two ways. The world is created by God and for God. "We believe that 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof'." So is man. His creation by God is expressed in indicative terms: "Our own capacities and all we possess are gifts of the Creator." His creation for God is expressed in imperative terms: The gifts of the Creator "should be held and used in stewardship to him."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020. The last edition, however, has one deviation in that the brotherhood of men is defined in the shorter form of "All men are brothers".

<sup>26</sup> Ib. 1956 # 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Ib.

Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of Man. The Christological understanding of man, as connected with the idea of the "worth" of man, is derived from the redemption through Jesus Christ as the Christ of Good Friday and Easter; in a sense, therefore, as the "kerygmatic Christ". At this point the heritage of the former Methodist Episcopal Church, South, makes itself heard.

The redemption through Christ is the redemption of "human life" from "sin". Redemption is thus, in the first place, the redemption of human life. This is the purpose of Christ's death. "Jesus died for the redemption of human life."<sup>28</sup> The concept of human life stands for the whole of life in all areas. This was made clear in 1956 by saying that "the grace of God in Christ is available for redemption in all areas of life as we seek in penitence and obedience to do his holy will".<sup>29</sup>

Human life is ultimately defined as personality. Facing the social problems of the time The Methodist Church declares, in the language of personalism, her concern about man as personality in a twofold way. Personality is the principle of her social considerations and actions.

Personality is the principle of the Church's social considerations because she believes in it as value. This is to be understood as an absolute claim which reads in the original form of 1939

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<sup>28</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>29</sup>Ib. 1956 # 2020.

till 1952: "We believe that personality possesses the highest value."<sup>30</sup> In the final form of 1956 it was nearer explained in the assertion: We believe that all persons have supreme value in the sight of God, and ought to be so regarded by us."<sup>31</sup> Besides, the idea of personality as the value in the sight of God reminds of the above mentioned idea of the "worth" of man as a "child of God".

Personality is the principle of the Church's social actions because she makes it her criterion. The Methodist Church is determined that "we test all institutions and practices by their effect upon personality" or, as it was altered in 1956, "upon persons".<sup>32</sup> The application of the criterion of personality is conceived as the concern about personality. "Since personality is being oppressed in so many parts of the world, we seek for its emancipation and for those things which will enrich and redeem it."<sup>33</sup> The final form of this statement of 1956 simplifies the structure of the sentence and thereby makes it more powerful without altering its basic meaning, saying: "Personality is oppressed in many parts of the world, and we seek its emancipation and those things which will enrich and redeem it."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Ib. 1956 # 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Ib. 1956 # 2020.

Both forms, though, lead us in their last words back to our context of redemption and set up the equation that the redemption of man, which in the beginning has been understood as the redemption of human life, is supposed to mean the redemption of personality.

Redemption is furthermore, in the second place, the redemption from sin. For the church this has two implications. She has to acknowledge the fact of sin in order to fight against the effects of sin. The acknowledgment of sin of 1956 refers to both individual and social sin. "We believe that sin, both individual and social, stands under the judgment of God."<sup>35</sup> The fight against sin in any form was always regarded as the role of the church. "We believe we should live (to fulfill our obligation) to help save man from sin and from every influence which would harm or destroy him."<sup>36</sup>

This theological foundation is claimed to be mediated to the Church through the Methodist tradition, qualifying the resulting position of The Methodist Church on the social situation as her "historic position".<sup>37</sup>

The mediation of the theological foundation through the Methodist tradition, or "Our Heritage", as the Church preferred to call it in

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<sup>35</sup> Ib.

<sup>36</sup> Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020. The words in parentheses have been omitted in the last edition.

<sup>37</sup> Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020.

1956<sup>38</sup>, is in the years up to 1952 explained by a reference to John Wesley. "The interest of The Methodist Church in social welfare springs from the labors of John Wesley, who ministered to the physical, intellectual, and social needs of the people to whom he preached the gospel of personal redemption."<sup>39</sup>

This formulation was e.g. also adopted by the Methodist Church in Germany, however in a translation which does not render the exact meaning. For "the labors of John Wesley, who ministered to the needs of people" were interpreted as "the efforts which John Wesley made in order to minister to the needs of people."<sup>40</sup> The actual ministry of John Wesley has thus been reduced to the mere intention of this ministry.

In 1956 a very brief but very important addition has been inserted in the reference to John Wesley. It now reads that "the interest of The Methodist Church in social welfare springs from the gospel, and from the labors of John Wesley."<sup>41</sup>

The earlier statements were liable to the understanding, in the eyes of their authors certainly a misunderstanding, as if John Wesley were the source from which the Methodist social interest could "spring". The recent addition, introducing the gospel in its

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<sup>38</sup>Ib. 1956 # 2020.

<sup>39</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020.

<sup>40</sup>Kirchenordnung der Methodistenkirche, Frankfurt/Main 1954 # 139.

<sup>41</sup>Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church, Nashville et al. 1956 # 2020.

implications for the social stand of Methodism, was obviously intended as a clarification. And although its words coordinate John Wesley with the gospel, as if there were now two sources of the Methodist social interest, its spirit clearly aims at the subordination of John Wesley as the channel under the gospel as the source of the interest of the Church in social questions. The meaning is clear: The position of The Methodist Church on the social situation, as founded on a particular understanding of Christology (the gospel as the source) is her historic position because it is mediated to her through her tradition (John Wesley as the channel).

The historic position of Methodism, proceeding from a theological foundation which is claimed to be influenced by John Wesley, is summarized in terms of the imitation of Christ, leading to the submission to the will of God. "We have followed Christ in laboring to bring (or: we have sought to follow Christ in bringing) the whole of life, with its activities, possessions, and relationships, into conformity with the will of God."<sup>42</sup> The historic position is elaborated in detail, using the words of 1956, as "Our Declaration of Social Concern".<sup>43</sup>

The mode of derivation of the position in the declaration from the theological foundation as mediated through tradition is defined

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<sup>42</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020. The rendition in parentheses is the one of 1956.

<sup>43</sup>Ib. 1956 # 2020.

as the application of the principles which are the theological foundation. "Applying the foregoing principles (to the social problems of our day), The Methodist Church declares itself as follows."<sup>44</sup> What follows is an enumeration of practical proposals which are, as to the form, strongly influenced by the formulations of the former Church of the South. This appears especially from the introductions to the subdivisions of the Social Creed, for these offer in most cases the former Southern phrases: "We stand for" this or that.<sup>45</sup>

Among the several practical proposals of the Church there is, also after 1939, one on the problem of war. The respective section in the Social Creed and the further pronouncements on war, as based on and related to it, have again to be analyzed with regard to two aspects. The particular historic position of The Methodist Church on war, as it is embedded in and results from her general historic position on the social situation, is, as to this study, of interest in so far as it (the one aspect) proceeds from the theological foundation discussed and as it (the other aspect) exceeds the mere practical level, revealing a principal stand on war. Methodologically we will have to invert the order of the aspects. Thus we have now to turn to the question of the influence of the Christological foundation on the theoretical and

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<sup>44</sup>Ib. 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020. The words in parentheses were dropped in 1956.

<sup>45</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712; 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020; 1956 # 2020.

practical attitude of The Methodist Church toward war which has, in turn, definite implications for the Church herself.

First: the influence of the Christological foundation on the theoretical attitude toward war.

The Christological foundation influencing the theoretical attitude toward war is not the Christological foundation in its entirety as described above but rather only in its first of the three parts dealing with Jesus Christ as the Teacher of the Church. This function of Jesus Christ has been understood as the function of the pre-Easter Jesus, a term which, in turn, has been defined as the heritage of the former Northern Church. And the former Northern Christology is indeed transparent in the content of the theoretical attitude toward war, for the Christological terms employed concern not only "the teaching" of Jesus, but also his "spirit", his "methods", and his "ideals".

The teaching, as well as the spirit of Jesus, are seen as absolutely "contrary" to war in so far as it involves "animosities and prejudices".<sup>46</sup> The methods of Jesus are contrasted to the methods of war by saying either that they "belong to different worlds"<sup>47</sup> or that they "move in different directions".<sup>48</sup> The ideals

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<sup>46</sup> Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020, # 2025; 1952 # 2020, # 2026; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020, # 2025; 1952 # 2020, # 2026.

<sup>48</sup> Ib. 1956 # 2020.

of Jesus are opposed to war because war is nothing but "a denial" of these ideals."<sup>49</sup>

The theoretical attitude toward war, being influenced by the Christological foundation, must now be stated as a chain of four links, resulting from the contrast of war and Christianity (in the sense described): war is force, cruelty, destruction, and sin.

War is force. In this it differs from Christianity. "War makes its appeal to force and hate, Christianity to reason and love."<sup>50</sup>

Thus "war is contrary to every tenet of love and reason for which Christianity stands."<sup>51</sup> Force characterizes the nature of war in many respects. "War is a crude and primitive force. It arouses passions which in the beginning may be unselfish and generous, but in the end war betrays those who trust in it. It offers no security that its decisions will be just and righteous. It leaves arrogance in the heart of the victor and resentment in the heart of the vanquished."<sup>52</sup>

War is cruelty. Force produces cruelty. The hope that "the horrors" and "the cruelties" of war would diminish is a vain hope. "War grows only more hideous and destructive."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712.

<sup>50</sup> Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020, # 2025; 1952 # 2020, # 2026.

<sup>51</sup> Ib. 1948 # 2025; 1952 # 2026.

<sup>52</sup> Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020, # 2025; 1952 # 2020, # 2026.

<sup>53</sup> Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020.

War is destruction. Cruelty grows into destruction. "War is utterly destructive."<sup>54</sup>

War is sin. Sin is the climax and the basis of war. In strong words, as inherited from the former Northern Church, the "sinfulness" of war is asserted.<sup>55</sup> War is openly called "our greatest collective social sin."<sup>56</sup>

As to the implications of the theoretical attitude of The Methodist Church for the Church herself it can be said that The Methodist Church, facing the problem of war, has arrived at a specific conception of both her nature and her mission, the latter understood in the negative and in the positive sense.

In the negative sense The Methodist Church "must not become the agent of any government for its furtherance", i.e. that of war. For The Methodist Church is a part of "Christianity", of "the Church as the body of Christ, the carrier of the gospel, the institution that bears Christ's name" and as such she "and war are utterly opposed."<sup>57</sup>

In the positive sense "The Methodist Church, whose representatives are in every part of the earth, must make its full contribution to this great end" which has been defined as "the abolition of war." This contribution is possible again because The Methodist Church is a part of "the Church of Christ, which transcends races, nations, and classes"

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<sup>54</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712.

<sup>55</sup>Ib. 1948 # 2025; 1952 # 2026.

<sup>56</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712.

<sup>57</sup>Ib. 1948 # 2025.

and which as such "has an all-important contribution to make" to the problem in question.<sup>58</sup>

Second: the influence of the Christological foundation on the practical attitude toward war.

The Christological foundation influencing the practical attitude toward war is twofold. On the one hand it is again the pre-Easter, "historical" Jesus, as conceived by the former Church of the North, whose "teachings" need only to be "accepted" in order to eliminate war. "When the teachings of Jesus are fully accepted, war as a means of settling international disputes will die, and dying will set the world free from a cruel tyrant."<sup>59</sup>

The belief in the possibility of an elimination of war presupposes, or at least involves, the conviction that war is not inevitable. "It does not satisfy the Christian conscience to be told war is inevitable."<sup>60</sup> Therefore "we reaffirm the conviction that war is not inevitable."<sup>61</sup>

This conviction implies the theologically delicate assumption that if the sin of war is not inevitable then sin as such is not inevitable. If this is true, then the doctrine of original sin is discarded.

On the other hand the Christological foundation is also conceived in terms of the post-Easter "kerygmatic" Christ of the former Church of

<sup>58</sup> Ib. 1940 # 1716.

<sup>59</sup> Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020, # 2025; 1952 # 2020, # 2026.

<sup>60</sup> Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020, # 2025; 1952 # 2020, # 2026; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Ib. 1952 # 2026.

the South. From this point of view "the spirit of Christ" as appearing in "the gospel" is the force motivating action against war or toward peace. "Motivated and mobilized by the spirit of Christ and challenged by world conditions, Christians are in a strategic position to make the gospel articulate in world affairs to the end that peace may become real and dynamic."<sup>62</sup> The concrete way of articulating the gospel is, true to the Southern heritage, to "stand for" a series of "propositions" on war<sup>63</sup> which are summarized in the traditional formula: "We stand for the repudiation of war."<sup>64</sup>

The stand against war, which received only a pragmatic interpretation in the former Southern Church, is, since 1939, supported by two principal considerations. The one concerns the "fertile causes of war"<sup>65</sup> which are enumerated in detail. The other draws a line from the Southern understanding of Christology to the causes of war stating that "to each of these factors the Christian gospel" not only "has a decisive word to speak"<sup>66</sup>, but even "has an answer".<sup>67</sup>

As to the implications of the practical attitude of The Methodist Church for the Church herself it can be said that The Methodist Church,

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<sup>62</sup>Ib. 1956 # 2024.

<sup>63</sup>Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020, # 2025; 1952 # 2020, # 2026; 1956 # 2020.

<sup>64</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695; 1940 # 1712.

<sup>65</sup>Ib. 1948 # 2025; 1952 # 2026.

<sup>66</sup>Ib. 1948 # 2025.

<sup>67</sup>Ib. 1952 # 2026.

facing the problem of war, has also suggested the application of her stand, and again in both, the negative and the positive sense.

In the negative sense "The Methodist Church takes its stand undivided in its opposition to the spirit of war now raging through the world."<sup>68</sup> This was resolved in 1939 in the light of the encroaching events of World War II. The practical stand against war means concretely that "we stand upon this ground, that The Methodist Church as an institution cannot endorse war nor support or participate in it."<sup>69</sup> This statement, introduced in 1939, was enlarged in the following year by saying that "The Methodist Church, although making no attempt to bind the consciences of its individual members, will not officially endorse, support, or participate in war."<sup>70</sup>

In the positive sense The Methodist Church must make its contribution against war in more than just "to declare its sinfulness."<sup>71</sup> For "it is not enough to declare the evil of war."<sup>72</sup> The Church must rather fulfill a demanding and creating function. During the war (1944) the Church felt that "the time is at hand when the Church must rise in its might and demand an international organization

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<sup>68</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1697.

<sup>69</sup>Ib. 1939 # 1695, 1940 # 1712.

<sup>70</sup>Ib. 1940 # 1716.

<sup>71</sup>Ib. 1948 # 2025.

<sup>72</sup>Ib. 1956 # 2020.

which will make another war impossible."<sup>73</sup> This view was held until 1952. In 1956 it was replaced by the view that "we must actively and constantly create the conditions of peace" which then are enumerated in detail.<sup>74</sup>

The extensive discussion of the Methodist attitude toward war, as presented above, reveals what must be considered as its central theological problem. This is the question whether the position of Methodism, when it is assumed to be its historic position, can be proven so or not. A positive result would make the Methodist reference to and interpretation of Wesley legitimate, a negative result would make them illegitimate.

The decision whether the Methodist position is Wesleyan or not Wesleyan, or even partly Wesleyan and partly not Wesleyan, cannot be passed by without a thorough investigation of John Wesley's attitude toward war. It is precisely this problem of John Wesley's attitude toward war which has never received any adequate treatment, as a survey of the literature may show.

Among the literature on Methodism and Wesley which assumes to be scholarly work only a few references to Wesley's attitude toward war can be traced, mostly in short quotations or only allusions to the subject.

The Methodist attitude toward war, whether that of before or after 1939, appears only in three works, but it is mentioned only in short

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<sup>73</sup>Ib. 1944 # 2010; 1948 # 2020; 1952 # 2020.

<sup>74</sup>Ib. 1956 # 2020.

remarks, without any reference to Wesley whatsoever. This is the case in Sherwood Eddy's and Kirby Page's study on The Abolition of War of 1924, in which they plead the case against war and discuss questions and answers concerning war.<sup>75</sup> The same is true with regard to Walter W. van Kirk and his investigation on The Churches and World Peace, published in 1934.<sup>76</sup> And even in 1953, Charles Samuel Braden, in his book on War, Communism and World Religions is content with such a short treatment of the Methodist attitude toward war.<sup>77</sup>

The Wesleyan attitude toward war has occasionally challenged the interest of scholars who have studied Wesley either under the biographical, the historical, the sociological, or the theological perspective.

The biography of Wesley is still most ably treated in the two standard works, the three volume work of L. Tyerman of 1870-71,<sup>78</sup> and the five volume work of John S. Simon of 1921-34.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore

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<sup>75</sup> Sherwood Eddy & Kirby Page, The Abolition of War, New York 1924, pp. 64, 194.

<sup>76</sup> Walter W. van Kirk, Religion Renounces War, Chicago 1934, pp. 10, 34.

<sup>77</sup> Charles Samuel Braden, War, Communism and World Religions, New York 1953, pp. 251.

<sup>78</sup> L. Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., 3 Vols., London 1870-1871.

<sup>79</sup> John S. Simon, John Wesley, 5 Vols., London 1921-1934; Vol. I: John Wesley and the Religious Societies, 1921; Vol. II: John Wesley and the Methodist Societies, 1923; Vol. III: John Wesley and the Advance of Methodism, 1925; Vol. IV: John Wesley the Master-Builder, 1927; Vol. V: John Wesley The Last Phase, 1934.

bibliography is a true sector of biography, therefore the bibliographical work of Richard Green of 1896<sup>80</sup> must also be considered in its biographical implications.

All of these publications do have references to John Wesley's attitude toward war, but not because they are, as we are, interested in it as such, but because they regard it a constituent factor of Wesley's life which they have to place into its proper historical framework. Consequently their contribution has no effect at all on the theological determination and only very little effect on the practical manifestation, but considerable effect on the historical formation of John Wesley's attitude toward war. Their actual contribution in its limited field must be discussed in detail in the following chapter where these works are extensively consulted.

The history of Wesley as it exceeds his life and influences Methodism thereafter is another aspect in the Wesley research.

Very little has been done to study Wesley's attitude toward war from this angle. As to periodicals, the Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society published four annotations to the said problem in 1900, 1910, 1914, and 1924.<sup>81</sup> As to books on the history of Wesley

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<sup>80</sup> Richard Green, The Works of John and Charles Wesley, London 1896.

<sup>81</sup> Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, London 1897 ff.; Vol. II, 1900, pp. 201 f.; W. H. Coradine, Wesley and the Colonies; Vol. VII, 1910, pp. 166 f.; J. Taylor, Wesley as a Party Politician; Vol. IX, 1914, pp. 5-9; T. E. Bridgen, Wesley and Joseph Galloway, Member of the First American Continental Congress; Vol. XIV, 1924, pp. 186-191; R. Butterworth, Charles Wesley's Hymns in War Time.

only three authors mention the position on war at all. One of them, T. E. Brigden, needs, however, only two lines for this problem in the section on Wesley in the New History of Methodism as edited by W. T. Townsend, H. B. Workman and George Eayrs in 1909.<sup>82</sup> The other two authors devote at least a small paragraph to the question. In 1928, Paul Neff Garber points to the fact, without accounting for it, of Wesley's opposition to war as an argument for That fighting spirit of Methodism.<sup>83</sup> And in 1943, Umphrey Lee, discussing the history of pacifism, in his work on The Historic Church and Modern Pacifism, offers a few scarcely related quotations from Wesley in order to show that his "humanitarian instincts revolted against war."<sup>84</sup>

The sociology of Wesley has always received comparatively much attention (unfortunately, however, mostly to the neglect of and at the expense of his theology). Thus also his attitude toward war has been presented sociologically, in almost all cases, however, too sociologically i.e. sociologically only".

The series of these studies was inaugurated in 1918 by John Alfred Faulkner. He understands Wesley's attitude toward war only in a definitely sociological manner, because he refers to it when discussing

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<sup>82</sup> T. E. Brigden, John Wesley, in: W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman, George Eayrs ed., A New History of Methodism, 2 Vols., London 1909, Vol. I, p. 224.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Neff Garber, That Fighting Spirit of Methodism, Greensboro, N. C. 1928, pp 89 f.

<sup>84</sup> Umphrey Lee, The Historic Church and Modern Pacifism, New York 1943, pp. 59, 172-175.

the sociologist Wesley whom he carefully distinguishes from Wesley the theologian and churchman. The reference to Wesley's position does, however, only consist of a paraphrase of two Wesley quotations and is, therefore, indeed but a reference.<sup>85</sup> In 1930, J. W. Ernst Sommer published a brief paper on John Wesley and the social question, in which only one of the quotations already mentioned is expounded which, of course, is still less satisfactory.<sup>86</sup> Maldwyn Edwards presented in 1933, and in 1935, his studies of the social and political influence of Wesley and Methodism after Wesley. In both of his works he discusses, respectively mentions, only Wesley's attitude toward one particular war i.e. the American War of Independence. This is not adequate to show his attitude toward war as a whole.<sup>87</sup> Kathleen Walker MacArthur in her 1936 investigation of John Wesley's economic ethics excludes the problem of war altogether with the exception of one summarizing allusion to it.<sup>88</sup> In 1937, W. T. Watkins pursued his interest of what grew out of Aldersgate. He explains Wesley's social attitudes in a separate chapter in which he also devotes one paragraph to his attitude toward war. But also he considers only one source and that is the same source J. W. Ernst Sommer used. This naturally

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<sup>85</sup> John Alfred Faulkner, Wesley as Sociologist, Theologian, Churchman, New York 1918, pp. 19-21.

<sup>86</sup> J. W. Ernst Sommer, John Wesley und die soziale Frage, Bremen 1930, pp. 16-18.

<sup>87</sup> Maldwyn Edwards, John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century, New York 1933, pp. 70-81. - Id., After Wesley, London 1935, pp. 17 f.

<sup>88</sup> Kathleen Walker MacArthur, The Economic Ethics of John Wesley, New York 1936, p. 65.

lessens the value of his work.<sup>89</sup> The 1937 publication of E. C. Urwin and Douglas Wollen on the Christian citizenship of John Wesley does not claim to be more than a collection of selections from Wesley's social teaching. It offers three unrelated quotations on Wesley's attitude toward war, including the already famous one which also the preceding authors emphasized, as well as the most important quotations on Wesley's conduct during the American war of Independence.<sup>90</sup> By far the best study of Wesley from the sociological point of view has been presented, in 1938, by J. Wesley Bready. It concerns the social reform introduced by Wesley and includes the best, although still too brief treatment of Wesley's attitude toward "the insanity" of war. He limits himself to this particular aspect of Wesley's attitude toward war, and furthermore considers only two instances where Wesley encountered the problem of war.<sup>91</sup>

The theology of Wesley is the neglected stepchild of Methodism. Only in the most recent years the indications are increasing that it may one day receive the honour which it deserves. The neglect of Wesley's theology in general also accounts for the neglect of his theology of war in particular.

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<sup>89</sup> W. T. Watkins, Out of Aldersgate, Nashville 1937, pp. 123-125.

<sup>90</sup> E. C. Urwin & Douglas Wollen, John Wesley - Christian Citizen, London 1937, pp. 84-100.

<sup>91</sup> J. Wesley Bready, England: Before and After Wesley, London 1938, pp. 229-234.

The first author of a theology of Wesley (which, in 1926, he still called a "Christian philosophy") who allows for Wesley's attitude toward war at all although only in a biographical introductory note is George Eayrs.<sup>92</sup> Umphrey Lee in his outline of Wesley's theology with its implications for modern religion suggests the first theological evaluation of Wesley's attitude toward war. He correctly connects it at two points with Wesley's anthropology. But the suggestions do not exceed their character as brief suggestions, saying too much by implication and too little by explication.<sup>93</sup> In 1946, William Ragsdale Cannon published his comprehensive interpretation of John Wesley's theology. In it he shows that he is well aware of the anthropological implications of Wesley's attitude toward war, as suggested by Umphrey. But also he thinks it to be sufficient in the framework of his study to paraphrase one source of Wesley, definitely the most important one.<sup>94</sup> Henry Carter's work in 1951, on The Methodist Heritage was prepared by his studies on the Methodist Way, which first appeared in 1914, and were revised and enlarged in 1937. In these two publications it has been assumed throughout that Methodism has little to do with Wesley as far as the attitude toward war is concerned. Wesley's theology of war is mentioned only occasionally and at these few occasions it has

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<sup>92</sup>George Eayrs, John Wesley, Christian Philosopher and Church Founder, London 1926, p. 45.

<sup>93</sup>Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion, Nashville 1936, pp. 121, 290 f.

<sup>94</sup>William Ragsdale Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, New York 1946, p. 188.

furthermore lost its theological significance.<sup>95</sup>

The examination of the literature confirms the thesis that John Wesley's attitude toward war has been neglected almost completely. In the eyes of the quoted writers it was obviously a peripheral subject for Wesley. Whether this is true or not, it reveals a grievous gap in the Wesley research up till today which must soon be filled for the sake of a true understanding of Wesley and a credible witness of Methodism. This study wants to make its contribution to the amendment of the neglect.

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<sup>95</sup>Henry Carter, The Methodist, London, First Edition 1914, Revised and Enlarged Edition 1937, pp. 114 f. - Id., The Methodist Heritage, New York 1951, pp. 122 f., 146, 186.

**THE PROBLEM OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR  
IN HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT**

**PART I**

**THE HISTORICAL FORMATION OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR**

## CHAPTER II

### WAR AND THE COMMENTS OF WESLEY

Wesley never expressed his theology, like Calvin, as the word of a coherent system but, like Luther, as the word in a pressing situation. The formation of his theology is occasioned by, though not rooted in, outward events. This is also true with regard to his attitude toward war.

Wesley's life covers almost the whole of the 18th century, a century which presented Great Britain with sufficient wars<sup>1</sup> to occasion Wesley to make himself heard in the particular situation.

During four distinguishable periods of war in the 18th century Wesley raised his voice. Three of these concern wars between Great Britain and other European countries, the last of them brought about and partly overlapped by the conflict between England and America.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Simon, II, pp. 178 f.: "It is a significant fact that during the whole of John Wesley's great mission this country (i.e. England, EWG) was either preparing for war, at war, or recovering from the effects of war." Ib. is also given a note about and a list of the various wars.

The first period covers the years of 1739 to 1748. In 1739 Great Britain declared war against Spain which eventually, in 1744, turned into a war with France. This was due mainly to two circumstances: the alliance of France with Spain and the complications of the War of the Austrian Succession on the continent. For when Prussia, i.e. Frederick II, in 1740 turned upon Austria, i.e. Maria Theresa, France prepared for war against Austria, too, and Great Britain allied with Austria against France. Peace was restored in 1748 by the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle.<sup>2</sup>

The most disturbing phase of this period with regard to the inhabitants of Great Britain was the time shortly before and after the declaration of war by France. For in this time the "Pretender", taking advantage of the war situation, launched two military actions against the British Isles which caused considerable alarm among the population.

The Pretender of our context is the "Young Pretender", Charles Edward Stuart, the son of the "Old Pretender", James Stuart, who, in turn, was the son of King James II of the House of Stuart who in 1688 had been banished from England and had fled to France.

The Old Pretender had already in 1715 tried to win back the throne from the Hanoverians for the Stuarts by leading a rebellion in the Scottish Highlands. But the whole enterprise had failed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. William Edward Hartpole Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century, New Edition, 7 Vols., New York 1903, I, pp. 449-471; II, pp. 1-40.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ib., I, pp. 265-269. - Simon, II, p. 179.

The Young Pretender repeated the same attempt twice, the first time in 1744 before, and the second time in 1745 after France's declaration of war. The first venture was completely unsuccessful, for the French fleet which was to carry it through appeared in the Channel but could not land on British soil.<sup>4</sup> The second venture was at least partly successful. The Pretender not only actually landed in Scotland and gained control over her but also invaded England. In England, particularly in London, he almost caused a state of panic. But because he was disappointed of the anticipated support he was forced to withdraw, and in 1746 was decisively defeated at Culloden. This defeat clearly indicated that the time was past for a Stuart restoration.<sup>5</sup>

The climax of the Pretender's threat was reached with his successful landing and first victories in Scotland. In particular the northern parts of England felt threatened. This is why Wesley hurried to Newcastle-upon-Tyne and spent the latter part of September and the first part of October, 1745, there.<sup>6</sup>

Wesley's comments upon war during the first period of 1739 to 1748 concern exclusively the Pretender's invasion. During the first threat of the Pretender Wesley conceived an important address to the king, although he never delivered it to him.<sup>7</sup> The main comments,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lecky, II, pp. 17 f. - Simon, II, pp. 179 f.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Lecky, II, pp. 28-30. - Tyerman, I, pp. 489 f. - Simon, II, pp. 245-249.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Tyerman, I, pp. 490-493. - Simon, II, pp. 287-290.

<sup>7</sup> J III 123 f., 1744. <sup>Of</sup> Tyerman, I, p. 439. - Simon, II, pp. 181 f.

however, appear during the second threat, they were for the most part, though not all,<sup>8</sup> drawn up either during those days in Newcastle or shortly before or after. Most of them are short entries in his Journal,<sup>9</sup> some of them are parts of his letters, in particular of those to his brother Charles<sup>10</sup> and to the Mayor of Newcastle,<sup>11</sup> and one of them is a little tract called "A Word in Season: or, Advice to an Englishman"<sup>12</sup> which was written only a few days after Wesley had left Newcastle.<sup>12</sup>

The second period concerns the years of 1756 to 1763 which is known as the Seven Years War. In it Great Britain was allied with Prussia. They fought against Austria, France, and after 1762 also Spain. The war was brought to an end by the peace treaty of Paris.<sup>13</sup>

In Great Britain the Seven Years War was accompanied and still more preceded by an almost continuous fear of a French invasion. This was only occasionally interrupted when it had grown in gravity and had caused a common state of panic. England declared war against France in May, 1756, and the month prior to this created the greatest alarm among

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<sup>8</sup>J III 178, 1745. - Cf. Simon, II, p. 249.

<sup>9</sup>J III 206, 1745; ib. 210, 212, 213.

<sup>10</sup>L II 42, 1745.

<sup>11</sup>L II 40 f., 1745.

<sup>12</sup>W XI 182-186, Englishman, 1745. - Cf. Green, #76. - Tyerman, I, pp. 502 f.

<sup>13</sup>Of. Lecky, II, pp. 358-369, 405-449; III, pp. 194-214. - Tyerman, II, p. 234. - Simon, III, pp. 306 f.; IV, pp. 54 f., 108 f.

the population.<sup>14</sup> However the beginning of the war, the second half of 1756 and the first half of 1757 were only little less disturbing. The French descent on British soil was expected every day.<sup>15</sup> A similar excitement towards the end of 1759 was less important.<sup>16</sup>

Wesley's comments upon war during the period of 1756 to 1763 are, with the exception of one occasional remark in his Journal in September, 1757,<sup>17</sup> as to the form, related only to the first two threats of invasion, i.e. to the year of 1756, the months preceding and following the declaration of war, and the beginning of 1757. As to content, Wesley's comments upon war cover more than the threat of invasion and reach farther back than the year of 1756. Two particular groups of sources concerning Wesley's attitude toward war may be distinguished during this period.

There is, in the first place, Wesley's Journal<sup>18</sup> and his correspondence. Among the latter letters to his friend Ebenezer Blackwell<sup>19</sup>, to James West, the Joint Secretary to the Treasury of that time<sup>20</sup>, and to his wife<sup>21</sup> are most instructive.

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<sup>14</sup>Of. Lecky, II, pp. 362 f. - Tyerman, II, p. 234. - Simon, III, pp. 306 f., 316.

<sup>15</sup>Of. Lecky, II, pp. 362 f., 404. - Simon, IV, pp. 18 f.

<sup>16</sup>Of. ib., III, p. 320; IV. pp. 54 f., 87 f.

<sup>17</sup>J IV 237, 1757. - Of. Simon, IV, pp. 35 f.

<sup>18</sup>J IV 145, 1756. - Of. Tyerman, II, p. 233. - Simon, III, pp. 316 f., 321 f.

<sup>19</sup>L III 164, 1756. - Of. John Telford, Note to L I 334. - Simon, III, p. 322.

<sup>20</sup>L III 165, 1756. - Of. Telford, Note to ib. - Tyerman, II, pp. 234 f. - Simon, III, pp. 307 f., 317.

<sup>21</sup>L III 179 f., 1756.

And there is, in the second place, Wesley's treatise on original sin, called "The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience."<sup>22</sup> Its first part, entitled "The Past and Present State of Mankind",<sup>23</sup> entails a detailed discussion of war.<sup>24</sup> It is mainly this discussion which covers more than the threat of invasion and which reaches farther back than the year of 1756. Living under the threat of the French invasion Wesley proceeds from, and takes the particular war with France as an example of war in general which he then evaluates anthropologically. He can do so because, writing in 1756 and 1757<sup>25</sup> he only actualizes the plan of answering John Taylor, a plan which he had conceived already in 1751<sup>26</sup>, after having read John Taylor's work on original sin at least as early as in 1748.<sup>27</sup> The year of 1748, however, was the year when the last war with France was ended. And during the years from 1748 to the new outbreak of the war in 1756 there was but a truce in Europe. In other parts of the world, especially in America and India, there was never any

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<sup>22</sup> W IX 191-464, Orig Sin, 1757. - Cf. Green, #182. - Tyerman, II, p. 294. - Egon W. Gerdes, John Wesley's Lehre von der Gottesebenbildlichkeit des Menschen, Theol. Diss., Kiel 1958, pp. 30 f.

<sup>23</sup> W IX 196-238, Orig Sin, 1757.

<sup>24</sup> Ib. 221-223, 237 f.

<sup>25</sup> Ib. 196-238: the part in question is dated January 18, 1757. - Of. also L III 180, 1756. - L III 208, 1756. - J IV 199, 1757. - Green, #182. - Gerdes, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> J III 520, 1751. - Cf. Green, #182. - Tyerman, II, p. 294. - Gerdes, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> J III 374, 1748. - Cf. Gerdes, p. 30.

interruption of the hostilities<sup>28</sup>, so that Wesley conceived his treatise on original sin not only in memory and anticipation of, but even during the course of war between England and France. Thus it is that this treatise presents more than an expected invasion and than the year of 1756 had to offer in this respect.

The third period includes the years of 1763 to 1782, the American War of Independence and its forebodings. It is advisable to divide this eventful period into three phases, the preparation, the outbreak, and the conduct of the war.

The preparation of the war between England and America can be traced back until 1763. The seeds of the war were laid in the very peace treaty of Paris. The American colonies had largely profited from the preceding war whereas the mother country, although she did not lose in it, was yet heavily burdened financially by the remaining war debts. To fund these debts several measures were passed to have the colonies share in the obligations of England which, for obvious reasons, were anything but welcomed beyond the ocean. These measures, inaugurated by the Grenville ministry, were introduced by the proposal of 1763 to enforce the Navigation Acts, were continued by the Stamp Act of 1765 and, after the dismissal of Grenville, were made worse instead of better by the Declaratory Act of 1766. Consequently new taxes were imposed upon America, particularly the famous duty on tea. The Boston

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<sup>28</sup> Of. Lecky, II, pp. 229-255, 355-367. - Simon, III, pp. 303 f.

"massacre" of 1770 and the Boston "tea party" of 1773 were but the prelude of the events to come. The English reaction to them meant the beginning of war which then broke out in 1775.<sup>29</sup>

During this first phase which led to the American War of Independence, Wesley's comments upon the approaching war are either direct discussions of, or indirect allusions to the problem.

Towards the end of 1768 Wesley wrote a long letter "to a friend" which was published two years later, as "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs", his first of many political pamphlets.<sup>30</sup> In 1772 he elaborated these occasional "Thoughts" with considerations of principle, in the "Thoughts upon Liberty"<sup>31</sup> and the "Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power".<sup>32</sup> In the same year Wesley conceived and early the next year he published his "Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions" in which some light is thrown on the general situation of this time, though the problem of war as such is not immediately touched.<sup>33</sup> The "Thoughts upon Slavery" of 1774 have again important

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<sup>29</sup> Of. Lecky, IV, pp. 1-201. - Tyerman, III, p. 47. - Simon, IV, p. 238; V, pp. 33-35, 49 f.

<sup>30</sup> L V 370-388, 1768, or W XI 14-33, Publ Aff, 1768. - Of. Green, #264. - Tyerman, III, pp. 37 f.

<sup>31</sup> W XI 34-46, Th Lib, 1772. - Of. Green #279. - Tyerman, III, p. 145.

<sup>32</sup> W XI 46-53, Power, 1772. - Of. Green, #280. - Tyerman, III, pp. 145 f.

<sup>33</sup> L V 349-354, 1772, or W XI 53-59, Scarcity, 1773. - Of. Green, #286. - Simon, IV, pp. 314-317.

implications for the problem of war, both for war in general and for the war expected between England and America in particular.<sup>34</sup>

From this time an entry in the Journal<sup>35</sup> and several letters lead us into to the year of 1775 up to the point of the outbreak of war. We are especially interested in three letters to Thomas Rankin in America<sup>36</sup>, one of them accompanied by a note to all preachers in America<sup>37</sup>, in the letter to James Dempster, like Thomas Rankin one of these preachers<sup>38</sup>, and in a letter to his brother Charles.<sup>39</sup>

The outbreak of the war between England and America is connected with the decisive year of 1775. During this year the first two battles were fought in America, in April the battle of Lexington which the English lost, in June the battle of Bunker's Hill which they finally won, but in circumstances which only encouraged the Americans to build up a regular army in the months following, in order to continue the hostilities.<sup>40</sup>

During this second phase, the year of 1775, Wesley's comments upon war are extremely numerous, due to the great importance of this

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<sup>34</sup>W XI 59-79, Slavery, 1774. - Cf. Green, #298. - Tyerman, III, p. 183.

<sup>35</sup>J VI 55, 1775. - Cf. Tyerman, III, p. 185.

<sup>36</sup>L VI 142, 1775. - L VI 148, 1775. - L VI 150 f., 1775. - Cf. Simon, V, pp. 52-54.

<sup>37</sup>L VI 142 f., 1775.

<sup>38</sup>L VI 149 f., 1775.

<sup>39</sup>L VI 152, 1775.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Lecky, IV, pp. 201-234. - Tyerman, III, pp. 185 f. - Simon, V, pp. 49-52.

year in British history which he apparently sensed.<sup>41</sup>

As the news of the first clash with the Americans did not reach England before the end of May, Wesley's comments before this date belong into the preparatory phase, and only those after this date are of interest in this context. Wesley first refers to the actual outbreak of the war in another letter to Thomas Rankin in June, 1775.<sup>42</sup> And only one day later he addresses a very famous, and very important duplicate letter to the Earl of Dartmouth, at that time Secretary of State for the Colonies, and to Lord North, at that time First Lord of the Treasury and Prime Minister.<sup>43</sup> The most important and at the same time the most controversial pamphlet of Wesley during this time was "A Calm Address to Our American Colonies". Wesley wrote this tract in June, 1775, published it, in the first edition soon afterwards and, in a new edition even before the end of the year.<sup>44</sup>

For Wesley's attitude toward war during the latter half of the year again his Journal and his correspondence have to be extensively consulted. In the Journal several notes in September<sup>45</sup>, October<sup>46</sup>,

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Edwards, Wesley and the Eighteenth Century, pp. 70-81.

<sup>42</sup> L VI 154 f., 1775.

<sup>43</sup> L VI 155-160, 1775. - L VI 160-164, 1775. - Cf. Tyerman, III, pp. 197-200. - Simon, V, pp. 55-59.

<sup>44</sup> W XI 80-90, Calm Am, 1775. - Cf. Green, #305. - Tyerman, III, pp. 185-192. - Simon, V, pp. 70-72. - Nehemiah Curnock, Note to J VI 66 f.

<sup>45</sup> J VI 78, 1775.

<sup>46</sup> J VI 81, 1775.

and November<sup>47</sup> must be considered. In the correspondence<sup>48</sup> three letters to Thomas Rankin in America have again to be mentioned in the first place. They are written in July, August, and October respectively.<sup>49</sup> In importance they are closely followed by three letters of October and November<sup>50</sup> to his brother Charles. And within the circle of Methodist preachers also two letters to Christopher Hopper, dated in November and December,<sup>51</sup> refer to our problem. As to Wesley's political contacts there are two more substantial letters to the Earl of Dartmouth of significance, the first written in August, when he was still Secretary of State for the colonies, the second drawn up in December, when he was already Lord Privy Seal.<sup>52</sup> And as to Wesley's public relations an account, given to the editor of "Lloyd's Evening Post" in November,<sup>53</sup> must also be considered.

In the same month Wesley also wrote and preached and published a sermon on "National Sins and Miseries". It was a charity sermon "for the benefit of the Widows and Orphans of the Soldiers who lately fell near Boston, in New-England."<sup>54</sup> This purpose clearly establishes the

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<sup>47</sup> J VI 82 f., 1775.

<sup>48</sup> Of. Tyerman, III, pp. 194-200.

<sup>49</sup> L VI 168, 1775. - L VI 173, 1775. - L VI 181 f., 1775.

<sup>50</sup> L VI 179, 1775. - L VI 183, 1775. - L VI 186, 1775.

<sup>51</sup> L VI 188, 1775. - L VI 199, 1775.

<sup>52</sup> L VI 176, 1775. - L VI 198, 1775.

<sup>53</sup> L VI 192 f., 1775.

<sup>54</sup> WS VII 400-408, 1775. - Of. Green, #309. - Tyerman, III, p. 192 f.

connection to our context, the problem of war.

The conduct of the war between England and America falls in the years of 1776 to 1782. On July 4, 1776, the American colonies declared their independence and were willing, under the leadership of George Washington, to fight for it. Their victory over the English at Saratoga in October, 1777, meant the turning point of the war. Now France, Spain, and also Holland went to war with England, too, in order to take revenge. The complete defeat of the English at Yorktown in October, 1781, resulted in peace negotiations. The provisional articles were signed in November, 1782, the final treaty in January, 1783, both in Paris. Thus the fratricidal war was brought to an end, resulting in the independence of the United States of America.<sup>55</sup>

During this phase of the war Wesley's comments are concentrated in the first three years of 1776 to 1778. In 1776 Wesley embodies his ideas on the war in question not so much in his Journal or correspondence. There are only two references of importance in the Journal<sup>56</sup> and none in the correspondence. He rather offers them in two more political tracts. The first one is called "Some Observations on Liberty, Occasioned by a Late Tract".<sup>57</sup> The tract Wesley is referring to is a publication of Richard Price, a Unitarian minister, which was entitled "Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the

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<sup>55</sup>Cf. Lecky, IV, pp. 354-487; V, pp. 14-55, 100-125, 179-200. - Simon, V, pp. 121 f.

<sup>56</sup>J VI 100, 1776. - J VI 118, 1776.

<sup>57</sup>W XI 90-118, Obs Lib, 1776. - Cf. Green, #310. - Tyerman, III, pp. 234 f.

Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America".<sup>58</sup> The other tract Wesley wrote in this year presents "A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great Britain, respecting the unhappy Contest between us and our American Brethren: With an Occasional Word Interspersed to those of a Different Complexion. By a Lover of Peace".<sup>59</sup>

In 1777 Wesley continued to present another of his "addresses", namely "A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England".<sup>60</sup> Also this address deals with the American War of Independence, as does a note in the Journal.<sup>61</sup>

In 1778 Wesley published two more "addresses" which are, however, of minor importance as to the problem of war as such. They are "A Serious Address to the People of England, with regard to the State of the Nation",<sup>62</sup> and "A Compassionate Address to the Inhabitants of Ireland".<sup>63</sup> A more significant publication than these appeared in the form of a sermon and was called "Some Account of the late Work of God in North-America".<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>W XI 90 f., Obs Lib, 1776. - Cf. Green, #310. - Tyerman, III, pp. 234 f.

<sup>59</sup>W XI 119-128, Seas Gr Brit, 1776. - Cf. Green, #311. - Tyerman, III, pp. 234 f.

<sup>60</sup>W XI 129-140, Calm Engld, 1777. - Cf. Green, #316. - Tyerman, III, pp. 236 f. - Simon, V, pp. 98-101.

<sup>61</sup>J VI 138, 1777.

<sup>62</sup>W XI 140-149, Ser Engld, 1778. - Cf. Green, #327. - Tyerman, III, pp. 267 f.

<sup>63</sup>W XI 149-154, Comp Ireld, 1778. - Cf. Green, #328. - Tyerman, III, pp. 268 f.

<sup>64</sup>WS VII 409-419, 1778. - Cf. Green # 331.

In the later years of the war with America Wesley published three writings about the war, but none of them were written by him. Thus they represent secondary sources, though Wesley agrees with the viewpoint presented. They are "An Account of the Conduct of the War in the Middle Colonies. Extracted from a late Author",<sup>65</sup> and "Reflections on the Rise and Progress of the American Rebellion",<sup>66</sup> both in 1780. And in 1781 it is "An Extract of a Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Viscount H(ow)e on his Naval Conduct in the American War".<sup>67</sup>

In 1784, after the war, Wesley comments for a final time upon the war with America, and that in a letter to "Our Brethren in America".<sup>68</sup> His interest here is ecclesiastical, not political.

The fourth period began in 1778, at the climax of the American War of Independence, and ended in 1783, shortly after the peace with America had been settled. This period marks the intervention of European powers into the war England had with America, the intervention of those European powers who wanted to take revenge on England, namely France, Spain, and Holland. France came in first, in 1778,

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<sup>65</sup>Of. ib., 340.

<sup>66</sup>Of. ib., 341: Green believes in Wesley's authorship. - But cf. T. E. Brigden, Wesley and Joseph Galloway, in: Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society IX, London 1914, pp. 5-9.

<sup>67</sup>Of. Green, #353. - T. E. Brigden, art. cit., pp. 5-9.

<sup>68</sup>L VII 238 f., 1784.

followed by Spain and Holland in 1780, with only a few months interval. In January 1783, the peace was established between Great Britain and France and between Great Britain and Spain at Versailles, and that on the very same day when the final peace treaty with America was signed at Paris. It was also agreed on a truce with Holland, the respective peace treaty being signed in September, 1783.<sup>69</sup>

The extension of the war between England and her colonies to another inter-European war could have only discouraging effects on Great Britain. It was in particular the repeated appearance of the French, respectively the combined French and Spanish fleet in the Channel, which kept the country in a perpetual alarm. The first and most disturbing threat occurred in 1779,<sup>70</sup> another in 1780,<sup>71</sup> and still another in 1781.<sup>72</sup>

During this period Wesley's comments upon war refer in particular to the first, the 1779 threat of the fleet of the enemies in the Channel. We find these comments again in the Journal<sup>73</sup> as well as in the correspondence, this time in two letters to Samuel Bradburn, a

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Lecky, IV, pp. 453 f.; V, pp. 2 f., 8-10, 61-73, 83, 184-186, 198 f. - Tyerman, III, p. 286. - Simon, V, pp. 121 f.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Lecky, V, pp. 8-10. - Tyerman, III, p. 286. - Simon, V, p. 121.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Lecky, V, pp. 60-62.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. ib., pp. 83 f.

<sup>73</sup> J VI 253, 1779. - J VI 253, 1779 (two different entrances!). - Cf. Simon, V, p. 145.

friend and preacher of Wesley, the "Demosthenes of Methodism", at that time stationed in Dublin in Ireland.<sup>74</sup>

As an appendix, it should also be mentioned that Wesley published in 1781 and 1782 two tracts on war in his "Arminian Magazine". The first one, with the plain title "On War" is dated in November and appeared in December, 1781.<sup>75</sup> The second one, which is said to "serve as a supplement" to the former "piece on war", is enclosed in the January installment of the next year and is called "The Cause and Cure of War".<sup>76</sup> In both cases, however, the authorship is not indicated which allows us at the most to regard both articles, because Wesley published them, as secondary sources. According to the judgment of the British investigator, John Lawson, neither of the tracts display Wesley's style, either in the prose or the verse.<sup>77</sup> We therefore believe in the improbability of John Wesley's authorship of the two writings in question.

The preceding survey of the sources reveals that Wesley approaches the problem of war at various times and in various ways. This is the reason why it sometimes seems as if Wesley were

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<sup>74</sup>L VI 348, 1779. - L VI 358, 1779. - Cf. Tyerman, III, pp. 286-288. - Telford, Notes to L VI 177, L VI 257.

<sup>75</sup>The Arminian Magazine IV, London 1781, pp. 658-660.

<sup>76</sup>Ib. V, London 1782, pp. 39-43.

<sup>77</sup>John Lawson in a private conversation.

inconsistent, as if one argument would contradict the other. In the following detailed discussion, as based on the sources, the attempt will be made to correlate the statements of Wesley first of all with his theology and its basic structure. In this perspective many parts may fit together which would otherwise remain irreconcilable. We do not want to harmonize the tensions which lie in Wesley himself, but we hope to overcome some of the divergencies which are founded in the different interpretations of Wesley by his students.

PART II

THE THEOLOGICAL DETERMINATION OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR

SECTION A

THE FOUNDATION OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR  
IN THE DOGMATICAL CONCEPTS OF  
GOD AND MAN

## CHAPTER III

### WAR AND THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

It was the political situation of the 18th century, as we have seen, which again and again brought Wesley face to face with the problem of war and which challenged him to speak and to act. The influence of the political situation must, however, not be overestimated. For it only accounts for the form, not for the content of John Wesley's attitude toward war. It well explains the historical formation but neither the theological determination nor the logically subsequent manifestation of this attitude. The form of Wesley's attitude is occasioned by political, as well as social and economic events. The content, however, is rooted in and proceeds from his theology.

John Wesley's theology is a theology of creation and only in dependence upon this a theology of history. The original and the restored creation are the static poles between which the process of history takes place, and this in its threefold form of world history,

church history, and salvation history.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley's concept of history is qualified by his idea of creation. So also is his attitude toward war, above all in its theological determination which precedes its practical manifestation. War as a phenomenon of history is theologically qualified by a threefold relationship to creation: to the Creator, i.e. God; to the creature, i.e. man; and to creation as such, i.e. to the world in general and to society in particular. The relationship of war to the Creator is expressed in the dogmatic concept of God. The relationship of war to creation is expressed in the ethical norm for society. Man, being vertically directed to God and horizontally to society, participates in both. The relationship of war to the creature is expressed, on the one hand, in the dogmatic concept of man, and, on the other hand, in the ethical norm for man. The theological determination of John Wesley's attitude toward war is founded in the dogmatic concepts of God and man and explicated in the ethical norms for man and society. These considerations suggest the outline we shall have to follow.

The role of God in war is determined by His providence, a concept which in our context represents the climax of the assertion that God is the Creator. God is the Creator in a threefold sense: God brought His creation into being, God also preserves His creation, and God Himself will lead His creation to perfection.

God brought His creation into being. He created man and bestowed life upon him. This, Wesley infers, reserved Him the right, and even

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<sup>1</sup> WS VI 428 f., 1780. - Cf. Gerdes, pp. 5 f.

the exclusive right of claiming life back from man. "The Creator of man has the sole right to take the life which He gave."<sup>2</sup> Thus God has the power over life and death of man by His very nature as Creator.

This natural right of God is exclusive in that it excludes any similar natural right on the side of man. Man by his nature has no right whatsoever to kill man. He rather stands, and that in an absolute sense as far as the relationship of man to man is concerned, under the commandment of the Decalogue which says: "Thou shalt not kill!" This has a twofold consequence. Man has, in the first place, no right to take life from himself. "No man has a right to dispose of his own life."<sup>3</sup> But neither has he, in the second place, the right to kill another man, not even if the other man agreed to it. Wesley condemns the opinion which in his time had been advocated, namely that one man could dispose of the life of another man if the other agreed to it, arguing that, if man cannot dispose of his own life, he cannot "give to another a right which he never had himself, ... which no man upon the face of the earth either has or can have"<sup>4</sup>. This verdict extends also to the state, as we shall have to show in another context, but only to that state which builds its authority on the will of the people. For, after all, "no man...can give the power of the sword,

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<sup>2</sup> W XI 52, Power, 1772.

<sup>3</sup> Ib.

<sup>4</sup> Ib.

any such power as implies a right to take away life",<sup>5</sup> because this can be given only by God. The state, therefore, can receive its right to kill, as we shall also have to explain later on, only by "delegation" from God and not from man, as Wesley says. Thus the state's right over life and death is precisely not founded in the nature of man but in the nature of God the Creator.

The distinction between the delegated divine and the assumed human right over life and death implies that principally war exists in two kinds. There is on the one hand the war which is founded on the divine right delegated to man and which is, therefore, legitimate. And there is on the other hand the war which is founded on the human right assumed by man and which is, therefore, illegitimate. For, after all, man does not possess such a right by himself. It must, however, be said that ultimately this distinction collapses. For the divine right over life and death, delegated to man, does for Wesley not include war. Thus war cannot be based on divine right. And the human right over life and death, assumed by man, does not justify war either because it is no right at all. Thus war cannot be based on human right either. Consequently there remains only one kind of war, the war without any right whatsoever. It is this war in which God the Creator continues his creativity by preserving His creation nevertheless.

God also preserves His creation. Against the deism of his age which acknowledged God only as the great watchmaker who withdrew from

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<sup>5</sup>Ib., *Italics mine*, EWG.

His work after having brought it into being, Wesley asserts that creation is not only a pre-historical and then a post-historical state but also a historical process. The first creation is in continuance toward the second creation, creatio is carried on by creatio continua toward recreatio. It is the continuing creation which takes place in history, and this is meant by the idea of preservation. To Wesley, therefore, God the Creator did not at all withdraw from the world after creating it. As the continuing Creator He rather participates in the history of the world and, consequently, also in the historical events of war.

Wesley's conviction that God preserves the world also in times of war is most strongly asserted in his correspondence of the year 1775, the year of the outbreak of the American War of Independence. In the crucial political situation of this year he accuses, in a letter to the Lord Privy Seal, the Earl of Dartmouth, and to the Prime Minister, Lord North, the English people of a typical deistic attitude in matters of public affairs. "We Englishmen are too wise to acknowledge that God has anything to do in the world!"<sup>6</sup> This is said with special reference to war, as Wesley explains to Thomas Rankin in America, saying that "when a land is visited with famine or plague or earthquake, the people commonly see and acknowledge the hand of God. But wherever war breaks out, God is forgotten, if He be not set at open defiance".<sup>7</sup> Of

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<sup>6</sup>L VI 159, 164, 1775.

<sup>7</sup>L VI 150 f., 1775.

course, Wesley differs from the attitude he complains of. He believes in the God of history and expresses his belief in the biblical word "Our time is in God's hand". This is by no means a faint resignation as if man need not act because God acts. On the contrary, it involves the highest strain possible as appears from the words immediately following which reads: "Let us stand ready for all things", however God<sup>8</sup> may act.

Wesley's conviction that God preserves his world also in times of war, that He even participates Himself in the historical events of war, is expressed, above all, in the theological concept of divine providence.

The concept of divine providence is traditionally subdivided in two ways. In the first place general providence is distinguished from particular providence. This distinction, however, is not shared by Wesley. To him a general providence apart from the particular providence is meaningless.<sup>9</sup> In the second place God's providential foreknowledge of man is distinguished from his logically subsequent providential care for man. Both of these aspects play a role in Wesley's conception of war, although also they cannot always be sharply distinguished from each other in detail, because both of them explain but the same providential activity of the one God of history.

The sermon on Ezek. 1: 16, in the year 1778, shows in a special way that to Wesley divine providence is but one uniform reality in war.

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<sup>8</sup>L VI 182, 1775.

<sup>9</sup>J VI 326, 1781; et al.

In this sermon Wesley discusses the American War of Independence as the great example, the "grand scene",<sup>10</sup> of divine providence, emphasizing already in the title that he intends to deal with "the present dispensations of divine providence with respect to our colonies in North America".<sup>11</sup>

The prophet Ezekiel describes in the first chapter of his book his vision of the heavenly court and uses for this purpose in the 16th verse the illustration of wheels running one within another. In the way customary to Wesley he detaches this picture from its context and uses it in exegetical freedom for two kinds of human activities, both, as he thinks, sinful. The one wheel is "pride, and luxury, and sloth, and wantonness", the other is "the spirit of independency". Both of them have their roots in the American trade, wealth, and plenty. "Immense trade, wealth, and plenty, begot and nourished proportionable pride, and luxury, and sloth, and wantonness. Meantime the same trade, wealth, and plenty, begot or nourished the spirit of independency."<sup>12</sup> It is Wesley's point to show that in God's providence the two wheels are coordinated, are "running one within another", that all activity of man is "over-ruled by the justice and mercy of God".<sup>13</sup> It is only in divine providence that "one wheel answers to the other".<sup>14</sup> In His providence God both foreknows the actions of man, i.e. the isolated

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<sup>10</sup> WS VII 418, 1778.

<sup>11</sup> Ib. 409.

<sup>12</sup> Ib. 418.

<sup>13</sup> Ib.

<sup>14</sup> Ib.

courses of both wheels, and cares for man in coordinating these courses to the good of man. "What God foresaw would prove the remedy, grew up with the disease; and when the disease was come to its height, then only began to operate."<sup>15</sup> This is to say that in His providence God destroyed through the American War of Independence the American welfare, the nourishing soil of the sinful pride of independence. Thereby the true virtues can now recenter. "Who would have imagined, that this evil disease (i.e. the spirit of independency) would lay a foundation for the cure of all the rest (i.e. the other evils of pride, luxury, sloth, and wantonness)? And yet so it was. For this spirit, now come to maturity, and disdaining all restraint, is now swiftly destroying the trade, and wealth, and plenty whereby it was nourished, and thereby makes way for the happy return of humility, temperance, industry, and chastity."<sup>16</sup> This is certainly not a good argument of Wesley, but it reveals his concern for divine providence. Thus the American War of Independence is Wesley's proof of God's providence in war, and that of the one providence of the divine foreknowledge of, and the divine care for man. The God who cares for man because He knows man from beforehand is the God Wesley praises as the all-wise God. "Such unspeakable good does the all-wise God bring out of all this evil! So does 'the fierceness of man', of the Americans, 'turn to his praise'."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ib. 417 f.

<sup>16</sup>Ib. 418.

<sup>17</sup>Ib.

The idea of the ordering wisdom of divine providence in war is not only found, however, in Wesley's relatively late reflection about the war with America. He declares himself as early as 1745 in the same direction. As in this year the fear spread more and more that the Pretender, in carrying through his father's claim to the throne, would involve all England in war, we see Wesley in his endangered congregation at Newcastle. On a walk he personally inspects the arrangements of the town made for defense, and their possible effect on the church building situated outside the walls of the town. He was particularly interested in how the cannon were placed, and he states with relief not only that none of them could hit the house of the Methodists, but moreover that they so protected the house that no enemy could approach it "without being torn in pieces". It is this position of the cannon that again makes him recognize the wisdom of God, and he exclaims: "I could not but adore the providence of God." No wonder, therefore, that a man as Wesley, who sees in all fear of war the providence of God at work, at the same time chooses to preach to his congregation about "the wisdom of God in governing the world".<sup>18</sup>

Wesley, always understanding God's providence as a unity, did not, however, approach its two aspects with the same interest. His interest is not so much the theoretical concern of God's providential foreknowledge as presupposed by His care for man. It is rather the practical concern of God's providential care for man as built upon His foreknowledge.

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<sup>18</sup>J III 212, 1745.

Wesley's interest in God's providential care for man in times of war, as built upon His foreknowledge, is expressed in two ways which clearly demonstrate how much Wesley's thought moved in the framework of Creator and creature. For he declares on the one hand his solidarity with man and then speaks of God's participation in history from the human standpoint. On the other hand he understands himself as the interpreter of God and then tries to interpret the action of providence from the divine standpoint. These anthropocentric and theocentric views are a living unity to Wesley, because they are founded in the fruitful tension which he feels in himself as the mouth-piece of God for man and the mouth-piece of man before God.

The anthropocentric view answers to God's providential care for man as the help of God for man. Thus Wesley writes in his Journal during the disturbances of 1745: "We cried mightily to God to send His Majesty King George help from His holy place."<sup>19</sup> He is convinced that "the Lord is a wall of fire unto all that trust in him".<sup>20</sup>

The help of God is based upon His omnipotence. In war the raging of man does not restrict the action of God in history, but at most hides it. Ultimately the omnipotent God brings about the help for His elect also through the raging of man; e.g. in the war with America. For God's omnipotence guarantees in the first place a better help than the help of man, which after all England had renounced at that time altogether. "If we have so much wisdom and strength that we need no

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<sup>19</sup>J III 213, 1745.

<sup>20</sup>J III 210, 1745.

help from man, are we quite sure that we need no help from God...who hath all power in heaven and earth?"<sup>21</sup> In the second place God's omnipotence guarantees not only the better but the only true help for man in times of war altogether. So Wesley comments on the situation in America that "none but the God of almighty love can extricate the poor people out of the snare", in which, he thinks, the Americans are by the war.<sup>22</sup> Why then do men seek help from men at all, instead of turning to the true helper who as the omnipotent is the only one who can really help? This is precisely the question which Wesley raises in the treatise of the year 1776 which significantly bears the title: "A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great Britain, Respecting the Unhappy Contest between us and our American Brethren: With an Occasional Word Interspersed to those of a Different Complexion. By a Lover of Peace."<sup>23</sup> In this writing Wesley calls upon the addressed people, in the words of the Bible as he composes and quotes them from his memory, to seek help from the Almighty. "Look upward for help, to Him 'who doeth whatsoever pleases Him in the armies of heaven, and amongst the sons of men;' knowing it is He alone that 'can quench the violence of fire, still the raging of the sea, and the madness of the people.'<sup>24</sup> God alone sends true help

<sup>21</sup> L VI 198, 1775.

<sup>22</sup> L VI 150, 1775.

<sup>23</sup> W XI 119, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>24</sup> Ib. 123. This passage clearly illustrates how freely Wesley deals with the Bible. This one quotation shows forth elements at least from Ps. 135:6; Rev. 19:14; Hebr. 11:34; and Ps. 165:8; if not also reminiscences of Eccl. 8:3; and for the "madness" of the people Eccl. 1-10 are referred to besides Lk. 8:24 and parallels.

because He is the omnipotent.

What, now, is this help? - The help of God in times of war consists in that He forces the enemies not to encroach on His elect. So Wesley is strongly convinced, with regard to the situation of his preachers in America, that God will restrain the preachers' enemies, in this case those who love war above all, if it is His will to continue His work in North America. In August, 1775, Wesley writes to Thomas Rankin in America that "in that time (of another year) it will be seen what God will do with North America, and you will easily judge whether our preachers are called to remain any longer therein. If they are, God will make their way plain and give you favour even with the men that delight in war."<sup>25</sup> It is, therefore, God who will also work with the enemies.

Still more distinctly Wesley describes the help of God which restrains the enemies four years later when the Spanish and French fleets threatened the English mainland and especially the town of Plymouth. Wesley believes that God is mightier than the enemies and he waits for His help. "It is the judgement of many that, since the time of the Invincible Armada, Great Britain and Ireland were never in such a danger from foreign enemies as they are at this day. Humanly speaking, we are not able to contend with them either by sea or land. They are watching over us as a leopard over his prey, just ready to spring upon us. They are mighty and rage horribly: but the Lord that

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<sup>25</sup>L VI 173, 1775.

dwelleth on high is mightier."<sup>26</sup> Wesley was not disappointed in trusting in God's help. The enemy did not descend on British soil, and Wesley saw the protecting hand of God at work. "Why, then, did they not go in, destroy the dock, and burn, or at least plunder, the town? I believe they could hardly tell themselves. The plain reason was, the bridle of God was in their teeth; and He had said, 'Hitherto shall ye come, and no farther'."<sup>27</sup> Later Wesley came to know that pestilence, "the malignant fever", had broken out in the fleet and that this was the natural cause of why the enemies did not carry out a landing. But this insight did in no ways change his first interpretation of the events that it was God's providence which had frustrated the enemies' enterprise, precisely by "the malignant fever".<sup>28</sup> The God of help is the essence of what Wesley has to say from the anthropocentric standpoint about God's providential care for man in times of war.

The theocentric aspect of God's providential care for man in war leads beyond the anthropocentric aspect and deeper into its theological significance, and it does so because of a definite concern for the two states of creation, and for their respective kinds of history. In the first place the providential care of God for man in war, as built upon His foreknowledge, is no longer only the divine answer of help to the human need of it, but it also overpowers human activity altogether.

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<sup>26</sup>  
L VI 348, 1779.

<sup>27</sup>  
J VI 253, 1779.

<sup>28</sup>  
L VI 358, 1779.

God is concerned about the first creation, about world history. God can "interpose". Wesley, in 1768, fears the worst consequences of a war with America, "unless an higher hand interpose".<sup>29</sup> Looking back to some of the actual results of this war with America Wesley in 1778 finds his view confirmed: "The spirit of independency...is over-ruled by the justice and mercy of God."<sup>30</sup> Thus God's providence overrules the counsels of man. Wesley elaborates this thought with regard to war by a threefold reference to the narration of Ahithophel and his counsel in II. Sam. 15-17. Ahithophel, formerly one of David's counsellors, had sided with Absalom in the rebellion against the king. He counselled Absalom in how to win over David. His counsel was "good" in that it would have succeeded if carried out. But God made Absalom listen to Hushai's counsel who was a friend of David's. Thus God "defeated the good counsel of Ahithophel" because He intended "to bring evil upon Absalom" (II. Sam. 17: 14).

When discussing the question of the American War of Independence with Thomas Rankin in 1775 Wesley explains that in his opinion both the people in England and in America are misused by some unscrupulous Englishmen who want to further their evil purposes. They certainly assume, Wesley thinks, that their plans promise the utmost success, and he continues: "But I trust One wiser than them will yet turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."<sup>31</sup> In the following year

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<sup>29</sup> L V 383, 1768.

<sup>30</sup> WS VII 418, 1778.

<sup>31</sup> L VI 173, 1775.

Wesley reaffirms this conception and makes clear that it is the counsel of separating America from her mother country which cannot be from God but must ultimately appear as the counsel of Ahithophel.<sup>32</sup> And once more Wesley takes up the comparison to Ahithophel, namely in 1779 when the French and Spanish fleets seemed to bring the signal for war. He remarks in his Journal: "I preached on David's prayer, 'Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.' And how remarkably has He heard this prayer with regard to the French Ahithophel," again by letting pestilence break out on the ships.<sup>33</sup>

The reference to the counsel of Ahithophel reveals that Wesley understands God's providential care in war as ultimately motivated by God Himself, although it may well be occasioned by man. Or, as Wesley puts it: Man can at most be the secondary cause in the historical events of war. The primary cause is God. And this is what Wesley is really interested in. In discussing the American War of Independence he thus tries again and again to overcome the anthropocentric approach by getting behind the outward events. "Excuse my saying anything of the second cause, as I mean only to inquire into the first. ...I would beg leave to pass from the Second to the First Cause. Here I would fix my foot, as on a sure and solid foundation that will stand for ever."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> W XI 127, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>33</sup> J VI 253, 1779.

<sup>34</sup> W XI 122, 125, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

The Aristotelian language of the first and second cause makes God so much the subject in war, particularly in the American War of Independence, that Wesley's statements almost remind one of the doctrine of absolute predestination. He speaks even, although cautiously, of the "decree" of God which may have "gone forth from the Governor of the world" to destroy it through war.<sup>35</sup> It is also a bold statement to say that "we have great reason to fear God will soon say, 'Sword, go through that land and destroy it'."<sup>36</sup> And Wesley furthermore says: "Upon the whole I am really sometimes afraid that 'this evil (namely war)...is of the Lord'."<sup>37</sup> We shall have to show that Wesley is indeed thinking of predestination. He has, however, a conception of predestination which can without difficulty regard God as the Lord of history and also of war but which is not at all willing to acknowledge Him as the author of war. Thus we have to distinguish between the Lord of war and the author of war.

The Lord of war is God, and not only in war but also in what is made out of war. In 1775 Wesley writes to Thomas Rankin that within a year it will be evident "what God will do with North America".<sup>38</sup> The decisive point about war is, therefore, what God plans to accomplish by it. Three years later the "plans" of God have already become a

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<sup>35</sup>L VI 159, 164, 1775.

<sup>36</sup>L VI 168, 1775.

<sup>37</sup>L VI 159, 163, 1775.

<sup>38</sup>L VI 173, 1775.

visible "work" of God. Wesley speaks now about "the Late Work of God in North America".<sup>39</sup>

Wesley only reluctantly agreed to the idea that the result of the American War of Independence must have been a work of the providence of God. And yet this insight means the acknowledgement of God's concern about church history. It is the very foundation of Wesley's later attitude toward American Methodism as he expressed it in the noblest way in his ordinations for America. For these imply automatically the acknowledgement of the autonomy of the American Church. In the letter of 1784 which Wesley addressed to "our Brethren in America" in order to justify his far-reaching steps of church politics he circumscribes the result of the war with respect to Methodism in the following emphatic words which we have to quote in full:

By a very uncommon train of providences many of the Provinces of North America are totally disjoined from their Mother Country and erected into independent States. The English Government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the Provincial Assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice.

Only because of the acknowledgement of God's providence in the war with America Wesley's advice can be:

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<sup>39</sup> WS VII 407, 1778.

As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.<sup>40</sup>

Especially the last sentence reveals the clear view of the nature of divine providence. How hard must it have been for Wesley, who had condemned the American War of Independence in a way which was even offensive to his own countrymen, to admit that God had proved Himself so much the Lord of providence and of war that He had refused to give the English the help hoped for and asked for.

In the second place the providential care of God, as built upon His foreknowledge, is related to the second creation or the restoration of the first creation. God is concerned about the second creation, about salvation history within church history within world history. Under the impression of the war with America Wesley expresses this in the idea that all political occurrences take place according to the rule of virtue and vice. This rule, already underlying the historical introduction of Wesley's work on original sin,<sup>41</sup> is: "The holy Scriptures give us ample accounts of the fall and rise of the greatest monarchies. It is simply this: They rose by virtue; but

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<sup>40</sup>  
L VIII 238 f., 1784.

<sup>41</sup>  
W IX 195 ff., Orig Sin, 1757.

they fell by vice."<sup>42</sup>

Accordingly, the providence of God in war is "to punish (through war) those crying sins, and afterwards to heal them (therefrom)".<sup>43</sup>

We have to add that the restoration takes place, however, only after repentance. Thus we have a chain of four links in the providence of God in war: human sin, divine punishment through war, human repentance, divine restoration of peace. Divine punishment through war is the answer to human sin as divine restoration of peace is the answer to human repentance. In this context we have to concentrate on the two activities of God, His punishment and restoration, as they are part of the doctrine of God. The activities of man, his sin and repentance, will be discussed when we turn to the role of man in war as they determine him anthropologically and ethically respectively.

God's providential care for the salvation of man consists always of both elements, of punishment and restoration; in Luther's words: of mortificatio and vivificatio; in Wesley's words: of affliction and blessing. In the beginning of the year 1756, when the clouds of the Seven Years War were already discernible, Wesley's New Year's reflection was: "How much are men divided in their expectations concerning the ensuing year! Will it bring a large harvest of temporal calamities, or of spiritual blessings? Perhaps of both - of temporal afflictions preparatory to spiritual blessings."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> W XI 125, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>43</sup> WS VII 418 f., 1778.

<sup>44</sup> J IV 145, 1756.

In His providential care God first punishes the sin of man through war. Wesley thinks especially of the war with America. "The universal corruption of all orders and degrees of men loudly calls for the vengeance of God; and inasmuch as all other nations are equally corrupt, it seems God will punish us by one another."<sup>45</sup> This is spoken in the decisive year of 1775. Only a few months later, still in the same year, Wesley finds his fear already confirmed. "We likewise have sinned, and we are punished; and perhaps these are only the beginning of sorrows," he writes in the sermon on II. Sam. 24: 17. Alluding to the context (verse 16) he continues: "Perhaps the angel is now stretching out his hand over England to destroy it."<sup>46</sup> Thus war is punishment. "We are punished with the sword."<sup>47</sup> It is God Himself who comes as a man of war in order to punish the sins of men. "He punishes them by poverty, coming as an armed man, and overrunning the land."<sup>48</sup>

God's punishment through war is part of his "judgement".<sup>49</sup> God judges because he "has a controversy with the land".<sup>50</sup> War reveals His "anger"<sup>51</sup>, His "fierce anger".<sup>52</sup> And how soon can He let "the

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<sup>45</sup>L VI 168, 1775.

<sup>46</sup>WS VII 401, 1775.

<sup>47</sup>W XI 125, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>48</sup>WS VII 418, 1778.

<sup>49</sup>L VI 150, 1775.

<sup>50</sup>L VI 388, 1768.

<sup>51</sup>Ib.

<sup>52</sup>J III 210, 1745.

lifted thunder drop!"<sup>53</sup> The result would be a "general destruction".<sup>54</sup>  
 "What a scene will soon be opened! Ruin and desolation must soon over-  
 spread the land and fair houses be turned into ruinous heaps."<sup>55</sup>

God's anger, revealed in war, is just. But that must not be mis-  
 understood as if God were the cruel despot who wished only to destroy.  
 He rather uses, to speak in Luther's terminology, this His alien work  
 of war in order to accomplish thereby His proper work. From this  
 point of view God's punishment receives the character of a divine  
 trial and visitation.

The one idea, that war means trial, Wesley expresses in 1775 in a  
 letter to Thomas Rankin. The general situation of this year makes  
 Wesley anxious about what may still come, and he says: "I am afraid  
 you will soon find a day of trial; the clouds are black both over  
 England and America. It is well if this summer passes over without  
 some showers of blood. And if the storm once begins in America, it  
 will soon spread to Great Britain."<sup>56</sup>

The other idea, that war means a visitation of God, appears as  
 early as during the disturbances of 1745. Wesley is concerned that the  
 "sinful land" may "know the day of their visitation".<sup>57</sup> This concern  
 is resumed in 1775. Wesley finds that it is especially hard for men to

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<sup>53</sup>L VI 159, 164, 1775.

<sup>54</sup>L V 338, 1768. - L VI 155, 1775.

<sup>55</sup>L VI 155, 1775.

<sup>56</sup>L VI 148, 1775.

<sup>57</sup>J III 213, 1745.

understand God's visitation in war. We have already quoted what he writes to Thomas Rankin: "When a land is visited with famine or plague or earthquake, the people commonly see and acknowledge the hand of God. But wherever war breaks out, God is forgotten, if He be not set at open defiance."<sup>58</sup> And as the visitation of God is so hard to discern in war Wesley tries to explain his point to the Earl of Dartmouth and to Lord North saying that "general dissoluteness of manners" demands "a general visitation".<sup>59</sup> In the sermon on "National Sins and Miseries", which is occasioned by the news of the death of the first soldiers at Boston, Wesley furthermore compares the visitation of England with that of Israel. "Is there not, in several respects, a remarkable resemblance between the case of Israel and our own? General wickedness then occasioned a general visitation; and does not the same cause now produce the same effect?"<sup>60</sup>

God's punishment through war, His judgment in trial and visitation, can go so far that His own work perishes thereby. Thus the beginning of the war with America in 1775 reminded Wesley of the disturbances in 1745 and he comments: "What a glorious work of God was at Cambuslang and Kilsyth from 1740 to 1744! But the war that followed tore it all up by the roots and left scarce any trace of it behind; inasmuch that when I diligently inquired a few years after, I could not find one that

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<sup>58</sup>  
L VI 150 f., 1775.

<sup>59</sup>L VI 159, 163 f., 1775.

<sup>60</sup>  
WS VII 401, 1775.

retained the life of God!"<sup>61</sup> On the one side war is thus God's means of carrying through His punishment, on the other side it can, however, also destroy the work of God itself.

This statement raises the question whether God, punishing the sin of man through war, can really at the same time destroy His own work. Wesley clearly admits that God can indeed permit the destruction of His own work through war. But this admission is overshadowed by the assurance that the destruction of the work of God through war is always only preliminary. Finally war must, in the hands of God, even further His work. Wesley infers this from three observations.

Wesley's first inference is that war can be a "furtherance of the gospel". When in 1745 the Pretender approached Newcastle Wesley found that the people listened more attentively to his sermons than usually. "I never saw before so well-behaved a congregation in any church at Newcastle as was that at St. Andrew's this morning. The place appeared as indeed the house of God."<sup>62</sup> And not only the outer behaviour but also the inner participation of the congregation was different. "The congregation was so moved that I began again and again, and knew not how to conclude."<sup>63</sup> It is from this observation that Wesley inferred that war had also its good. "How do all things tend to the furtherance of the gospel!"<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> L VI 151, 1775.

<sup>62</sup> J III 212, 1745.

<sup>63</sup> J III 213, 1745.

<sup>64</sup> J III 212, 1745.

Wesley's second inference is that war can do "more good than harm to the work of God". In 1779, reflecting about the disturbances created by the French and Spanish fleets in the Channel, he remarks that "the alarm has been general in England as well as Ireland, particularly in the maritime parts. But it has done abundantly more good than harm to the work of God. The children of God have been greatly stirred up and have been more instant in prayer. And many men of the world have been greatly awakened, and continue so to this day."<sup>65</sup>

Wesley's third inference is that war can "issue in glory to God" and "turn to His praise". At the beginning of the war with America in 1775 Wesley discusses the political situation in a letter to Thomas Rankin. "The sword is drawn; and it is well if they have not on both sides thrown away the scabbard. What will the end of these things be either in Europe or in America? It seems, huge confusion and distress, such as neither we nor our fathers had known!" It is Wesley's hope that the praise of God, as recorded in the Christmas story of Luke 2, may be the final outcome of this war, too. "But it is enough if all issues in glory to God and peace and good will among men."<sup>66</sup> In 1778, at the height of the war, Wesley sees already proof enough that "'the fierceness of man', of the Americans, 'turn to His praise'," precisely through the raging war.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>L VI 358, 1779.

<sup>66</sup>L VI 154, 1775.

<sup>67</sup>WS VII 418, 1778.

It may be advisable to sum up Wesley's ideas about God's providential punishment by saying: When creating the world God did not at the same time create war. Although it is said that God in His providence is also the Lord of war, that can never mean that God is the author of war. Therefore Wesley can never talk about war from the point of view of absolute predestination as already suggested. God in His providence shows His Lordship even over war rather in the circumstance that He coordinates the actions of man in a sovereign way. The guilt of war lies always with man as we shall have to show in the next chapter. But God includes this human guilt within His plan of salvation precisely by punishing sin in order to restore man and peace after repentance. The destruction of the work of God has for Wesley doubtlessly to be put on the account of man who bears the guilt of war altogether. God never carries through the destruction of His own work Himself, but He permits it, again, however, to bring good out of this evil as well.

In His providential care God furthermore restores peace after the repentance of man. This is the biblical view of God who is not the absolute, passive, transcendent Being but the living Lord of history, who also can change His mind. Of this God Wesley always knew.

In 1745 Wesley approaches the question of divine restoration after repentance under the premise that it is possible for God "to spare a sinful land yet a little longer".<sup>68</sup> The threat of the Pretender may

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J III 213, 1745.

well be dissolved if men repent. Wesley quotes Jonah 3:9 and says:  
 "Who can tell if God will return, and repent, and turn away from His  
 fierce anger, that we perish not?"<sup>69</sup>

Also the American War of Independence will be turned into blessing if men only find their way to God. "He will send through all the happy land, with all the necessaries and conveniences of life...an unspeakable blessing."<sup>70</sup> The blessing is the restoration of peace both, historically and eschatologically. With this idea we have, however, already entered into the third statement about God the Creator.

God Himself will lead His creation to perfection. The Creator and Preserver of the world is also its Consummator. As such he will restore peace. Wesley is this-worldly enough to believe that repentance will restore peace here and now, as we shall have to discuss in detail when we turn to the purpose of repentance. But Wesley is also other-worldly enough to hope for peace as an eschatological event, as the reference to Isa. 2: 4 proves. "Then brother shall not lift sword against brother, neither shall they know war any more."<sup>71</sup> The peace here and now is but a token of the anticipated eschatological peace to come. In both aspects, however, peace is a gift of God, given to man.

This leads us to the point where we have to ask for the role of man in war, not without defining how the role of God, His punishment

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<sup>69</sup> J III 210, 1745.

<sup>70</sup> WS VII 419, 1778.

<sup>71</sup> WS VII 408, 1775.

and restoration, and the role of man, his sin and repentance, are coordinated. One can say: In the temporal and logical sense, concerning the sequence of the roles of God and man in war, the action of God is posterior, i.e. subsequent to the anterior action of man. But in the structural and principal sense, concerning the order of the roles of God and man in war, the action of man is inferior, i.e. subordinate to the superior action of God.

## CHAPTER IV

### WAR AND THE SIN OF MAN

The role of man in war consists of two phases, the primary dogmatic and the secondary ethical phase.

The primary role of man in war is dogmatically determined by sin, and that in a threefold sense. The sin of man is the cause of war, the sin of man is the content of war, and the sin of man is the consequence of war.

The sin of man is the cause of war. Wesley elaborates this thesis in four stages: He first ascertains the fact that sin is indeed the basis of war. He then asks what sin is in its essence as the root of war. He furthermore explains how sin in the form of particular sins leads to war. He finally shows who the sinner is through whose sin and sins war arises.

In the first place Wesley ascertains the fact that sin is indeed the basis of war. This is true with regard to every war, but especially with regard to war as it involves affliction and misery. "Sin is the baleful source of affliction; and consequently, the flood of

miseries which covers the face of the earth, which overwhelms not only single persons, but whole families, towns, cities, kingdoms."<sup>1</sup>

The war with America is no exception to this rule. Also with regard to it Wesley draws the conclusion that "our sins (are) the real ground of all our calamities"<sup>2</sup> and that "our own sins (are) the cause of all our sufferings."<sup>3</sup>

War points back to sin in two ways. It can either be the direct consequence of sin. Then it is its outcome. Or it can be the indirect consequence of sin. Then it is its punishment.

War is first the direct consequence, the outcome of sin. This is to say: the sin of the war of man is the result of the sin of the war in man; or, in Wesley's own words: "From whence comes that complication of all the miseries incident to human nature, - war? It is not from the tempers 'which war in the soul'?"<sup>4</sup> The very conflict with America is the proof that it was preceded by the conflict within man, as raised by sin, the monster and serpent who has brought about everything. "Look in this glass, and see the ugly monster, universal sin, that subtle, unsuspected serpent that has inflamed our blood, and brought on the malignant fever of contention on our body."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> X IX 238, Orig Sin, 1757.

<sup>2</sup> W XI 88, Calm Am, 1775.

<sup>3</sup> WS VII 405, 1775.

<sup>4</sup> W IX 237, Orig Sin, 1757.

<sup>5</sup> W XI 127, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

War is furthermore the indirect consequence, the punishment of sin. War is divine punishment of human sin, according to the rule that the providence of God answers the actions of man. "We...have sinned, and we are punished,"<sup>6</sup> namely e.g. by the American War of Independence. The understanding of war as punishment for sin is, as Wesley admits, the rather simple answer to anybody and everybody who raises the famous question of "why". Why is there war? Why do we have war? "But why are we thus (threatened with war, in this case by the Pretender)? I am afraid the answer is too plain to every considerate man: Because of our sins; because we have well-nigh 'filled up the measure of our iniquities'."<sup>7</sup>

In the second place Wesley asks what sin is in its essence as the root of war. He answers, particularly during the American War of Independence, with the definition that sin is enmity against God and against one's fellow man. "While you are a slave to sin, you are an enemy to God, and your country too."<sup>8</sup>

Sin as enmity against God is the "contempt" of God. This is in Wesley's eyes the very heart of sin. The contempt of God is, therefore, even more emphatically condemned than the slave-trade which usually receives the sad honour of being the most attacked evil. "There is (if

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<sup>6</sup> WS VII 401, 1775.

<sup>7</sup> W XI 183, Englishman, 1745.

<sup>8</sup> W XI 125, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

aught can be worse) a sorer evil (than the slave-trade), namely, an astonishing contempt and neglect of truly sacred things; especially the solemn worship of Almighty God."<sup>9</sup> Associating the contempt of God with the neglect of the worship of God Wesley indicates that he is not concerned about an abstract contempt of God but its concrete manifestation. This he calls in his earlier period "ungodliness", in later years "impiety". Consequently both ungodliness and impiety are seen at the root of war. War in general "is a demonstrative proof of the overflowing of ungodliness in every nation under heaven."<sup>10</sup> And the war with America in particular is caused by impiety, by "shocking impiety" as Wesley stresses, equating it with "profaneness".<sup>11</sup> Impiety is universal. "Our universal impiety (is) the first and principal cause of our misery and wretchedness in general, and of the present distress in particular."<sup>12</sup>

Sin as enmity against one's fellow man is immorality or, as Wesley prefers to say when discussing the war with America, "vice".<sup>13</sup> Vice is equivalent to "wickedness". Therefore it can also be said that it was "general wickedness" which "occasioned a general visitation", namely this war.<sup>14</sup> If this is true "the friends of America" should surely not be content with explaining the War of Independence

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<sup>9</sup>Ib. 126.

<sup>10</sup>W IX 238, Orig Sin, 1757.

<sup>11</sup>L VI 159, 163, 1775.

<sup>12</sup>W XI 127 f., Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>13</sup>Ib. 125.

<sup>14</sup>WS VII 401, 1775.

from apparent but vague reasons, as Wesley suspects them to do, but should "think seriously of a more secret but certain cause, namely, the universality and enormity of every species of wickedness that is found in our land."<sup>15</sup>

In the third place Wesley explains how sin in the form of particular sins leads to war. Among the sins which cause war Wesley distinguishes three groups. The first group of sins is related to the first mentioned sin of vice and wickedness, the second group of sins is associated with the sin of human pride, and the third group of sins is connected with the sin of the slave-trade.

The first group of sins, related to vice and wickedness, appears in the English-American conflict, and that on both sides. The war between England and America is, therefore, the clash of two developments of the same kind which moved toward each other. As to England, Wesley points to the "astonishing luxury of the rich" as the main vice, besides "ten thousand other vices shocking to human nature" of which, however, he does not want to say anything. For it is the luxury of the rich which caused the "general dissoluteness of manners" which, in turn, demands "a general visitation" like this war.<sup>16</sup>

As to America Wesley makes also luxury and its relatives responsible for the war. All of these are rooted in the originally "immense trade, wealth, and plenty" of America which "begot and

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<sup>15</sup> W XI 127, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>16</sup> L VI 159, 163 f., 1775.

nourished" the wickedness, i.e. "luxury, and sloth, and wantonness."<sup>17</sup>

In any case luxury presupposes wealth. Wealth, however, is in Wesley's view apparently of a morally indifferent character whereas luxury is in his eyes definitely of a sinful nature, for it is regularly subsumed under the vices. Both appears from the preceding quotation. Consequently somewhere on the way from wealth to luxury the indifferent qualification must have turned negative. The question is where precisely this happened. Wesley knows of two answers which both belong in the context of the slave-trade where they have to be explicated. Their implications, though, have to be anticipated here in order to make the argument of luxury complete.

In both answers Wesley points out that he is not interested in wealth as such, however indifferent it may be. What interests him is man's attitude toward his wealth, and that in two respects: man's way of using his wealth and, logically prior to this, man's way of gaining his wealth. Wesley, therefore, does not speak about wealth as such, indifferent wealth, but of wealth as used and gained by man, as qualified by man.

Thus the first answer to the question of luxury is that it is sinful because man has used his wealth in a sinful way. But this is not the only answer. The other is at least as important.

The second answer is that luxury is sinful because the wealth of man is already sinful because man has gained his wealth in a sinful

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<sup>17</sup>WS VII 418, 1778.

way. As to the war between England and America this means concretely that both countries had gained their wealth in an evil way, namely through the slave-trade. And as the slave-trade itself is sinful, as Wesley strongly argues, so also the wealth resulting from it cannot be anything but sinful. Therefore also luxury dependent upon wealth, is bound to be sinful.

The second group of sins, associated with human pride, arise either with or from pride.

As the brother of equivalent sins, pride is one reason among others why two countries take up arms and go to war with each other. Wesley knows of quite a number of the associates of pride. "When nation rises up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, does it not necessarily imply pride, ambition, coveting what is another's; or envy, or malice, or revenge, on one side, if not on both?"<sup>18</sup> As the father of subsequent sins pride is not only one but the reason of war, again with special reference to the war between England and America. Wesley's argument is put forth in the form of a genealogy of pride. Pride creates "contention" which is born under the labour of "commotions". What the commotions indicate, the contention finally brings about, namely war. For contention creates "dismemberment", dismemberment, in turn, creates war.

The labour of commotions necessarily precede the birth of contention, pointing to it. Accordingly Wesley discovers the contention of the seventies, including its offspring, in its embryonic stage already in the commotions of the late sixties. Thus he points out in

<sup>18</sup>W IX 237 f., Orig Sin, 1757.

1768 that "the consequences of these commotions will be....exactly the same as those of the like commotions in the last century." Among the consequences war is the dominating one. "The land will become a field of blood; many thousands of poor Englishmen will sheathe their swords in each other's bowels for the diversion of their good neighbours."<sup>19</sup>

Finally contention is born, the child of pride. It is, as Wesley states in 1776, "the unhappy contention of brethren"<sup>20</sup>, or in other words: "the unhappy contest between us and our American brethren."<sup>21</sup> As such it proceeds from pride, for contention, "as Solomon observes, 'only cometh of pride'."<sup>22</sup> Wesley here refers to Proverbs 13:10 which reads "Only by pride cometh contention." Contention produces dismemberment. "The empire is dismembered",<sup>23</sup> which means that there is "a kingdom divided against itself."<sup>24</sup> And dismemberment results in war. Dismemberment "is not the consequence of this war, but rather the cause of it."<sup>25</sup> War follows immediately. "A kingdom divided against itself is an evil, of all other, the most dreadful; inasmuch as an innumerable train of evils necessarily follows; no inconsiderable part of which are the sword, fire, plunder, and famine."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>L V 383, 1768.

<sup>20</sup>W XI 121, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>21</sup>Ib. 119.

<sup>22</sup>Ib. 121.

<sup>23</sup>W XI 111, Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>24</sup>W XI 119, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>25</sup>W XI 111 f., Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>26</sup>W XI 119, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

Thus the horrors of war, "the horrors of so terrible a conflagration", which directly originate from dismemberment, were indirectly "occasioned through the unhappy contention" between England and America.<sup>27</sup>

The third group of sins, connected with the slave-trade, is most important because the slave-trade itself has a face of Janus. For it is war and sin in one. According to the form it is war and, therefore, founded on sin. According to the content it is sin and, therefore, the foundation of war. Thus the slave-trade is a twofold argument for the thesis that sin is the cause of war. The slave-trade is war according to its form. It employs the means of war as a way, in comparison to other ways, as the "more compendious way of procuring African slaves."<sup>28</sup> The natives are not war-minded by nature, Wesley asserts. Only the slave-trade teaches them war. "Till then they seldom had any wars; but were in general quiet and peaceable. But the white men first taught them" war.<sup>29</sup> Without the slave-trade they furthermore "would not stir a step" to make war.<sup>30</sup> Therefore the slave-traders, vulgarly speaking, lend a helping hand "by prevailing upon them to make war upon each other."<sup>31</sup> Exactly speaking, however,

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<sup>27</sup> Ib. 121.

<sup>28</sup> W XI 65, Slavery, 1774.

<sup>29</sup> Ib.

<sup>30</sup> Ib. 78.

<sup>31</sup> Ib. 65.

the natives are "excited...by every possible means, to fall upon one another."<sup>32</sup> The wars the slave-trade knows of never originate by themselves. They are "occasioned and fomented".<sup>33</sup> The slave-traders are guilty to "raise of foment (them) on purpose".<sup>34</sup>

The "natives" in question are mainly those of the "African trade", but they are not the only ones affected by the slave-trade. For there is a similar Asian trade pointed out by Wesley. And he cannot believe that "the East-India trade is a jot better". To him both of the trades "seem very nearly allied". For also in India the "refined iniquity (is) practiced... of fomenting war among the natives".<sup>35</sup> The purpose of the wars among the natives is their brutal exploitation. In Africa it is the aim that the natives make among themselves as many prisoners as possible in order then to take "these poor creatures"<sup>36</sup> and sell them as slaves which is practically "to sell one another".<sup>37</sup> In India the object of the trade is not so much the natives themselves but their goods. Wesley believes that in the Indian trade there "is no leading into captivity, as in the former". What matters here is "seizing the chief of the plunder" which the

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<sup>32</sup>Ib. 71 f.

<sup>33</sup>Ib. 71.

<sup>34</sup>Ib. 76.

<sup>35</sup>W XI 125 f., Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>36</sup>W XI 71, Slavery, 1774.

<sup>37</sup>Ib. 65.

instigated wars leave behind.<sup>38</sup> In any case, however, war is employed because it promises a profitable business.

The purpose of the wars of the slave-trade, thus understood, determines also their motivation as profiteering. Thus Wesley discovers the root of the evil of these wars in the phenomenon of money. With money the white men "hire" the natives "to sell one another",<sup>39</sup> thereby "to tear away their own countrymen from this lovely country" of Africa.<sup>40</sup> And those whom the white men hired they "first taught them drunkenness and avarice".<sup>41</sup> The money, sinful through the purpose it is used for, has come a long way before it is put into the hands of the natives. The natives, by Wesley styled as "African butchers",<sup>42</sup> are "excited...by money, by drink, by every possible means"<sup>43</sup> to make war and to sell the prisoners. The instigators are "the captains employed in the trade".<sup>44</sup> Their sole motive is also money only. "They well know, to get money, not to save lives, was the whole and sole spring of their motions."<sup>45</sup> The captains receive their money from the "merchant who is employed in the slave-trade". It is, therefore, in a

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<sup>38</sup> W XI 125 f., Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>39</sup> W XI 65, Slavery, 1774.

<sup>40</sup> Ib. 76.

<sup>41</sup> Ib. 65.

<sup>42</sup> Ib. 78.

<sup>43</sup> Ib. 71.

<sup>44</sup> Ib. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Ib. 72.

proper sense the merchant who "induces the African villain to sell his countrymen,...by enabling the English villain to pay him for so doing, whom you overpay for his execrable labour".<sup>46</sup> And the merchant lives on the money of the slave-holder, the "gentleman that has an estate in our American plantations". He is, therefore, "the spring that puts all the rest in motion".<sup>47</sup>

As to the problem of money it is instructive to see how much Wesley is interested in the use of money. His condemnation of the wrong use of money is his "Thoughts upon Slavery", as expressed in 1774<sup>48</sup>, is only half of the picture. It is by more than a quarter of a century preceded by the outline of the right use of money, offered in 1748 in the sermon on "The Use of Money".<sup>49</sup>

The slave-trade, being war according to its form, is sin according to its content, as already suggested by the previous discussion. For otherwise Wesley would neither have spoken of "African butchers" and of "African and English villains", nor would he have called the slave-trade an "execrable labour". He, indeed, condemns the slave-trade most emphatically as one of the greatest sins if not the greatest sin of his times. The slave-trade is sin outwardly and inwardly.

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<sup>46</sup> Ib. 77.

<sup>47</sup> Ib. 78.

<sup>48</sup> Ib. 65 ff.

<sup>49</sup> S II 314 ff., 1748.

The slave-trade is sin outwardly because in its appearance it is always connected with sin; it cannot be carried out without sin. This sin Wesley conceives as a triad in at least three passages. The first time he speaks of "stealth, force, and wars", saying that the natives are torn away from their native country "part by stealth, part by force, part made captives in those wars which you (captains) raise or foment on purpose".<sup>50</sup> The second time Wesley refers to "stealing, robbing, and murdering". In order "to sell his countrymen" the African has "to steal, rob, murder men, women, and children without number".<sup>51</sup> The third time Wesley calls the same triad "frauds, robberies, and murders".<sup>52</sup> A comparison of the three ways of putting the same idea shows that to Wesley stealing and stealth are united to fraud, that furthermore robbing and robbery is allied with force, and that, most important of all, war is equated with murder.

The murderous wars of the slave-trade are, though the worst, yet not the only sinful product of the sinful money. For the same money which makes the natives sell each other's prisoners brings about that "by this means, even their Kings are induced to sell their own subjects".<sup>53</sup>

The slave-trade is sin inwardly because in its nature it is nothing but "iniquity". And this is true not only with respect to the

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<sup>50</sup>W XI 76, Slavery, 1774.

<sup>51</sup>Ib. 77.

<sup>52</sup>Ib. 78.

<sup>53</sup>Ib. 65.

African, but also to the Indian trade. Nothing can excuse the African trade. Neither its extension nor its continuance can alter its iniquity. "However extensively pursued, and of long continuance, the African trade may be, it is nevertheless iniquitous from first to last."<sup>54</sup> The situation in India is different but not "a jot" better.<sup>55</sup> We have seen that Wesley calls the trade there a "refined iniquity"<sup>56</sup> which therefore does not cease to be iniquity. It rather "has been as conspicuous to the serious and attentive" people as the African trade.<sup>57</sup> The slave-trade is iniquity because it sins against the blood of men. "It is the price of blood! It is a trade of blood, and has stained our land with blood!"<sup>58</sup> This is the face of Janus of the slave-trade, that it is not only war pointing backward to sin but also sin pointing forward to more war.

The war which results from the sin of the slave-trade is the war between England and America. In a unique view Wesley connects the English slave-trade with the American War of Independence, understanding the latter as the outcome of the former. Thus he declares in 1776: "As we are punished with the sword (of this war), it is not improbable but one principle sin of our nation is, the blood that we have shed in Asia, Africa, and America."<sup>59</sup>

The coordination of the slave-trade and the war with America, ultimately in the providence of God who punishes the first through the

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<sup>54</sup> W XI 125, Seas Gr Brit, 1776. <sup>57</sup> Ib. 126.

<sup>55</sup> Ib.

<sup>58</sup> Ib. 125.

<sup>56</sup> Ib.

<sup>59</sup> Ib.

second, allows Wesley to see both problems, slavery and the said war, in a larger context than his contemporaries did. According to Wesley, therefore, neither can be understood fully when isolated from the other. In itself the slave-trade is but a moral problem concerning the basic rights of men. In itself the war with America is but a military problem concerning the basic rights of nations. Only in their junction they are taken out of the mere human realm and receive a truly theological importance for Wesley.

In the fourth place Wesley shows who the sinner is through whose sin and sins war arises. In other words: Wesley discusses the problem of the guilt of war, and that with regard to the two wars which are interrelated to him: the war of the slave-trade and the war between England and America. As to the wars of the slave-trade Wesley declares that everybody, who is connected with the money that either directly or indirectly buys the natives, is guilty of them, and thereby of the slave-trade altogether.

The outstanding sinners, the people whom Wesley considers "more immediately concerned" are the "captains, merchants, and planters".<sup>60</sup> They, therefore, are the most guilty, though not the only guilty group of people. The captains are concerned because they "occasioned and fomented" the wars among the natives. "Was it not themselves? They know in their own conscience it was, if they have any conscience

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<sup>60</sup>  
W XI 76, Slavery, 1774.

left".<sup>61</sup> Thus the captains are guilty.

The merchants are still more concerned because they pay the "English villain" to pay the "African villain". "It is your money" the merchant is told, "that is the spring of all, that empowers him (the captain) to go on: So that whatever he or the African does in this matter is all your act and deed".<sup>62</sup> Thus the merchants are still more guilty.

The planters, however, are the most concerned because they are the first link of the chain.

Now, it is your money that pays the merchant, and through him the captain and the African butchers. You therefore are guilty, yea, principally guilty, of all these frauds, robberies, and murders. You are the spring that puts all the rest in motion; they would not stir a step without you; therefore, the blood of all these wretches who die before their time, whether in their country or elsewhere, lies upon your head.<sup>63</sup>

The outstanding sinners are, however, not the only sinners. The "captains, merchants, and planters" are but the special agents of the "white men", i.e. the "Europeans" including the American colonists.<sup>64</sup> Therefore a whole race is guilty of the slave-trade and its wars.

The general observation of the guilt of the white race as to the slave-trade and its wars receives, due to Wesley's historical

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<sup>61</sup>Ib. 72.

<sup>62</sup>Ib. 77.

<sup>63</sup>Ib. 78.

<sup>64</sup>Ib. 65.

situation, a special application to the British, whether in England or America. The share of the British in the slave-trade and its wars is actually the only section thereof which really presses him.

As an Englishman Wesley does not exclude himself from the British. He does not speak of the sin of the slave-trade in the third but in the first person. He speaks out of the solidarity of the sinners and deploras the "sin of our nation" which brought about that "we are punished with the sword".<sup>65</sup> Not "they" are guilty, not "you" are guilty, but "we" are guilty! Thus Wesley joins the ranks of those who are guilty of the slave-trade and its wars. This fact certainly accounts for the passion of Wesley's fight against slavery, and probably also for its success.

As to the American War of Independence Wesley took an active interest in the excited discussions of his time as to whether the Americans of the English were guilty of the war between the mother country and her colonies. On different occasions Wesley differently expressed his views about the guilt of the war in question. On the whole it is the case that he at first sympathized with the Americans but then later firmly backed the British. This general observation, however, is the only one which one can make with regard to a temporal sequence of Wesley's comments. Any development of the details of his ideas is untraceable; certainly because the passion of his participation in this vital question of his nation carried him away again

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W XI 125, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

and again. Thus there even occur, in the historical perspective, several chronological contradictions which, however, receive a profound theological significance when seen in the systematic perspective as we shall attempt to do.

Wesley's argument for or against the British or the Americans takes place on the background of two main issues: the question of taxation and the question of liberty.

As to the question of taxation "the one point is, Has the Supreme Power a right to tax or not?"<sup>66</sup> This is of course not spoken of a theoretical but of the practical case in which England is the taxing side and America the side being taxed. "The grand question which is now debated, (and with warmth enough on both sides,) is this, Has the English Parliament a right to tax the American colonies?"<sup>67</sup> England affirms, America denies, this right. This disagreement occasions, at least officially, the outbreak of the war between the two countries.

The question of taxation does, however, not only account for the outbreak, but also for the guilt of war as Wesley firmly believes. For if the outbreak of the war appears from the contrast of two subjective answers, then the guilt of the war must appear from the establishment of an objective answer to the question of taxation. And about this answer Wesley is concerned. For if the English are right then the Americans are guilty of the war, and vice versa, if the

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<sup>66</sup>  
L VI 199, 1775.

<sup>67</sup>  
W XI 82, Calm Am, 1775.

Americans are right then the English are guilty of the war. "The one question is, 'Have we a right to tax or no?' If we have, they are rebels, and accountable to God and man for all the blood that is shed. If we have not, they are innocent, and the blood lies at our door. Will they allow this right? or can we give it up?"<sup>68</sup>

The external question of taxation is based upon the internal question of liberty.<sup>69</sup> As the former was mainly the subject of Wesley's political letters, so the latter is mainly treated in his sermons.

As to the question of liberty the point is the American interpretation of it as autonomy, i.e. as independence from their mother country England. Wesley examines and criticizes precisely this American interpretation of liberty although he honestly tries to understand the American desire for it.

In the attempt to understand the American concept of liberty Wesley grants that they had, not only since recently but from the very beginning, "an hankering after independency". This was quite natural to them. "It could not be expected to be otherwise, considering their families, their education, their relations, and the connexions they had formed before they left their native country." But their background is only one reason of their desire for independence. Another as important reason is the treatment they had received in England. "They

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<sup>68</sup>L VI 188, 1775.

<sup>69</sup>L VI 193, 1775.

were farther inclined to it (i.e. independency) by the severe and unjust treatment which many of them had met with in England. This might well create in them a fear lest they should meet with the like again, a jealousy of their governors, and a desire of shaking off that dependence, to which they were never thoroughly reconciled."<sup>70</sup> And for a time there is also a third reason of the American aspiration of independence. This, however, is much more than a matter of the background to the war, and therefore exceeds the foregoing points in importance. It will be discussed in detail later in the context of the content of the guilt of this war. This third reason is connected with Wesley's temporary assumption that the American desire for independence was instigated by a few enemies of the monarchical principle.

The examination of the American concept of liberty from without is, however, very soon added to the attempt to understand it from within. In a sense Wesley's last argument for the American desire for independence suggests this transition itself. Wesley grants that "the spirit of independency" is indeed founded in the nature of the colonists, but this nature has been corrupted, above all through "trade, wealth, and plenty". Consequently everything which proceeds from their nature is necessarily sinful. Thus on the one hand, "immense trade, wealth, and plenty, begot and nourished proportionable pride, and luxury, and sloth, and wantonness". On the other hand, "the same trade, wealth, and plenty, begot or nourished the spirit of

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<sup>70</sup>

WS VII 414, 1778.

independency". A comparison of these two parallel statements reveals that to Wesley the catalogue of vices and the "spirit of independency" stand on the same level. Both are sinful. As the vices so is also the "spirit of independency" an "evil disease".<sup>71</sup> Independence "would be no blessing, but an heavy curse, both to them (i.e. the colonists) and their children".<sup>72</sup> Wesley even calls it "the glorious fault of angels and of gods, that is, in plain terms, of devils".<sup>73</sup>

The criticism of the American concept of liberty concerns precisely the equation of independence and liberty which Wesley thinks is a false equation. The "spirit of independency", although "so many call (it) liberty"<sup>74</sup> because "they are taught to call (it) liberty", is yet but "a great phantom". It is only the phantom of liberty which "stalks before" the Americans and "drags on these poor victims into the field of blood". It is only the phantom of liberty "which breathes into their hearts stern love of war, and thirst of vengeance, and contempt of death". It is not the reality of liberty for "real liberty, meantime, is trampled under foot, and is lost in anarchy and confusion".<sup>75</sup>

These ideas about the questions of taxation and liberty, which according to Wesley represent "the real state of the question without

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<sup>71</sup> Ib. 418.

<sup>72</sup> Ib. 419.

<sup>73</sup> Ib.

<sup>74</sup> Ib.

<sup>75</sup> WS VII 404 f., 1775.

any colouring or aggravation"<sup>76</sup>, make up the background of the argument now to be presented whether the Americans or the English are guilty of the war between them.

Wesley clearly expressed his original sympathy with the Americans as late as in June, 1775, in the already mentioned duplicate letter to Lord Dartmouth and Lord North. Besides, this is probably the only time he ever took an unambiguous stand for the Americans. He explained his position saying: "I cannot avoid thinking (if I think at all) that these, an oppressed people, asked for nothing more than their legal rights, and that in the most modest and inoffensive manner which the nature of the thing would allow."<sup>77</sup> If thus the Americans are declared not guilty then the alternative is that the English are guilty of the conflict between their countries. This implication Wesley indeed explicates in a statement of about the same time of June, 1775,<sup>78</sup> not without a slight but important modification. For the alternative to the Americans as a whole are not the English as a whole but only "a few men in England who are determined enemies to monarchy".<sup>79</sup> This modification has a twofold significance. On the one hand the limitation of the guilt to a minority in England represents a first attenuation of the original position. On the other hand the

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<sup>76</sup>L VI 193, 1775.

<sup>77</sup>L VI 156, 161, 1775.

<sup>78</sup>W XI 80 ff., *Calm Am*, 1775. This address was written around June 15, 1775. - Cf. Curnock, Note to J VI 66 f.

<sup>79</sup>W XI 86, *Calm Am*, 1775.

connection of the guilt with a specific minority in England involves a complication of the original position. For now it must be shown how English anti-monarchical sentiment is related to the American movement for independence.

Wesley argues that the American desire for independence is primarily caused, though not primarily intended by the English anti-monarchical group. Its primary intention is rather the overthrow of the monarchy in England. Therefore the few enemies to monarchy, who are few because "they have let very few into their design", "have for some years been undermining it (i.e. the monarchy) with all diligence, in hopes of erecting their grand idol, their dear commonwealth, upon its ruins". Whether this is of personal or principal reason, Wesley cannot tell. "Whether they hate His present Majesty on any other ground than because he is a King I know not. But they cordially hate his office."<sup>80</sup>

In the primary intention of an English republicanism the American desire for independence is a secondary means, but as such it is opportune for, and therefore caused by those anti-monarchists. The Americans "are only the tools of men on this side the water, who use them for deadly purposes".<sup>81</sup> This is said as late as in August, 1775.

The method employed in spreading anti-monarchism in England and "the spirit of independency" in America is that of agitation. Thinking

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<sup>80</sup>  
Ib.

<sup>81</sup>  
L VI 173, 1775.

of England Wesley points out that "they (i.e. the few men in England) are steadily pursuing it (i.e. anti-monarchism), as by various other means, so in particular by inflammatory papers, which are industriously and continually dispersed throughout the town and country." The result is apparent for "by this method they have already wrought thousands of the people even to the pitch of madness." Turning to America Wesley continues that "by the same (method), only varied according to your circumstances, they have likewise inflamed America."<sup>82</sup>

Thus Wesley has ascertained the dependence of the American movement for independence upon the English republicanism and is enabled to draw the conclusion that the few English anti-monarchists are guilty of the war between England and America. "I make no doubt but these very men are the original cause of the present breach between England and her colonies."<sup>83</sup> Their guilt is based on their sin, for "they heartily despise His Majesty and hate him with a perfect hatred. They wish to imbue their hands in his blood; they are full of the spirit of murder and rebellion."<sup>84</sup> This Wesley said in August, 1775.

Less than a year later, in April, 1776 Wesley resumes the issue of the agitation,<sup>85</sup> which, as the connecting link between the American

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<sup>82</sup> W XI 86, Calm Am, 1775.

<sup>83</sup> Ib.

<sup>84</sup> L VI 176, 1775.

<sup>85</sup> W XI 90 ff., Obs Lib, 1776. Wesley began to write this treatise on April 4, 1776, according to J VI 100, 1776.

struggle for independence and the English anti-monarchical activities, is supposed to have led to war. The existence of this agitation, which is ultimately an agitation for war, is accounted for in the same, but its genesis in different terms. As to the existence of the agitation of war, Wesley continues to "allow that the Americans were strongly exhorted by letters from England, 'never to yield or lay down their arms till they had their own terms'<sup>86</sup>".

As to the genesis of the same agitation of war, Wesley goes one step further than the year before. He is no longer content to trace the agitation only to the small anti-monarchist group in England but proceeds to trace the English anti-monarchical spirit together with its resulting agitation back to the American striving for independence. "I once thought those measures (of agitation for war) had been originally concerted in our own kingdom; but I am now persuaded they were not." He rather believes that "those measures were concerted long before this"<sup>87</sup>, namely precisely in America which always hankered after independence, as he puts it. Thus Wesley has completely inverted his argumentation. Not the anti-monarchical spirit created that of independence, but vice versa, the spirit of independence produced the anti-monarchical one. Consequently the guilt of war can no longer be looked for in England but must be found in America.

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86

W XI 108 f., Obs Lib, 1776.

87

Ib.

During the few months between the two accounts for the agitation of war there must have occurred the famous change in Wesley's attitude toward the conflict between England and America. It is interesting to examine the time from June 1775 to April 1776 for eventual indications of this change.

Strange as it is, the first slight suggestions of an antipathy toward the Americans appear together with Wesley's strong assertion of his sympathy for them in June, 1775. For he then expresses his opinion "in spite of all my rooted prejudices, (my) long-rooted prejudices", because "all my prejudices are against the Americans".<sup>88</sup> One cannot doubt at all that Wesley was subjectively completely honest in his unconditional defense of the Americans, for rationally he had overcome his prejudices. But it is interesting to speculate whether he had not overcome his prejudices emotionally, whether he was not objectively honest. Could not his change in attitude be, at least partly, a revival of his old prejudices? So that he was never completely reconciled with the Americans?

There is at least one strong argument which points in this direction, and that is the fact that Wesley worked upon his famous "Calm Address" which means a decisive step in the assumed change, as early as in June 1775<sup>89</sup>, which actually coincides with and even precedes the expression of his favour toward the Americans.

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<sup>88</sup>L VI 156, 161, 1775.

<sup>89</sup>Of. Curnock, Note to J VI 66 f.

However this may be, it can furthermore be substantiated that what was originally a prejudice became finally a judgment. Wesley's High Church principle had asserted itself over his desire to be sympathetic with the Americans. It was the attitude of the famous work of Samuel Johnson, "Taxation no Tyranny; An Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress", mentioned by Wesley himself<sup>90</sup>, which answered to his sentiment. All of this happened in the latter part of October and the earlier part of November, 1775. First Wesley mentions the process of the change saying "I find a danger of losing my love for the Americans."<sup>91</sup> Then he accounts for the fact of the change in a new edition of his "Calm Address", based upon Johnson's work.<sup>92</sup>

After this time Wesley strongly declares himself against the Americans. "What impartial man can either blame the King or commend the Americans?"<sup>93</sup> Of course nobody. For after all not the King but the Americans are guilty of the "unrighteous quarrel" which is "doubtless unrighteous on their part".<sup>94</sup> This Wesley has to prove.

One of the strong arguments Wesley discovers for his opposition to the Americans is the equation that those who started the war are also guilty of it. And who started it? "Who was first in the

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<sup>90</sup> W XI 80, Calm Am, 1775.

<sup>91</sup> L VI 179, 1775.

<sup>92</sup> L VI 181 f., 1775. - L VI 183, 1775. - J VI 82 f., 1775.

<sup>93</sup> L VI 193, 1775.

<sup>94</sup> W XI 112, Obs.Lib, 1776.

transgression? Who began the dreadful strife?"<sup>95</sup> Of course not the English. "Can we declare, in the face of the sun, that we are not aggressors in this war? We can.."<sup>96</sup> The Americans are the aggressors. "While we were warmly debating these things in England, the Americans, believing matters were now in a proper forwardness, wholly threw off the mask, openly took up arms, seized upon His Majesty's stores and ships, and avowed themselves to be sovereign states, independent on Britain or any other."<sup>97</sup> And as the Americans are the aggressors in the war, therefore they are guilty of it.

Speaking of the Americans and their guilt of the war with England Wesley modifies his standpoint in the same way as he did it with regard to the English and their guilt of the war with America. He did not mean the English as a whole, so he does not mean the Americans as a whole for "the Americans in general love the English, and the English in general love the Americans."<sup>98</sup> After all "it is certain the bulk of the people both in England and America mean no harm." Not all of the Americans are guilty but only "their miserable leaders" for the people "only follow their leaders, and do as they are bid without knowing why or wherefore". It is, therefore, not their sin which caused the war, "for the poor sheep are 'more sinned against than

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<sup>95</sup>W XI 122, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>96</sup>W XI 115, Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>97</sup>W XI 133, Calm Engld, 1777.

<sup>98</sup>W XI 86, Calm Am, 1775.

sinning',<sup>99</sup> but the sin of their leaders.<sup>99</sup>

The alternative that either a few among the English, or a few among the Americans, their leaders, are guilty of the war, is, however, not the last word Wesley has to say. For as a theologian Wesley is not content, in the case of the war between England and America not less than in the case of the wars of the slave-trade, to attribute the ultimate guilt of the war either to third persons (They are guilty!) or to second persons (You are guilty!). As a theologian Wesley proceeds to speak about the guilt of the war in the first person (We are guilty!) including himself.

The indications of the confession of his own guilt appear in two statements which, in a temporal sense, frame the debate of the question. In the beginning of the debate Wesley strongly affirms that in a proper sense he does "not intend to enter upon the question whether the Americans are in the right or in the wrong".<sup>100</sup> And at the conclusion of the debate he as strongly asserts that he does not want to discuss the question who started the war. "I must beg your pardon for not touching this subject now. Excuse my saying anything of the second cause, as I mean only to inquire into the first."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>L VI 179, 1775.

<sup>100</sup>L VI 161, 1775.

<sup>101</sup>W XI 122, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

The climax of the confession of the own guilt is reached in the sermon on "National Sins and Miseries" of November, 1775.<sup>102</sup> In it Wesley distinctly proceeds from a discussion of the "they" over the "you" to the "we".

The "They" are "the widows and Orphans of the Soldiers who lately fell, near Boston, in New England" for whose "benefit" Wesley wrote and preached this sermon.<sup>103</sup> With regard to them Wesley poses the question of his text II. Sam. 24:17 "'These sheep, what have they done'" that "all this is come upon them?" Are they guilty of the war in which their husbands and fathers died, because they are more sinful than others? No! Wesley gives his negative answer in the words of Jesus according to his free rendition of Luke 13: 2 f., saying: "'Suppose ye that they are sinners above other men, because they suffer such things? I tell you, nay'"<sup>104</sup>

The "You" are thus already involved in this word of Jesus. Wesley, applying this "You" of course to his listeners and readers, continues in the words of Jesus: "'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish'".<sup>105</sup> Therefore not "they", but "you" are guilty. In interpreting this word of Jesus Wesley also draws the last conclusion.

The "We" must, therefore, be understood when Jesus says "You". This means to Wesley: "It therefore behoves us to consider our own

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<sup>102</sup>WS VII 400 ff., 1775.

<sup>103</sup>Ib. 400.

<sup>104</sup>Ib. 405.

<sup>105</sup>Ib.

sins; - the cause of all our sufferings. It behoves each of us to say, 'Lo, I have sinned; I have done wickedly!'.<sup>106</sup> Thus "we" are guilty, which means in Wesley's sense that he himself is included.

The confession of his own sin contains the deepest insight possible into the structure not only of the guilt of war in particular but also of the cause of war in general.

The sin of man is the content of war. We follow Wesley's own train of thought in proceeding from the discussion of the cause of war to its content. "Whatever be the cause (of war), let us calmly and impartially consider the thing itself."<sup>107</sup>

Because war is caused by sin it can also in itself be nothing but sin, as already the slave-trade exemplified which was seen as both, as war and sin in one. For the sinfulness of war Wesley gives an account that consists of three layers. The layer on the surface may be called the psychological argument, the layer in the middle the philosophical, and the layer at the bottom the theological argument.

The psychological argument, which reveals the element of Pietism in Wesley, relates war to the emotions of man. In extensive descriptions of war is indicated what is expressed in intensive verdicts upon war. The descriptions of war reflect Wesley's view of what he in his time took to be the essence of warfare. At two occasions he depicted the phenomenon of war as he saw it. And although these two depictions are separated by almost twenty years there is a striking resemblance

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<sup>106</sup>  
Ib.

<sup>107</sup>  
W IX 222, Orig Sin, 1757.

between them, as a comparison will show, so that the conclusion is allowed that Wesley's emotional attitude toward war remained basically unchanged.

The first description concerns England's war with France as it took place in the framework of the Seven Years War. In 1757 Wesley explains: "Here are forty thousand men gathered together on this plain. What are they going to do? See, there are thirty or forty thousand more at a little distance. And these are going to shoot them through the head or body, to stab them, or split their skulls, and send most of their souls into everlasting fire, as fast as possibly they can."<sup>108</sup>

The second description refers to England's war with her colonies in America. In 1775 Wesley points out: "Hark, the cannon's roar! A pitchy cloud covers the face of the sky. Noise, confusion, terror, reign over all! Dying groans are on every side. The bodies of men are pierced, torn, hewed in pieces; their blood is poured on the earth like water! Their souls take their flight into the eternal world; perhaps into everlasting misery."<sup>109</sup>

Special attention has to be called to two points in both of these descriptions. In the first place, the horrors of war are delineated almost sarcastically. Men "bite and devour one another".<sup>110</sup> From the events in 1757 Wesley inferred already in 1768 for the later situation

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<sup>108</sup>  
Ib.

<sup>109</sup> WS VII 404, 1775.

<sup>110</sup>  
W XI 124, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

of 1775 that "many thousands of poor Englishmen will sheathe their swords in each other's bowels for the diversion of their good neighbours".<sup>111</sup> This picture, drawn in times of peace, combines the after-taste of the first with the foretaste of the second war. Thus it truly serves as a connecting link between the two descriptions of war presented, confirming the thesis that Wesley's emotional attitude toward war remained unchanged throughout this period.

In the second place, the curse of war is considered. Wesley not only looks at, but also behind, the horrors of war by posing the question of the eternal destiny of the soldiers killed in war. His answer, reflecting his view about soldiers, is anything but optimistic. He is convinced, we have seen in the preceding two quotations, that the majority of them is a prey of eternal damnation.

The verdicts upon war follow immediately after the descriptions of the horrors of war. They call war in an almost brutal frankness by its name. War is a "monster" which "stalks uncontrolled".<sup>112</sup> It is "the fell monster"<sup>113</sup> which in "its insatiable violence"<sup>114</sup> destroys every "trade, and wealth, and plenty".<sup>115</sup> On the one hand, war thus spreads the horror mentioned over the country, "the horrors of so terrible a conflagration"<sup>116</sup>, making the scene of war a "horrid

<sup>111</sup> L V 383, 1768.

<sup>112</sup> W IX 223, Orig Sin, 1757.

<sup>113</sup> WS VII 404, 1775.

<sup>114</sup> W XI 120, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>115</sup> WS VII 418, 1778.

<sup>116</sup> W XI 121, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

scene".<sup>117</sup> On the other hand it is accompanied by troubles. "The nation is already involved in many troubles. And we know not how many more may follow."<sup>118</sup> For "perhaps these are only the beginning of sorrows".<sup>119</sup> Not the least of these troubles are 'misery,...complicated misery",<sup>120</sup> and desolation. "Stop here then, my brethren, and survey the desolation. Behold the weeping" of mothers, wives, and children who mourn for their sons, husbands, and fathers.<sup>121</sup>

The philosophical argument, which reveals the element of the Enlightenment in Wesley, relates war to what he calls "humanity". To Wesley the humanity of man means primarily what makes him human and only secondarily what makes him humane. This appears from the further qualification of the concept of humanity as a humanity of the mind, represented by the rational idea of reason, and as a humanity of the will, represented by the moral idea of virtue, just as the humanism of the Enlightenment consists of a primary rationalism and a secondary moralism.

The ideas of reason and virtue widen the relationship between war and humanity to the relationship between war and humanity with its manifestations of reason and virtue. Wesley determines this

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<sup>117</sup>WS VII 404, 1775.

<sup>118</sup>L VI 198, 1775.

<sup>119</sup>WS VII 401, 1775.

<sup>120</sup>Ib. 404.

<sup>121</sup>W XI 120, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

relationship quite clearly as a disjunctive one. War on the one side and humanity and reason and virtue on the other side exclude each other. "So long as this monster (of war) stalks uncontrolled, where is reason, virtue, humanity? They are utterly excluded; they have no place; they are a name and nothing more."<sup>122</sup>

What is true of the relationship between war and humanity with its manifestations of reason and virtue is also true of the relationship between war and the duality of reason and virtue as such. They destroy each other. War is the proof for "the utter degeneracy of all nations from the plainest principles of reason and virtue."<sup>123</sup> If reason and virtue are unable to displace war by its contrary, peace, then war is able to invert reason and virtue into their contraries, ignorance and pride. "And surely all our declamations on the strength of human reason, and the eminence of our virtues, are no more than the cant and jargon of pride and ignorance, so long as there is such a thing as war in the world."<sup>124</sup>

In the coordination of reason and virtue to each other reason is conceived as the principle of virtue. This is in full accordance with the Enlightenment in which Wesley, after all, participates. For as the mind is the principle of the will, so the humanity of the mind is the principle of the humanity of the will, and so reason is the principle of virtue, and so also the humanism of rationalism is the

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<sup>122</sup>W IX 223, Orig Sin, 1757.

<sup>123</sup>Ib. 222.

<sup>124</sup>Ib. 223.

principle of the humanism of moralism.

The idea of reason is, therefore, of primary and the idea of virtue of secondary importance. This is reflected in Wesley in that he connects reason in a particular way with humanity. Consequently the relationship between war and humanity can furthermore be conceived as the relationship between war on the one hand and humanity and reason on the other hand. Also in this case it is true that where the one side is the other cannot be. There is, says Wesley, a "horrid reproach ...to all reason and humanity. There is war in the world! war between men!"<sup>125</sup> This reproach points out "how shocking, how inconceivable a want must there have been of common understanding ("understanding" is in Wesley's language equivalent to "reason")<sup>126</sup>, as well as common humanity", before war could appear.<sup>127</sup> War presupposes a complete, not only a partial want of reason and humanity. War is the proof "of the absolute want, both of common sense (the English type of reason) and common humanity, which runs through the whole race of mankind".<sup>128</sup>

And a final modification of the relationship between war and humanity must be exemplified. For what is true of the relationship of war on the one side and humanity and reason on the other side is also true of the relationship between war and reason as such. They oppose each other, in the twofold sense that reason opposes war and that war

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<sup>125</sup>  
Ib. 221.

<sup>126</sup>  
Cf. WS VI 244, 1781. - WS VI 352 f., 1781. - W XIII 424, Locke, 1781. - Gerdes, pp. 262 f.

<sup>127</sup>  
W IX 222, Orig Sin, 1757.

opposes reason. Reason opposes war as a politicum and war opposes reason as a humanum.

Reason opposes war as a politicum. This is to say that reason does not allow war to be a constituent factor of politics. This concerns both, the war with France and the war with America. As to the war with France, Wesley argues that war is, although apparently a rational, yet essentially an irrational factor of politics. The apparent rationality of war is suggested by the fact that it so often serves as a "last resort"<sup>129</sup>, as the continuation of politics with other means, to use the famous formulation of Clausewitz. But this apparent rationality is overruled by the essential irrationality of war.

The essential irrationality of war lies in the conditio sine qua non of war, and that is the assumption that the right of sovereigns and their nations can be determined through the might of their armies. Wesley questions this assumption in both of its parts. He questions that armies can represent their sovereigns and nations, and he questions that might can represent right.

Wesley denies that armies can represent their sovereigns and nations. For the sovereigns and nations have a motive for war which is not shared by the armies because they have no motive at all.

That the armies have no motive for war appears from the manner in which they assail one another. For this makes one ask "Why so? What harm have they done to them?" And the only answer one receives is

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<sup>129</sup>  
Ib.

"O, none at all! They do not so much as know them."<sup>130</sup> The Sovereigns, however, do have a motive for war, namely their personal quarrels. "A man, who is King of France, has a quarrel with another man, who is King of England."<sup>131</sup> And because the armies do not have, whereas the Sovereigns do have a motive for war, the Sovereigns transfer their motive, without any reason whatsoever, to the armies, so that "these Frenchmen are to kill as many of these Englishmen as they can".<sup>132</sup>

Wesley furthermore denies that might can represent right, that e.g. the Frenchmen, by killing as many of the Englishmen as possible, can "prove the King of France is in the right".<sup>133</sup> It is precisely this what war cannot do. "Now, what an argument is this! What a method of proof! What an amazing way of deciding controversies!"<sup>134</sup> With reason at least it has nothing to do. "What must mankind be, before such a thing as war could ever be known or thought of upon earth?...before any two Governors, or any two nations in the universe, could once think of such a method of decision!"<sup>135</sup>

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130  
Ib.

131  
Ib.

132  
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Ib.

134  
Ib.

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Ib.

As to the war with America, Wesley resumes his judgment that reason cannot approve of the war, and that because it completely lacks wisdom and common sense. The war with America lacks wisdom for "who that seriously considers this awful contest, can help lamenting the astonishing want of wisdom in our brethren to decide the matter without bloodshed? What, are there no wise men amongst us? none that are able to judge between brethren?"<sup>136</sup> The war with America furthermore lacks common sense. "Waiving this, waiving all (moral) considerations of right and wrong, I ask (the rational question), Is it common sense to use force toward the Americans?"<sup>137</sup> Wesley denies this, thus clearly stating that at least this particular war, if not war in general, is politically unreasonable. The rational calculability of war is annulled by its irrational uncertainty. For "if the sword should be drawn, upon whom may it light? This we know not."<sup>138</sup>

War opposes reason as a humanum. This is to say that war does not allow reason to be a constituent factor of man. This concerns also both the war with France and the war with America. As to the war with France, Wesley states that war is irreconcilable with, and therefore rules out the reason of man. As to the first point Wesley asks "Now, who can reconcile war, I will not say to religion, but to any degree of reason or common sense?"<sup>139</sup> As to the second point he answers himself

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<sup>136</sup> W XI 122, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>137</sup> L VI 156, 161, 1775.

<sup>138</sup> W XI 120, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>139</sup> W IX 221, Orig Sin, 1757.

that "men in general can never be allowed to be reasonable creatures, till they know not war any more".<sup>140</sup>

As to the war with America, Wesley sees his view confirmed that the reason of man, including its relatives wisdom and understanding, is outruled. "Reason is lost in rage; its small still voice is drowned by popular clamour. Wisdom is fallen in the streets. And where is the place of understanding? It is hardly to be found."<sup>141</sup> Reason is not only outruled but also replaced by its contrary, by what Wesley calls "folly and madness" and what his interpreters call "insanity".<sup>142</sup> "How is wisdom perished from the wise! What a flood of folly and madness has broke in upon us!"<sup>143</sup>

The theological argument, which reveals that Wesley is more than just a combination of Pietism and Enlightenment, relates war to what he calls "religion".<sup>144</sup> "Who can reconcile war...to religion?"<sup>145</sup> The relationship between war and religion is also, as the preceding quotation already suggests, completely disjunctive. War is disconnected from the fruits of religion, from faith and love, because it is connected with sin. It is the equation of war and sin which the theological argument elaborates with regard to both, to original sin

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<sup>140</sup> Ib. 223.

<sup>141</sup> WS VII 403 f., 1775.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. e.g. W. T. Watkins op. cit. 124. - J. W. Bready op. cit. 229.

<sup>143</sup> W XI 122, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. E. W. Gerdes 188 f.

<sup>145</sup> W IX 221, Orig Sin, 1757.

and actual sin.

War is original sin. This Wesley clearly states in his studies on original sin as published in 1757. War is in two ways the main proof of the corruption of man, for war reveals the universal as well as the total corruption of man.

Man is universally corrupt because all men are corrupt. This is reflected by war. "If, then, all nations, Pagan, Mahometan, and Christian, do in fact, make this (i.e. war) their last resort, what further proof do we need of the utter (i.e. total) degeneracy of all nations...which runs through the whole race of mankind?"<sup>146</sup> And, as Wesley says, the Christians are not exempted. They have been involved in war not less than the others. "Is it not astonishing, beyond all expression, that this is the naked truth? that, within a short term of years, this has been the real case in almost every part of even the Christian world?"<sup>147</sup> But if this is true that the Christians were also involved in war then war is a reproach to them in particular. "There is a still more horrid reproach (than all other sins) to the Christian name, yea, to the name of man....There is war in the world! war between men! war between Christians! I mean, between those that bear the name of Christ, and profess to 'walk as he also walked'."<sup>148</sup>

Man is totally corrupt because all of man is corrupt. This is also demonstrated by war. "There is still greater and more undeniable

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<sup>146</sup> Ib. 222. Italics mine, E.W.G.

<sup>147</sup> Ib. 223. Italics mine, E.W.G.

<sup>148</sup> Ib. 221.

proof (than all the other sins) that the very foundations of all things, civil and religious, are utterly out of course in the Christian as well as the heathen world (i.e. universally).<sup>149</sup>

War is actual sin. This Wesley concludes during the American War of Independence which thus confirms his former principal view. This particular war is the occasion for Wesley to show how war in general conflicts with the original nature of man which is to be restored by grace.

War is contrary to nature. Wesley finds, it "is really surprising" that there is war in the world "and meanwhile we gravely talk of the 'dignity of our nature'".<sup>150</sup> And the war with America is the more unnatural because it is "an unnatural civil war",<sup>151</sup> a war among brothers. "Brother goeth to war against brother; and that in the very sight of the Heathen. Surely this is a sore evil amongst us."<sup>152</sup> As an evil this war is sin, revealing "the spirit and temper of the world" by which men "bite and devour one another".<sup>153</sup>

War is also contrary to grace. This statement can be substantiated by two remarks which Wesley made during the war with America. In the one remark he indicates that the message of grace may find a

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Ib. Italics mine, E.W.G.

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Ib. 222.

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W XI 120, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

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Ib. 122.

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Ib. 124.

better ground in areas which are not immediately involved in the events of war. Thus he advises his friend Thomas Rankin in America to go to South Carolina because, "as the people are farther removed from the din of war, they may be more susceptible of the gospel of peace".<sup>154</sup> In the other remark Wesley speaks of the ministers of grace who leave the battlefields of the war. "The ministers of grace turn away from the horrid scene; the ministers of vengeance triumph."<sup>155</sup>

The sin of man is the consequence of war. Also this final coordination of sin and war is suggested by Wesley, however only suggested and not, as the others, elaborated. This obvious neglect is the result of the fact that Wesley conceives the anthropological implications of war from an ultimately theological perspective. In this perspective the idea of sin is the major and more comprehensive, and the idea of war the minor and less comprehensive concept. In other words: sin explains the nature of war completely but war explains the nature of sin only partially. Therefore Wesley elaborates how war points back to and coincides with sin, and only suggests how sin points back to and coincides with war. These suggestions are occasional remarks that war, having sinful roots and a sinful trunk, can have nothing but sinful branches. There are three of these remarks.

The first remark occurs in 1745. After the first successes of the Pretender Wesley asks the question about the fruit of war, saying:

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<sup>154</sup>L VI 182, 1775.  
<sup>155</sup>WS VII 404, 1775.

"We would have war; and we have had it. And what is the fruit?"

Wesley knows of two fruits, of misery and more war.

Misery is thus not only the constant companion of war, as we have seen, but also its successor. Misery follows war immediately, resulting from it. "Our armies (are) broken in pieces; and thousands of our men either killed on the spot, or made prisoners in one day."

But misery is only one of the fruits of war. The other is as important, namely more war. War creates war. "Nor is this all. We have now war at our own doors; our own countrymen turning their swords against their brethren."<sup>156</sup>

The second remark resumes the question of the fruits of war in 1775 during the American War of Independence. In his correspondence with Thomas Rankin in America Wesley sees misery coming to a climax. "What will the end of these things be either in Europe or America? It seems huge confusion and distress, such as neither we nor our fathers had known!"<sup>157</sup> Wesley became aware of this climax through the observation that war makes man a beast. "It is no wonder that the spirits of the men that know not God are sharpened into madness, that human creatures become and commence lions and bears; this is the genuine fruit of war!"<sup>158</sup> But Wesley himself does not believe in the final success of the mere force of the "lions and bears". He is "persuaded love and tender measures will do far more than

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<sup>156</sup>W XI 182, Englishman, 1745.

<sup>157</sup>L VI 154, 1775.

<sup>158</sup>L VI 173, 1775.

violence".<sup>159</sup> Here we have a first glimpse of the principle of his own conduct during the time of war, as we will discuss it in a later chapter.

The third remark refers to the result of the wars of the slave-trade. Wesley's point is to show that the wars of the slave-trade never produce the right over the life of a man, whatever else they may produce. "It cannot be, that either war, or contract, can give any man such a property in another as he has in his sheep and oxen."<sup>160</sup> At this point ideas as to the basic rights of man begin to shine through.

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<sup>159</sup>L VI 182, 1775.

<sup>160</sup>W XI 79, Slavery, 1774.

**SECTION B**

**THE EXPLICATION OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR  
IN THE ETHICAL NORMS FOR  
MAN AND SOCIETY**

## CHAPTER V

### WAR AND THE REPENTANCE OF MAN

The secondary role of man in war is ethically determined by repentance. War is a call to repentance, and repentance, in turn, is an ethical attitude in war.

War is a call to repentance. It is especially the war between England and America which Wesley interprets as a call to repentance. "Never had America such a call to repentance!"<sup>1</sup> he declares, thinking, however, not only of America, but also of England,<sup>2</sup> i.e. of everybody involved, and above all of all those "that fear God".<sup>3</sup> For, he asks, "was there ever a time in which there was a louder call for them that fear God to... repentance?"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L VI 155, 1775.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. ib. context.

<sup>3</sup> L V 388, 1768. - L VI 150, 1775.

<sup>4</sup> L V 388, 1768.

As a call to repentance war poses an "awful crisis", thereby furnishing "the important opportunity" of repentance.<sup>5</sup> This it is an incitement to repentance. "Certainly the present doubtful situation of affairs (between England and America) may be improved to the benefit of many. They may be strongly incited now 'to break off their sins by repentance'."<sup>6</sup>

War is both a call and an incitement to repentance because it points out that repentance is the indispensable and the proper thing to do. "Never was there a time when it was more necessary for all that fear God, both in England and America", to repent, Wesley asserts.<sup>7</sup> The reference to the people in England and America "that fear God" is not meant as a restriction to only them. They serve as the pars pro toto, for ultimately the necessity of repentance is upon everybody because everybody is guilty of the "universal impiety" which caused the war and which, therefore, requires "an universal, or at least a general repentance".<sup>8</sup> The factor of universality, of the necessary repentance as well as of the preceding sin, suggests furthermore that it is proper for everybody to repent. Wesley quotes, in the free way typical for him, Luke 13: 2 f. and applies the word of Jesus about the fall of the tower of Siloam, which killed eighteen people,

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<sup>5</sup>L VI 348, 1779.

<sup>6</sup>L VI 142, 1775.

<sup>7</sup>L VI 150, 1775.

<sup>8</sup>L VI 168, 1775. - W XI 127 f., Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

to the English soldiers who lost their lives in America in fighting the colonists. "'Suppose ye that they are sinners above other men, because they suffer such things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish'." And from the scriptural call to repentance he continues to infer: "It therefore behoves us to consider our own sins...It behoves each of us to say, 'Lo, I have sinned: I have done wickedly'".<sup>9</sup> This is implied when war is understood as a call to repentance.

Repentance, in turn, is an ethical attitude in war. The ethical character of repentance is given with the very fact that it is an attitude. This is to say, repentance is more than the (rationalistic) change of mind or the (pietistic) change of heart. It is the change of the whole man, manifest in his conduct. This is the repentance Wesley calls for when giving a theological interpretation of the invasion of the Pretender in 1745, asking: "Brethren, countrymen, Englishmen, what shall we do; today, before the season of mercy is quite expired, and our 'destruction cometh as a whirlwind?' Which way can we remove the evils we feel? which way prevent those we fear?"<sup>10</sup> Repentance extends into the realm of ethics precisely because it has to be done. Therefore Wesley remarks with reference to the American War of Independence, "let us do our utmost"<sup>11</sup> in this respect.

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<sup>9</sup>WS VII 405, 1775.

<sup>10</sup>W XI 184, Englishman, 1745. Italics mine, E.W.G.

<sup>11</sup>W XI 123, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

As an attitude repentance has a particular meaning and a particular purpose. The meaning of repentance in war is threefold. Repentance in war means, in the first place, negatively, the attitude of not participating in the spirit of war because it is the spirit of the world. "Let not Christians engage in the controversy (of the war with America) in the spirit and temper of the world, and bite and devour one another, lest they should be consumed with the world."<sup>12</sup>

Repentance in war means, in the second place, positively, the attitude of seeking God. During the invasion of the Pretender in 1745 Wesley thus not only asked "all our brethren to join with us... in seeking God",<sup>13</sup> but also "called on a multitude of sinners...to seek the Lord while He might be found".<sup>14</sup> And in 1775, when the war with America broke out, he asked the Lord Privy Seal, the Earl of Dartmouth, and the Prime Minister, Lord North, the question: "Should we not seek Him?"<sup>15</sup>

Before the former he argues that to seek the Lord means to seek His help. "Why may not the people of England as well as the people of Nineveh seek His help who hath all power in heaven and in earth?"<sup>16</sup> And the seeking of God's help is, of course, identical with the

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<sup>12</sup>

Ib. 124.

<sup>13</sup>J III 210, 1745.

<sup>14</sup>J III 213, 1745.

<sup>15</sup>L VI 159, 164, 1775.

<sup>16</sup>L VI 198, 1775.

asking for this help. Thus Wesley can also say: "If we have so much wisdom and strength that we need no help from man, are we quite sure that we need no help from God? I know" Wesley continues in his letter to Lord Dartmouth, "your Lordship is not of that opinion. But if we need it, why are we ashamed to ask for it? to ask for it in the manner our forefathers did?"<sup>17</sup>

The manner of seeking God and asking for His help to which Wesley refers is the manner of "fasting and prayer", of "solemn public fasting and prayer".<sup>18</sup> These concrete suggestions of Wesley show that his concept of seeking God is anything but an abstract idea. We have, therefore, to go back and to see that in 1745 his question to his brethren was to ask them "to join with us.... in seeking God by fasting and prayer";<sup>19</sup> and that the Lord Privy Seal and the Prime Minister were asked in 1775 whether the English should "not seek Him by fasting and prayer before He lets the lifted thunder drop?" Wesley continues to implore each of these two noblemen saying "O my Lord, if your Lordship can do anything let it not be wanting! For God's sake, for the sake of the King, of the nation, of your lovely family, remember Rehoboam! Remember Philip the Second! Remember King Charles the First!"<sup>20</sup> The passion in these words of Wesley reveals that it is

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17  
Ib.

18  
Ib.

19  
J III 210, 1745.

20  
L VI 159 f., 164, 1775.

above all the shadow of the fratricidal strife between England and America which induces him to propose public fasting and prayer.

Wesley is not content, however, to propose general fasting and prayer. In particular he wants the Methodists on both sides of the ocean to practice them. In 1775 he urges upon Thomas Rankin "to appoint in America (as we do in England and Ireland) one or more general days of fasting and prayer."<sup>21</sup> And in the next year he concludes the Conference in England with a day "which we observed with fasting and prayer, as well for our own nation as for our brethren in America".<sup>22</sup>

It is mainly the call to prayer which, throughout Wesley's life, war impresses upon him and which he expresses in various ways. This can be seen as early as in 1745 during the invasion of the Pretender. Wesley records in his Journal how the Methodist societies met the situation, saying on one day: "About one we met, and poured out our souls before Him; and we believed He would send an answer of peace".<sup>23</sup> And on another day shortly later he remarks "We cried mightily to God to send His Majesty King George help from His holy place, and to spare a sinful land yet a little longer".<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> L VI 155, 1775.

<sup>22</sup> J VI 118, 1776.

<sup>23</sup> J III 210, 1745.

<sup>24</sup> J III 213, 1745.

When the clouds of the war with America drew nearer and nearer Wesley called in a particular way for the "prayers of the faithful", precisely because "the clouds do indeed gather more and more", he said, "and it seems an heavy storm will follow".<sup>25</sup> He refers to the "faithful" at both sides of the ocean. For he thinks it is "necessary for all that fear God, both in England and in America, to stir up the gift of God that is in them and wrestle with God in mighty prayer".<sup>26</sup> Let it be remarked at this point how closely Wesley's concept of prayer is related to that of grace. For the "gift of God" which man can "stir up in himself" is in Wesley's terminology nothing but a periphrasis of grace, and that of prevenient grace in particular, a gift which everybody has by birth, but not as nature but as grace. Thus, in a sense, nature is absorbed by grace and it is grace which enables man to pray and to repent. It must be admitted, though, that the understanding of grace as a divine gift inhering in man reminds very much of the Roman Catholic concept of grace as infusion. Here we encounter an important factor of Wesley's Anglican heritage.

The prayer of the faithful, we have seen, is expected both in America and in England. As to America Wesley is much concerned about the American people whom he thinks to be in a snare, and he believes that "none but the God of almighty love can extricate the poor people out of the snare". Therefore prayer before Him is the adequate way of

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<sup>25</sup>  
L VI 173, 1775.

<sup>26</sup>  
L VI 150, 1775.

repentance. "O what need have you to besiege His throne with all the power of prayer!"<sup>27</sup> And as to England Wesley sees her dependence upon the situation in America. "Just what I thought at first, I think still of American affairs. If a blow is struck, I give America for lost, and perhaps England too." As England is thus interlinked with America, the Methodists in Europe are called to prayer in the same way as the Americans. "Our part is to continue instant in prayer".<sup>28</sup>

The war did break out, and Wesley continued to exhort the British in general, and the Methodists among them in particular, to pray for the Americans, their American Brethren. "Ye salt of the earth, exert the seasoning preserving quality which you are favoured with. Bring your contentious brethren in your loving arms of faith and prayer, and lay them at your Father's feet, praying him 'to forgive them, as they know not what they do'."<sup>29</sup>

The war continued and the situation became worse when France also entered into the war. Again Wesley gives the advice of prayer to the more endangered parts of Great Britain, to Ireland and England. He writes to Samuel Bradburn in Dublin "I make no doubt but you improve the important opportunity (of this awful crisis) and lift up your voice like a trumpet", namely for prayer. The example of public

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<sup>27</sup> Ib.

<sup>28</sup> L VI 152, 1775.

<sup>29</sup> W XI 123, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

prayer in England should be followed in Ireland, too. "Our brethren in various parts of England have set apart an hour in a week for prayer (namely, from eight till nine on Sunday evening) in behalf of our King and country. Should not the same thing be done in Ireland too? particularly at Cork and Bandon." If somebody cannot participate in public prayer let him exert private prayer. "Those who have not opportunity of meeting at the time may pray part of the time in private."<sup>30</sup> Wesley's call was apparently followed in at least one respect. For a few months later he writes to Samuel Bradburn that the general disturbance "has done abundantly more good than harm to the work of God. The children of God have been greatly stirred up and have been more (instant) in prayer. And many men of the world have been greatly awakened, and continue so to this day".<sup>31</sup>

Repentance in war also means positively, in the third place, the attitude of "bending before the Lord",<sup>32</sup> or of self-humiliation. "Was there ever a louder call for them that fear God to humble themselves before Him?" Wesley asks in 1768.<sup>33</sup> Self-humiliation is directed, like fasting and prayer, to God. It is self-humiliation before God as it is seeking God by fasting and prayer. And war is a call to both of them, to the repentance of self-humiliation as well as to the repentance of seeking God by fasting and prayer. In one point, however, the

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<sup>30</sup>L VI 348, 1779.

<sup>31</sup>L VI 358, 1779.

<sup>32</sup>J III 213, 1745.

<sup>33</sup>L VI 338, 1768.

concept of self-humiliation represents an advance over the concept of seeking God and is thus able to differentiate more clearly within the concept of repentance. This point concerns the anthropological implications of repentance. Where the concept of seeking God in war emphasizes that repentance is occasioned by war and directed to God, the concept of self-humiliation adds another factor and stresses that repentance is occasioned by war, directed to God and negatively conditioned by man, namely by the sin of man. Thus we are brought back to the idea that repentance is repentance for sin. Accordingly, Wesley calls for a repentance in war which commands: "Lay thee in the dust, for this (thy sin of war) and for all thy sins."<sup>34</sup> He hopes that the people "may be strongly incited (through the war with America) now 'to break off their sins by repentance'".<sup>35</sup> The love of peace and the hatred of sin go hand in hand. "O let us follow after peace! Let us put away our sins; the real ground of all our calamities".<sup>36</sup> And Wesley meant "to do away with the sins", not just rationally to condemn them or emotionally to feel sorry for them. Man has "to do" repentance because grace, prevenient grace, enables him "to do" so. This is another incident which proves the legitimacy of understanding Wesley's concept of repentance ethically.

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<sup>34</sup>W XI 185, Englishman, 1745.

<sup>35</sup>L VI 142, 1775.

<sup>36</sup>W XI 88, Calm Am, 1775.

The purpose of repentance in war is also its motive. As such it is related to both, the particular occasion (war) and the particular condition (sin) of repentance. Repentance in war is motivated by what one wants to achieve by it. Fasting as one of the manifestations of repentance is also practiced as part of the military discipline of the armies. This makes Wesley ask: "What if others fast for strife and contention! Is that any reason that we should not do it from a better motive?"<sup>37</sup> Wesley's motive of repentance is not "strife and contention", but the "better motive", as we have seen, which intends to "remove the evils we feel" and to "prevent those we fear".<sup>38</sup> Accordingly the purpose of repentance is, medically speaking, a remedial and a prophylactic one. This medical language reveals a similarity of Wesley's understanding of repentance as dependent upon prevenient grace to Augustine's concept of grace as gratia medicinalis.<sup>39</sup>

The "evils" Wesley thinks of as to be removed or prevented, are the occasion of repentance, i.e. war, and the condition of repentance,

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<sup>37</sup>L VI 198, 1775.

<sup>38</sup>W XI 184, Englishman, 1745.

<sup>39</sup>The possible influence of Augustine on Wesley, whether directly or indirectly, has never been sufficiently discussed. There are striking similarities between these authors as to the medical, i.e. preventing and healing function of grace. One has only to think of Wesley's theology of the redemption of man as the process of the restoration of the image of God. There are also similarities as to the perfection of man in this restoration, and that through grace in love. Cf. Gerdes, pp. 5 f., 15 f.

i.e. sin. The remedy of the present evil of war is the first intention of repentance in war, in short: peace, the "answer of peace" sent by God before whom man repents.<sup>40</sup> Wesley is cautious enough not to establish a causal connection between man's repentance and God's restoration of peace. Man can influence God through repentance, but the repentance of man does not put God under any necessity, in other words: man cannot manage God. Thus Wesley rather hopes for than knows about peace after repentance. "There is now a probability that God will hear the prayer" of repentance, and, therefore, "it is not unlikely that peace will be re-established between England and the Colonies"<sup>41</sup> namely through repentance. "It is possible this might restore peace; but one cannot affirm it would", Wesley clearly states.<sup>42</sup>

The prevention of the future evil of war is the second aim of repentance in war. It is only repentance, Wesley claims, which can "prevent general destruction". All "that fear God" shall "humble themselves before Him, if haply general humiliation and repentance may prevent general destruction!"<sup>43</sup> And "unless general reformation prevent general destruction, what a scene will soon be opened!"<sup>44</sup> This

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<sup>40</sup>J III 210, 1745.

<sup>41</sup>L VI 142, 1775.

<sup>42</sup>L V 388, 1768.

<sup>43</sup>Ib.

<sup>44</sup>L VI 155, 1775.

is Wesley's fear for the war with America. Besides, the use of the term "reformation" as an equivalent of repentance is a further argument that repentance to Wesley involves distinct things to be done, i.e. that it is of ethical importance.

Wesley found his belief in the power, though not the unlimited power of repentance confirmed in 1779. For to him "God has already given abundant proof of His hearing prayer", the prayer of repentance, in preventing the hostile fleet in the Channel from "landing at Plymouth" by letting "the malignant fever" break out in their fleet.<sup>45</sup> But, of course, God cannot be forced always to answer repentance in that way. Sometimes it must be sufficient when "the prayers of the faithful obtain a longer reprieve" of war.<sup>46</sup>

The remedy of present sin is the third goal of repentance in war. This means, repentance in war asks for and has to ask for the forgiveness of sin.<sup>47</sup> Sin as the essence of war can only be forgiven through repentance. "Our sins, the real ground of all our calamities" in war "never will or can be thoroughly removed, till we fear God and honour the King", an attitude which is precisely what Wesley regards as the essence of repentance.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>L VI 358, 1779.

<sup>46</sup>L VI 173, 1775.

<sup>47</sup>W XI 123, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>48</sup>W XI 88, Calm Am, 1775.

The prevention of future sin is the fourth and final purpose of repentance in war. As sin is the essence of war so the repentance for sin is the only means of preventing the punishment of sin through war. "What can prevent this (punishment) but an universal, or at least a general, repentance?"<sup>49</sup> This is a rule founded not in the logical structure of things but in the merciful promise of God as spoken to Abraham when he interceded for the salvation of Sodom for the sake of the righteous in the town. God said "I will not destroy it for ten's sake" (Gen. 18:32). Wesley suggested this word to Samuel Bradburn in Ireland when the shores of Britain were endangered by the French and Spanish fleets in the channel. He wrote him that this is the "text for you".<sup>50</sup>

As sin is the cause, content and consequence of both, present and future wars, the remedy and prevention of war ultimately coincide in repentance for sin as such. War is, in short, "the time...for the inhabitants of the land to learn righteousness".<sup>51</sup> Wesley refers in this context to Nineveh which becomes the great example. "Why may not the people of England (in this situation of war) as well as the people of Nineveh seek His help who hath all power in heaven and in earth?"<sup>52</sup> For it may well be, although it cannot be said it must be, that

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<sup>49</sup> L VI 168, 1775.

<sup>50</sup> L VI 348, 1779.

<sup>51</sup> Ib.

<sup>52</sup> L VI 198, 1775.

repentance achieves now what it did then. "Who knoweth but God may be entreated of us (here and now in war) as He was for Nineveh?"<sup>53</sup>

It is Wesley's definition of repentance in war as the learning of righteousness through war<sup>54</sup> which is, in turn, fearing God and honouring the king, especially also in war,<sup>55</sup> that leads us right to the next chapter. Repentance necessarily extends into social and political affairs.

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<sup>53</sup>L VI 348, 1779.

<sup>54</sup>Ib.

<sup>55</sup>W XI 88, Calm Am, 1775.

## CHAPTER VI

### WAR AND THE ORDER OF SOCIETY

The order of society is intimately connected with the state. The question of war and the order of society becomes thus the question of the role of the state in time of war. We have to discuss both Wesley's approach to and his understanding of the role of the state in war.

Wesley's approach to the role of the state in war appears most clearly from the introduction to his "Free Thoughts on The Present State of Public Affairs"<sup>1</sup> as written in 1768 and printed in 1770. For it is in this "letter to a friend" that Wesley is unwilling <sup>to</sup> regard as a politician the "public affairs" of these years, which led to the conflict with America. "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."<sup>2</sup> Wesley argues that he is not a

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<sup>1</sup> L V 370 ff., 1768; or W XI 14 ff., Publ Aff, 1768.

<sup>2</sup> L V 370 f., 1768.

politician although he is an Englishman. This is to say, he refuses for himself the idea that "every Englishman is a politician; we suck in politics with our mother's milk. It is as natural for us to talk politics as to breathe; we can instruct both the King and his Council. We can in a trice reform the State, point out every blunder of this or that Minister, and tell every step they ought to take to be arbiters of all Europe".<sup>3</sup> Wesley denies this equation of the Englishman and a politician in rather sarcastic words. He grants that "every cobbler, tinker, porter, and hackney-coachman can do this; but I am not so deep learned. While they are sure of everything, I am in a manner sure of nothing; except of that very little which I see with my own eyes, or hear with my own ears."<sup>4</sup> As an Englishman Wesley is thus not automatically a politician, but it gives him the privilege, he claims, "to speak my naked thoughts, setting down just what appears to me to be the truth till I have better information".<sup>5</sup> This he prepares to do, exercising his advantage over the politicians, namely his impartiality. In the tense situation between England and America he claims to have neither anger nor bias for either of the contending parties.<sup>6</sup> "I believe I am tolerably impartial" he writes to his brother Charles as late as in November 1775.<sup>7</sup> Under the premise of not speaking as a politician

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<sup>3</sup>Ib. 371.

<sup>4</sup>Ib.

<sup>5</sup>Ib.

<sup>6</sup>Ib.

<sup>7</sup>L VI 186, 1775.

Wesley continues in the treatise to say: "I come to the point, to give you my 'free thoughts on the present state of public affairs', the causes and consequences of the present commotions."<sup>8</sup>

But if Wesley does not tackle as a politician the political problem of the role of the state in war, how then does he do it? We have seen that he claims to do it as an Englishman, but that does not say very much, because it only accounts for the right to speak, not for the perspective employed. One has to see that, in spite of its political character and in spite of his own English nationality, Wesley approaches the role of the state in war in a manner which is ultimately theological. For this we have to turn once more to his famous letter to Lord Dartmouth and to Lord North of June, 1775, the time when the relations between England and America had reached a crisis. He begins by again admitting that politics is not his field. "I would not speak, as it may seem to be concerning myself with things that lie out of my province." He feels, however, a responsibility to speak up, but this is not a political but a theological responsibility. "I dare not refrain from it any longer; I think silence in the present case would be a sin against God, against my country, and against my own soul."<sup>9</sup> This word is of high importance in two respects: In the first place, it clearly reveals the theological motivation (to avoid committing a sin) of Wesley's political tracts. To understand him in

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<sup>8</sup>  
L V 372, 1768.

<sup>9</sup>  
L VI 155, 160, 1775.

his political comments politically, nationalistically or pragmatically, is, therefore, insufficient, in spite of the fact that it seems to be the only interpretation up till now. In the second place, this word suggests the threefold theological determination of the state and its role in Wesley's view. It is (according to the threefold sin Wesley is decided not to commit) the relationship of the state to God, to the country and to one's own soul. And it must be said that to Wesley the relationship of the state to God is its foundation, to the country its resulting manifestation, and to one's own soul its necessary implication.

This threefold theological determination of the state is also reflected in its role in war. We therefore follow Wesley's own outline when we discuss the role of the state in war with regard to its origin (its relationship to God), to its dominion (its relationship to the country), and to its citizen (its relationship to one's own soul).

The role of the state in war with regard to its origin is discussed by Wesley mainly in "Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power" of 1772<sup>10</sup> and "Some Observations on Liberty" of 1776.<sup>11</sup> These two tracts are in two ways related to the problem of the role of the state in war. First of all, both of these tracts are conceived with regard to war, to the war between England and America, in anticipation of, or later participation in it. In this setting they thus deal especially with the concrete British state and its colonies.

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<sup>10</sup>W XI 52 ff., Power, 1772.

<sup>11</sup>W XI 90 ff., Obs Lib, 1776.

Furthermore, both of the tracts attempt to show how the war between England and America is interrelated with the contrast of two different conceptions of the state, the philosophical, anthropocentric conception of the Enlightenment and the theological, theocentric conception of orthodoxy.

In Wesley's view the origin of the state, or more precisely, of the power of the state, accounts also for the state's right to go to war, or rather, of its power over life and death. We have to follow him, therefore, also in these two steps of his argument.

The origin of the state's power in general must be traced back to God. Wesley's thesis is: "There is no power but of God".<sup>12</sup> The state is entrusted with power by God. God has delegated power to the state. "Government is a trust, and all its powers a delegation". Wesley makes it very clear, that the power of the state is a delegation from God. "It is a delegation, namely, from God; for 'rulers are God's ministers', or delegates".<sup>13</sup> The definition of the state as the delegate of God makes it a function of God, just as the definition of man as the image of God makes him an instrument of God. Both are nothing in themselves and can, therefore, never be explained by each other. It is as illegitimate to determine the state anthropologically as it is illegitimate to determine man politically. Besides, it leads beyond our context but it would be worthwhile to study the

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<sup>12</sup> W XI 53, Power, 1772. - W XI 105, Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>13</sup> W XI 105, Obs Lib, 1776.

interrelationship of Wesley's idea of the state as the political delegate of God and of man as the political image of God.<sup>14</sup>

As a trust from God the power of the state cannot be a trust from the people. "It is a trust, but not from the people."<sup>15</sup> A state cannot build its authority on the will of the people because the people are neither able nor do they actually confer the trust of power to the state. "The supposition, then, that the people are the origin of power, is in every way indefensible."<sup>16</sup>

The people are unable to confer power to the state because as images of God they are completely dependent upon God and, therefore, do not possess the power by themselves which they are assumed to delegate to the state. The principle of the people as the source of power is thus nothing but a "boasted principle" which "falls to the ground and the whole superstructure with it".<sup>17</sup>

The people furthermore actually do not confer power to the state. For if they would, that would include everybody, and everybody would have the right of conferring his share of power to the state. "If this be so, then it (this right) belongs to every individual of the human species; consequently, not to freeholders alone, but to all men; not to men only, but to women also; nor only to adult men and women, to those who have lived one-and-twenty years, but to those who have

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Gerdes, pp. 213 ff.

<sup>15</sup> W XI 105, Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>16</sup> W XI 52, Power, 1772.

<sup>17</sup> Ib. 53.

lived threescore."<sup>18</sup> Wesley concludes his sarcastic remark with the observation that "none did ever maintain this, nor probably ever will".<sup>19</sup> From his presupposition it is thus indeed correct to infer that the notion of the people as the source of power "is absolutely overturned by the very principle on which it is supposed to stand; namely that a right of choosing his Governors belongs to every partaker of human nature".<sup>20</sup>

The origin of the state's power over life and death in particular, or its right to go to war, must be seen in the general framework just outlined. We have now to present some ideas of Wesley as a whole which we already partly alluded to in the third chapter.

The right over life and death, the basis of the right to go to war, is, as we have seen, reserved to the Creator. "The Creator of man has the sole right to take the life which he gave."<sup>21</sup> The Creator is, however, also the Preserver or Governor of His creation. Hence this right is "a right which only the Governor of the world has, even the wiser Heathens being judges".<sup>22</sup> Whatever the conception of God may be, the right over life and death is exclusively a divine right. "Wherever it is, it must descend from God alone, the sole disposer of life and death."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ib. 52 f.

<sup>19</sup> Ib. 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ib. 52.

<sup>21</sup> Ib.

<sup>22</sup> Ib.

<sup>23</sup> Ib.

As the divine right is, as we have also seen, exclusive, it does not allow for a human right of the same kind. "No man therefore can give the power of the sword, any such power as implies a right to take away life."<sup>24</sup> This idea is based on the view of man as the image of God. According to it man is everything in dependence upon God, nothing in himself. Consequently he theoretically may receive (but actually does not receive) the power of the sword from God. In any case he does not possess it by himself. Therefore he cannot delegate it to the state. "It is an indisputable truth, Nihil dat quod non habet, 'none gives what he has not'. It plainly follows, that no man can give to another a right which he never had himself;...which no man upon the face of the earth either has or can have."<sup>25</sup>

From these considerations Wesley's view of the state's right of war can be defined in this way: The state cannot build its power in general on the will of the people, consequently it cannot build any right of war in particular on the will of the people either. The people cannot confer power in general nor the right of war in particular because they do not possess either of them. On the contrary, the state receives all its power from God. The great question now is: does this include the right to go to war? Does the state, then, as the delegate of God, have a divine right of war, if it lacks the human right of that kind? We have already denied this, and we believe,

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<sup>24</sup>  
Ib.

<sup>25</sup>  
Ib.

it is the correct interpretation of Wesley as may appear from the following observations:

In a preliminary political perspective Wesley actually allows for war, but only as an inevitable necessity under two conditions. The one condition which makes war understandable is self-defense. Wesley never clearly stated this idea himself but he seems to have advocated it for he quotes another author, obviously affirmatively, saying that "war itself is justifiable only on principles of self-preservation".<sup>26</sup>

The other condition which makes war understandable is rebellion. This was the case, in Wesley's view, in the war between England and America. America had rebelled against England, "usurping an illegal authority" and even, and this is the decisive point, "taking up arms against their King".<sup>27</sup> Thus the war is "doubtless unrighteous on their part, who revolt from their lawful Sovereign".<sup>28</sup> At this point, Wesley thinks, England could not but answer war with war, that is, in a sense, in self-defense, but not only that but also to restore order. "Yes, for this end, - to make them lay down their arms, which they have taken up against their lawful Sovereign....These are the ends for which our Government has very unwillingly undertaken this war, after having tried all the methods they could devise to secure them without violence."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>W XI 71, Slavery, 1774.

<sup>27</sup>W XI 113, Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>28</sup>Ib. 112.

<sup>29</sup>Ib. 111.

To make war politically understandable is the most Wesley can do, but it is sufficient to show that he is not a pacifist. In the ultimate theological perspective, however, Wesley condemns war altogether. After all, war in every form at every time and everywhere is finally sin. Sin is, as we have seen, the foundation, the content, and the consequence of war. Accordingly, it can have still less divine right than it could have human right, for God cannot sanction sin. As this is true with respect to every war, also to the American War of Independence, as we have seen, Wesley is also free from the charge of being a militarist.

Wesley's acknowledgment of the necessity and his denial of the right of war are no contradiction at all. They are nothing but the correct reflection of his idea of original sin which says that sin is both the destiny and the guilt of natural man. Accordingly, war as sin is both, inevitable as the destiny, and unrighteous as the guilt of man. This is Wesley's pessimism of nature which is balanced and overwhelmed only by the optimism of grace, beginning with prevenient grace. In the tension between both consists the only realism possible for the theologian Wesley.

The role of the state in times of war with regard to its dominion is twofold as the idea of the dominion itself carries a twofold meaning. For the dominion is both the act of the domination and the area of the domain. Wesley calls the act of the domination either abstractly "government" or he refers to its concrete personification in the "King". The area of the domain is in his terms the "country". The

king as the manifestation of the government on the one hand and the country on the other hand are a unity to Wesley, and he feels called to serve both, to plead the cause of both, particularly in the war with America. In the introduction of his "A Calm Address to our American Colonies" of 1775 he discounts "the treatment this would bring upon myself; but let it be, so I may in any degree serve my King and country".<sup>30</sup> And in "Some Observations on Liberty" of the next year (1776) he enters upon the question of "the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America"<sup>31</sup> under the presupposition: "I am pleading the cause of my king and country; yea, of every country under heaven, where there is any regular Government."<sup>32</sup> There is no doubt that to Wesley a "regular government" means monarchy. From this point of view he attacks democracy, "pleading against those principles that naturally tend to anarchy and confusion; that directly tend to unhinge all government, and overturn it from the foundation".<sup>33</sup> Wesley actually believed that "that dangerous tract, Dr. Price's 'Observations upon Liberty'," which he is answering in his tract of the same title, "if practiced, would overturn all government and bring in universal anarchy".<sup>34</sup> The "principles" Wesley is referring to are the very principles of democracy as

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<sup>30</sup> W XI 80, Calm Am, 1775.

<sup>31</sup> W XI 90 f., Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>32</sup> Ib. 98.

<sup>33</sup> Ib.

<sup>34</sup> J VI 100, 1776.

declared in the Age of Enlightenment, as seen in Rousseau's "Du contrat social" of 1762. These principles are based upon precisely that idea which Wesley questioned, namely that the people are the source of all power.

As the dominion of the state is twofold, so is its role in war, and we shall have to turn first to the problem of war and the role of the King in order to consider then the problem of war and the role of the country.

The role of the king in war is really a deep concern of Wesley. Already during the British war with France in the Seven Years War Wesley sides with the king, complaining about the poor counsel he, the king, had received about the war situation. "Indeed, I fear our fleets are bought and sold. Poor King George! where will he find an honest man?"<sup>35</sup> And even more does Wesley side with the king in England's conflict with America. It must be emphasized that he sided with the king because he was to him the lawful delegate of God who personified the lawful state. Hence it becomes understandable that he was opposed neither to England nor to America as such, after all he had strong words for both sides, as we have seen. What he attacked was rebellion wherever it appeared. Thus he sided with the king because he came to understand the war between England and America and its preparations as a rebellion, a rebellion which was finally carried out in America, but which was detectable in England even before that, and which was in the

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L III 179, 1756.

beginning spread on both sides of the ocean.

In the first period Wesley sided with the king against rebellion on both sides of the ocean. In 1768, in his "Free Thoughts on the Present State of Public Affairs", he vindicates the king of any responsibility he was charged with relating to the "commotions" of this time which Wesley feared would lead to war, as indeed they actually did. He is convinced that the king has taken "any step which he can possibly take, to put a stop to the present commotions" and thereby "to restore the peace of the nation" which was already then so very much in danger.<sup>36</sup>

The king is not responsible for the commotions, but those that agitate against his person and his office. These "publish palpable lies, and such lies as manifestly tend to breed dissension between the King and his subjects"<sup>37</sup>, as Wesley says four years later, in 1772. They "print and spread that deadly poison among his Majesty's subjects", he puts in in 1768.<sup>38</sup> They are the "incendiaries....who, by spreading all manner of lies, inflame the people even to madness".<sup>39</sup> We have already studied this phenomenon of agitation, an agitation against the king and for war against him, in a previous context.

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<sup>36</sup>L V 388, 1768.

<sup>37</sup>W XI 45, Th Lib, 1772.

<sup>38</sup>L V 388, 1768.

<sup>39</sup>Ib.

In Wesley's eyes this is nothing but rebellion which ought to be punished<sup>40</sup> because it is high treason wherever it occurs. He advocates "vigorously to execute the laws" against every rebel, arguing: "Ought they not to feel, if they will not see, that scandalum regis, 'scandalizing the King', is as punishable as scandalum magnatum? that for the future none may dare to slander the King any more than one of his nobles...Is not this little less than high treason? Is it not sowing the seeds of rebellion?"<sup>41</sup>

In the second period Wesley sided with the king against disloyal sentiment, the signs of rebellion, in England. In 1775 he analyzes the political situation of this decisive year as one great rebellion against the king. "England is in a flame! - a flame of malice and rage against the King, and almost all that are in authority under him."<sup>42</sup> This evil affected even the Methodists. In an entry of his Journal Wesley remarks that he found "some of our friends here were deeply prejudiced against the King and all his Ministers".<sup>43</sup>

At two occasions Wesley clearly defined disaffection against the king as sin. The first time he equates it with murder, the second time he calls it treason and treats it as an evil. In both cases he arrives at this judgment from his own experience. In a letter to the

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<sup>40</sup>W XI 45, Th Lib, 1772.

<sup>41</sup>L V 388, 1768.

<sup>42</sup>J VI 82, 1775.

<sup>43</sup>J VI 78, 1775.

Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Dartmouth, Wesley reports what he understands to be the feeling <sup>of</sup> "the bulk of the people in every city, town, and village where I have been" and explains that they "do not so much aim at the Ministry, as they usually did in the last century, but at the King himself. He is the object of their anger, contempt, and malice. They heartily despise His Majesty and hate him with a perfect hatred. They wish to imbue their hands in his blood". From this description Wesley draws the conclusion about the sinfulness of rebellion saying that in short "they are full of the spirit of murder and rebellion; and I am persuaded, should any occasion offer, thousands would be ready to act what they now speak".<sup>44</sup> In the sermon on "National Sins and Miseries" Wesley points to his personal acquaintances with people who turned rebels. "If you had heard men" he says, "as I have heard" who made this change, you would agree with me. For these people "once feared God and honoured the king", but now they are "breathing out the bitterest invectives against him and just ripe, should any occasion offer, for treason and rebellion". Rebellion is treason and therefore Wesley cannot "judge this to be a little evil, a matter of small moment, but one of the heaviest judgments which God can permit to fall upon a guilty land".<sup>45</sup>

In the third period Wesley sided with the king against the rebellion in America. In 1776 he develops in "Some Observations on

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<sup>44</sup> L VI 176, 1775.

<sup>45</sup> WS VII 403, 1775.

Liberty" the corollary, as he formulated it towards the end of the year 1775, in the words: "What impartial man can either blame the King or commend the Americans?"<sup>46</sup>

The American rebellion is a "revolt from their lawful Sovereign"<sup>47</sup>. This is to say it is also primarily directed against the king and his authority and only secondarily against England as such. Thus Wesley emphasizes mainly the rebellion against the king which the Americans "crowned"<sup>48</sup> by taking up arms "against their lawful Sovereign"<sup>49</sup> as Wesley stresses again and again; "against their King and mother country".<sup>50</sup> They defy the legal authority of the king and "usurp an illegal authority" of themselves.<sup>51</sup>

The Americans are the rebellious "aggressors in this war"<sup>52</sup> and this is why the king had to enter into this war in order to suppress the rebellion and to restore order which is to Wesley, one must never forget, the divine order of creation. The rebellion which the king aimed to suppress in America was in Wesley's view by no means a figment. "Is it possible that a man of sense should believe this? Did the King and Parliament undertake this war, on purpose to overturn

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<sup>46</sup>L VI 193, 1775.

<sup>47</sup>W XI 112, Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>48</sup>Ib. 113.

<sup>49</sup>Ib. 111.

<sup>50</sup>Ib. 113.

<sup>51</sup>Ib.

<sup>52</sup>Ib. 115.

a castle in the air?"<sup>53</sup>

In Wesley's opinion the order which the king intended to restore in America involved no selfish motives. "I humbly believe", he said, "both the King and his Ministers can declare this before God", namely "that we mean not, but it (the war), to acquire dominion or empire, or to gratify resentment".<sup>54</sup> The purpose of the war is really, Wesley believes, restoration, or as he also likes to put it, reparation. The king had to answer the American rebellion with war in order "to make them restore what they have illegally and violently taken from their fellow-subjects; to make them repair the cruel wrongs they have done them, as far as the nature of the thing will admit".<sup>55</sup> The idea of the war is "'solely to gain reparation for injury', from men who have already plundered very many of His Majesty's loyal subjects, and killed no small number of them".<sup>56</sup>

In siding with the king Wesley acknowledges the inevitable necessity of war. In our case he makes clear that in his view the king was forced to make war against the rebels in order to restore the order of creation. To repeat once more: Wesley is no pacifist. But on the other hand he is no militarist either, as we have said. And indeed, he nowhere attempted to show more than the necessity, he

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<sup>53</sup> Ib. 111.

<sup>54</sup> Ib. 115.

<sup>55</sup> Ib. 111.

<sup>56</sup> Ib. 115.

nowhere attempted to show the righteousness of war. The sinfulness of war remains untouched both as the guilt, but also as the curse of man. God the Creator cannot and does not sanction the sin of war, but permits it in His creation, and in His providence finally coordinates it with His plan of salvation. Thus Wesley sees a possibility and duty of the twofold loyalty to God because of war, as has been shown, and to the king in spite of war. This idea has to be resumed when we arrive at the citizen's role in war. Before that we must discuss another point.

Wesley's idea of the role of the country in war reflects still more the circumstance that his political interest has a theological basis. In the problem of the connection between England and America Wesley in 1775 tries to look at it from the mere political standpoint. In an apparently angry mood he reaches the conclusion that one should leave the Americans alone with their rebellion so that they may get to know what they are doing. "Cut off all other connexion with them than we have with Holland or Germany. Four-and-thirty millions they have cost us to support them since Queen Anne died. Let them cost us no more. Let them have their desire and support themselves."<sup>57</sup> The next year, however, Wesley in a sense took this sharp judgment back by penetrating this merely political reflection theologically, by superimposing upon it a theological thought. He now takes up, probably from the New Testament, particularly from St. Paul, the idea

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L VI 199, 1775.

of the body and its members with the difference that in this context he does not understand it in relation to the salvation within the church, i.e. to salvation history and church history, as St. Paul does, but to the world as a whole, i.e. to world history, or to give the key concept of his theology: to creation. This notion of the body and its members, thus understood, he applies to Britain and her American colonies. As the members of the body are joined together by God the Creator so are also England and America united by God the Creator. "God hath joined together...such powerful people as we and the Americans now are, for the mutual support, comfort, and defence of each other." This makes the state of Britain and America a "well-compacted body", manifesting God's "gracious design", we may add: His gracious design of creation. And because this is so, man should not separate what God has joined. The organic unity of England and America "should not be put asunder by any means whatsoever". This "would undoubtedly frustrate His gracious design". Therefore the "counsel...to separate (America from England) cannot be from God. It has no foundation in the nature and fitness of things beneficial, either to them or to us". Any attempt of separation in spite of this fact is nothing but rebellion, not only against the mother country, not only against the king, God's delegate, but against God Himself and His design of creation. And what is rebellion against God the Creator? Nothing but sin, the very heart of sin! We here really discover the theological depth of Wesley's opposition against rebellion. It is indeed neither political nor nationalist, it is

truly theological. "If one powerful member should rise up against the whole body, or the whole body against one such member, and disunite from it; this schism must, in the nature of things, occasion...a weakness and deformity in the whole body."<sup>58</sup> Wesley claims that Britain maintains liberty everywhere in her country and her colonies and that rebellion, wherever it occurs, destroys and perverts liberty.

The liberty which Britain maintains, is in Wesley's eyes "an unspeakable blessing" because it is "real, legal liberty".<sup>59</sup> It is this liberty "which is the glory of Englishmen".<sup>60</sup> Wesley defines it as "civil liberty, a liberty of enjoying all our legal property, - or religious liberty, a liberty of worshipping God according to the dictates of our own conscience". From this understanding of liberty he proceeds to complain that "thousands of our countrymen", whether in England or America, enter the rebellion on no other ground than that they "are screaming out for liberty, while they have it in their hands, while they actually possess it, and to so great an extent, that the like is not known in any other nation under heaven".<sup>61</sup>

The role of the country in war not only reveals the last principle of Wesley's opposition against the rebellion of a country but also throws light upon the problem of the liberty of a country which, as we

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<sup>58</sup>W XI 126 f., Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>59</sup>WS VII 419, 1778.

<sup>60</sup>L V 388, 1768.

<sup>61</sup>WS VII 403, 1775.

have already seen, serves as the motivation for rebellion.

The destruction of liberty through rebellion is for Wesley particularly manifest in the American rebellion. For the Americans "who usurp an illegal authority over their countrymen" are the same "who rob them of their substance, who outrage their persons, who leave them neither civil nor religious liberty".<sup>62</sup> And precisely this is one of the reasons Wesley gives why England had to answer the American rebellion with war. This war is partly intended "to make them allow to all that civil and religious liberty whereof they have at present deprived them".<sup>63</sup>

The perversion of liberty through rebellion is, in the case of America, what Wesley calls "independency". For this "would be no blessing, but an heavy curse, both to them and their children".<sup>64</sup> This perverted liberty is "licentiousness, a wanton abuse of liberty", it is founded upon a "contempt of all laws, divine and human".<sup>65</sup> Wesley goes even so far as to give some particular instances of this perverted liberty which he then calls "the liberty of war". He argues that "almost all the soldiers in the Christian world, as well as in the Mahometan and Pagan, have claimed, more especially in time of war,

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<sup>62</sup>W XI 113, Obs Lib, 1776.

<sup>63</sup>Ib. 111.

<sup>64</sup>WS VII 419, 1778.

<sup>65</sup>L V 388, 1768.

another kind of liberty; that of borrowing the wives and daughters of the men that fell into their hands; sometimes, if they pleaded scruple of conscience or honour, using a little necessary force. — Perhaps this may be termed the liberty of war".<sup>66</sup> But the soldiers are not the only friends of the liberty of war. "Many others there are who want the liberty of war, of borrowing their neighbours' wives or daughters".<sup>67</sup> There is no doubt that to Wesley the "liberty of war" coincided with the liberty the rebellion pretended to fight for, so that it is precisely the liberty of the rebellion and of the war of rebellion.

The role of the state in war with regard to its citizen points to the attitude of the citizen to the state in times of war. In a sense the following considerations continue the discussion of the chapter on repentance. There we studied the attitude of man in war in general, here we have to focus on the particular attitude of man toward the state engaged in war. This subject is, however, legitimately treated at this place only, because it presupposes Wesley's approach to, and understanding of, the role of the state in war with regard to its origin and its dominion, as we have discussed it. The state in war requires a particular attitude of the citizen to the state in times of war. This particular attitude is for Wesley the citizen's loyalty. We have to turn first to the foundation and then to the manifestation of this loyalty.

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<sup>66</sup>W XI 36, Th Lib, 1772.

<sup>67</sup>Ib. 43.

The loyalty of the citizen to king and country is founded upon his loyalty to God. Wesley earnestly exhorts all with whom he converses "as they fear God, to honour the King".<sup>68</sup> He exhorts all that hear him "to exert themselves as loyal subjects, who, so long as they fear God, cannot but honour the King".<sup>69</sup> These words were written during the Jacobite rising in 1744 and 1745. And ever after that Wesley defended the indissoluble unity of "to fear God and to honour the King", especially during the war with America.<sup>70</sup>

At this time he also once conceived of the twofold loyalty of man as of his loyalty to God and his country. He points out that "while you are a slave to sin, you are an enemy to God, and your country too".<sup>71</sup>

At the height of the American War of Independence he thus explains his view to the Methodists, from whom he asks, and indeed unconditionally demands, the twofold loyalty. "You, who are vulgarly called Methodists. Do 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 a practice, than with whore-mongers, or sabbath-breakers, or thieves, or drunkards, or common swearers."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>J III 123, 1744.

<sup>69</sup>L II 41, 1745.

<sup>70</sup>W XI 88, Calm Am, 1775. - J VI 81, 1775. - WS VII 403, 1775.

<sup>71</sup>W XI 125, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>72</sup>W XI 139, Calm Engld, 1777.

Loyalty to God is in Wesley's theology truly the foundation of loyalty to king and country. Wesley reminds the people: "Ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience' sake", we may say: for God's sake.<sup>73</sup> The last inference is allowed because the conscience is in Wesley's theology nothing but the umpire of God in man, a manifestation of prevenient grace.<sup>74</sup> To be loyal to the state out of loyalty to God is, negatively, not to honour the state as such, but, positively, "to revere the higher powers as of God".<sup>75</sup> The dependence of loyalty to the state upon loyalty to God is the reason why Wesley can never be content to look at war and at the state's role in it politically, as if these were affairs between man and man only. He must proceed and interpret both war and the state's role in it theologically, in their dependence upon man's relationship to God.

The loyalty of the citizen to the state is manifest in his attitude as peace-maker. This is the point Wesley stresses in his letters of 1775, to the Methodist preachers in America as a whole, and to Thomas Rankin and James Dempster in particular. "You were never in your lives in so critical a situation as you are at this time. It is your part to be peace-makers, to be loving and tender to all."<sup>76</sup> Wesley urges his preachers to be peace-makers in this war-like

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<sup>73</sup>J III 123, 1744.

<sup>74</sup>W X 473, Necessity, 1774.

<sup>75</sup>J III 123, 1744.

<sup>76</sup>L VI 142, 1775.

situation both outside the society, in the world, and also within.

The former duty involves the avoidance of party spirit. Party spirit "has always, so far as it prevailed, been the bane of all true religion, more especially when a country was in such a situation as America is now".<sup>77</sup> Therefore Wesley asks his preachers to oppose a party spirit. "That one point I earnestly recommend, both to Brother Rankin and you", he writes to James Dempster, "and all our preachers - by prayer, by exhortation, and by every possible means, to oppose a party spirit",<sup>78</sup> which means "to addict yourselves to no party". Wesley explains what he understands by this, saying: "In spite of all solicitations, of rough or smooth words, say not one word against one or the other side. Keep yourselves pure, do all you can to help and soften all; but beware how you adopt another's jar."<sup>79</sup> It may well be that this attitude leads to persecution. For this case Wesley gives the advice "Certainly, if they persecute you in one city, you should flee to another".<sup>80</sup>

Peace-making within the Society involves the unity of the preachers. "See that you act in full union with each other: this is of the utmost consequence." Wesley thus gives his advice how to keep the full union: "Not only let there be no bitterness or anger, but no

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<sup>77</sup>L VI 150, 1775.

<sup>78</sup>Ib. 149 f.

<sup>79</sup>L VI 142, 1775.

<sup>80</sup>L VI 173, 1775.

shyness or coldness, between you. Mark all those that would set one of you against the other. Some such will never be wanting. But give them no countenance; rather drag them into open day."<sup>81</sup> Wesley strongly believes that the peace-makers, acting out of peace among themselves, will be blessed by peace divine. "Let your eye be single. Be in peace with each other, and the God of peace will be with you."<sup>82</sup>

The advice Wesley gives for the conduct of a citizen of a country at war makes us ask the question whether he followed it himself. This will be the subject of our next chapter.

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<sup>81</sup> L VI 173, 1775.

<sup>82</sup> Ib. 143.

PART III

THE PRACTICAL MANIFESTATION OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR

## CHAPTER VII

### WAR AND THE CONDUCT OF WESLEY

John Wesley's conduct in the time of war is closely related to his theology of war, as we have presented it. Logically, his theology precedes and results in his subsequent personal conduct. His conduct is thus the consequence, even the necessary consequence, of his theology. In Wesley's actual life, however, the conduct and the theology appear together, the conduct being the outward manifestation of the theology. Thus conduct and theology constitute a unity.

The logical consequence of conduct to theology, or of action to thought, is embodied in Wesley's rule that one ought "to think before you speak".<sup>1</sup> He himself honestly sought to follow this rule. He was a theologian who acted according to his convictions and not a pragmatist who would shape his convictions after his actions. If this is true, then Johannes Schempp's study of Wesley's pastoral activity (Wesley as Seelsorger and Seelenführer) becomes rather questionable,

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<sup>1</sup>  
S II 102, 1749.

because it intends this very thing, namely to present Wesley as the great pragmatic pastor of Methodism. His theology is in Schempp's eyes only the secondary reflection of his primary pastoral activity.<sup>2</sup>

The necessity of the logical consequence of conduct to theology appears from Wesley's conception of authority which Stanley B. Frost, for one, has investigated.<sup>3</sup> Wesley himself says that theology is always to be tested by personal conduct, by experience, as well as by Scripture, reason and antiquity, or tradition.<sup>4</sup>

The unity of conduct and theology in the life of Wesley is especially visible in one of the most formative periods of both the man and the theology of Wesley, i.e. during the events around the year of 1738. Wesley's Journals and letters reveal that the development of his conduct always corresponded to the development of his theology, and vice versa. They appear together.

All of the three aspects are also true with regard to the relationship of Wesley's conduct in war to his theology of war. Wesley's conduct in war has to be seen in relationship to two areas of his activity, the church and the state. There is, in the first place, the situation where Wesley acted within the narrower circle of the church, more precisely of the Methodist societies, as they faced war. There is, in the second place, the situation where Wesley acted within the

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<sup>2</sup>Johannes Schempp, Seelsorge und Seelenführung bei John Wesley, Stuttgart 1949, pp. 9 f.

<sup>3</sup>Stanley B. Frost, Die Autoritätslehre in den Werken John Wesleys, München 1938.

<sup>4</sup>Of. e.g. W IX 191, Orig Sin, 1757. - W I iv, Preface, 1771.

wider circle of the state, more precisely of the state of Great Britain and Ireland where he travelled at that time. And in the third place, there is the situation where both circles overlapped, where Wesley acted within the church and within the state, where he acted from within the church toward the state.

In the first place, Wesley's conduct in war is a conduct within the Methodist societies. It is the expression of a concern for both the external welfare and the internal disposition of the Methodists whenever they faced war. Wesley's concern for the external welfare of the Methodists in war appears from two things which can be observed: the fact that he hurried to be with those Methodists who were mostly endangered by war, and the way he shared their worries when he was with them in their danger.

It was particularly during the early disturbances of 1745 that Wesley hurried to be with the Methodists in danger. When the Pretender approached Newcastle, Wesley, at that time preaching at Sheffield, "hearing of more and more commotions in the north", did not carry out his original plan of going to Newcastle by the way of Epworth. He rather "judged it best to go straight on to Newcastle".<sup>5</sup> He did so, as the context shows, in order to be with the Methodists there.

On another occasion Wesley indicated a similar intention although he did not have to carry out this plan. When travelling in Ireland in 1756, the year of the beginning of the Seven Years War, he one day noticed "in the air over Cornwall" the signs of a naval battle between, as he thought, the French and English fleets. He feared the English

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<sup>5</sup>J III 206, 2745.

might have lost the battle and the French might have landed on English soil. If this would prove to be true he would return to England. He wrote his wife: "If I hear of the French landing, or beating our fleet on the 14th of July (the day these sights appeared in the air over Cornwall) I shall endeavour to come into England directly; otherwise to go on my way."<sup>6</sup> This plan is, it may correctly be assumed, also conceived with particular reference to the Methodists in England for whom Wesley felt not only responsibility but also solidarity.

Again during the 1745 situation at Newcastle Wesley shared the worries of the Methodists as they faced war. The Methodists there had real reasons to be concerned, "because our house stood without the walls", Wesley comments in his Journal on September 20, 1745.<sup>7</sup> He shared these troubles of the Methodists especially since the situation grew worse instead of better, as he points out two days later, on the 22nd, saying that "all this week the alarms from the north continued, and the storm seemed nearer every day".<sup>8</sup> Now not only Wesley and his Methodists were worried themselves, but others became concerned for them, too. "Many began to be much concerned for us."<sup>9</sup> And the same "many" people "wondered we would still stay without the walls".<sup>10</sup> It is at this point that Wesley's attention was drawn to the position of

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<sup>6</sup> L III 179 f., 1756.

<sup>7</sup> J III 210, 1745.

<sup>8</sup> J III 212, 1745

<sup>9</sup> J III 210, 1745.

<sup>10</sup> J III 212, 1745.

the cannon which were to defend the town, and their possible effect upon the Methodist building. "Others told us we must remove quickly; for if the cannon began to play from the top of the gates, they would beat all the house about our ears." This argument Wesley found to be reason enough to go and to inspect the cannon himself, "this made me look how the cannon on the gates were planted". We know how Wesley, in inspecting the position of the cannon, discovered the providence of God at work.<sup>11</sup> It is probably under this impression of the adoration of God's providence that he wrote his brother Charles on the very same day: "We stand our ground as yet, glory be to God, to the no small astonishment of our neighbours."<sup>12</sup>

Wesley's concern for the internal disposition of the Methodists is also most clearly seen during the events of 1745. It shows Wesley as the pastor of his society who proclaimed the Scriptural message to everybody who was willing to listen. On September 18, 1745, Wesley "expounded the third chapter of Jonah" to "a great concourse of people" who "were with us in the evening". Wesley typically applied his text directly to the situation of the day. "Who can tell if God will return, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"<sup>13</sup> The next day, the 19th, conditions had not improved. "Fear and darkness were now on every side". Again Wesley

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<sup>11</sup> Ib.

<sup>12</sup> L II 42, 1745.

<sup>13</sup> J III 210, 1745.

preached the Word and "God applied those words to many hearts, 'Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified'". The general fear of the day did not fall upon "those who had seen the light of God's countenance". The result of this evening was, Wesley states, that "we rejoiced together...with solemn joy".<sup>14</sup> On the 22nd, three days afterwards, Wesley preached in the open air. "At eight I preached at Gateshead, in a broad street, near the Popish chapel, on the wisdom of God in governing the world."<sup>15</sup> The topic of his sermon clearly indicates that he was concerned about relating the situation of war to the providence of God. Wesley came back to Gateshead exactly a week later and preached there, on the 29th, again at eight. "I called on a multitude of sinners to seek the Lord while He might be found." And in the afternoon he "expounded part of the Lesson for the day, Jacob wrestling with the angel."<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to see that Wesley at all of these occasions chose texts which had already as such direct implications for the people in the danger of war and needed no elaborate application, although Wesley, at other occasions, saw nothing wrong in such a practice, even if it seems to us rather artificial.

We have another eloquent example of Wesley's pastoral care for his Methodists of the time when the relations between Britain and her American colonies had reached a crisis. In the crisis of 1775 Wesley

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<sup>14</sup>J III 210, 1745 (another entry!)

<sup>15</sup>J III 212, 1745.

<sup>16</sup>J III 213, 1745.

once more referred to the fear of war among the believers. "Finding many were much dejected by the threatening posture of public affairs, I strongly enforced our Lord's words, 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?'" Wesley expected God's action always during his preaching, and he noticed it also this time. "And of a truth God spoke in His word. Many were ashamed of their unbelieving fears, and many enabled to 'be careful for nothing', but simply to 'make' all their 'requests known unto God with thanksgiving'."<sup>17</sup> This word clearly expresses what the preceding quotations only indicated, namely that to Wesley preaching, involving God's activity, necessarily results in prayer, man's response to God's call. In a special sense this prayer is, as we have seen, the prayer of repentance, answering God's call as embodied in the events of war.

In the second place, Wesley's conduct in war is a conduct within the state of Britain. It is related, above all, to the crisis the state in Wesley's times faced in the conflict with America. This conflict was in Wesley's eyes, as we have seen, in a sense an affair within the nation, the American colonies rebelling against their British mother country. As a rebellion this conflict challenged Wesley's principles. "For I am a High Churchman, the son of a High Churchman, bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance."<sup>18</sup> These principles are the background

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<sup>17</sup>J VI 55, 1775.

<sup>18</sup>  
L VI 156, 161, 1775.

for the fact that Wesley does not dare to refrain any longer because he thinks that "silence in the present case would be a sin against God, against my country, and against my own soul".<sup>19</sup>

In this position, it should be noted, John Wesley differs from his brother Charles. Charles put forth his opinion in a letter to Thomas Rankin of March 1, 1775, in which he says: "As to public affairs, I wish you to be like minded with me. I am of neither side, and yet of both; on the side of New England, and of Old. Private Christians are excused, exempted, privileged, to take no part in civil troubles. We love all and pray for all, with a sincere and impartial love. Faults there may be on both sides; but such as neither you nor I can remedy; therefore, let us, and all our children, give ourselves unto prayer, and to stand still and see the salvation of God."<sup>20</sup> It is in the framework of this difference between the brothers that John wrote to Charles the famous word, "if the worst comes, we can agree to disagree".<sup>21</sup>

We have reproduced Charles' position in such a length, because it raises the question, in spite of all the other similarities between the theological views of the two Wesleys, whether or not Franz Hildebrandt's attempt to treat the two Wesleys as a unity is legitimate.<sup>22</sup> This problem ought to be investigated in a critical study of

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<sup>19</sup>Ib. 155, 160.

<sup>20</sup>Charles Wesley, Letter to Thomas Rankin of March 1, 1775, quoted in W XII 309.

<sup>21</sup>L VI 186, 1775.

<sup>22</sup>Franz Hildebrandt, From Luther to Wesley, London 1951, p. 7. - Id., Christianity According to the Wesleys, London 1956, p. 7.

Charles Wesley's theology.

John Wesley's personal loyalty to the British crown in the American War of Independence is mainly expressed in a literary contribution. On one major occasion only Wesley tried to do by word of mouth what he usually preferred to do in writing. This one instance he mentioned to Thomas Rankin when he explained to him, in October, 1775, that he was "persuaded love and tender measures will do far more (in the conflict between England and America) than violence". Wesley continues and declares that he would tell this also to Lord North, the Prime Minister (whom he probably meant in his allusion) when he would meet him. "If I should have an interview with a great man (which seems to be not unlikely), I will by the grace of God tell him so without any circumlocution."<sup>23</sup>

Among Wesley's literary contributions, three of his addresses are of outstanding importance. They are Wesley's ideas within and his comments about his "A Calm Address to our American Colonies", in 1775; his "A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great Britain", in 1776; and his "A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England", in 1777. These clearly reflect the motive of, and the reaction to, his personal conduct in war.

The motive of Wesley's conduct in war as expressed through the addresses is neither "to get money", nor "to get preferment for myself or my brother's children", nor "to please any man living, high or

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<sup>23</sup>

L VI 182, 1775.

low".<sup>24</sup> And there is no doubt, this is true.

Wesley's motive is rather connected with his great antipathy to rebellion. His theology, however traditional at this point, required from him a loyalty in deed as well as in word. His addresses were intended to be signs of such a twofold loyalty, as a contribution in the fight against rebellion.

The rebellion Wesley is fighting against is in his view a "flame",<sup>25</sup> "a flame of malice and rage against the King, and almost all that are in authority under him".<sup>26</sup> It is a "fire"<sup>27</sup> which spreads "flames"<sup>28</sup> over the country; it is an "evil fire".<sup>29</sup>

Wesley leads his fight against the rebellion, in the first place, negatively, by not supporting it. Into this flame or fire, he says, "we must pour water, not oil", because "all parties are already too much sharpened against each other".<sup>30</sup> This is said with regard to the address to the American colonies, which was definitely not intended to be "oil". "Least of all did I write (it) with a view to inflame any; just the contrary."<sup>31</sup> And as this address was not intended to be oil,

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<sup>24</sup>L VI 192, 1775.

<sup>25</sup>L VI 182, 1775. - J VI 82, 1775. - L VI 193, 1775. - W XI 129, Calm Engld, 1777.

<sup>26</sup>J VI 82, 1775.

<sup>27</sup>L VI 193, 1775. - W XI 123, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>28</sup>W XI 121, Seas Gr Brit, 1776. - Ib. 123.

<sup>29</sup>W XI 129, Calm Engld, 1777. - J VI 138, 1777.

<sup>30</sup>L VI 182, 1775.

<sup>31</sup>L VI 192 f., 1775.

so Wesley thinks it will also not prove to be oil. "I think there is not one sharp word therein. I did not design there should."<sup>32</sup> Wesley was certainly honest in his proposition, but mistaken about the effect of his address. It actually proved to be much more oil than water!

In the address to Great Britain Wesley explains that he sees the flames of rebellion still spreading. "The flames are actually spreading, and may soon reach from them (the Americans) to us." It is even "more than certain the flames will spread and endanger the whole building" of the British state and its colonies, if "we", Wesley says, continue in "contending who set the building on fire, and looking with rage and vengeance on the suspected party". He implores his readers, not to bring "combustible matter...to increase the fire".<sup>33</sup>

In the address to England Wesley states that the flame of rebellion, "studiously kindled some time since, which threatened to involve the whole nation", is now under control. "By the blessing of God, it is greatly checked; it does not spread, or blaze as formerly." But it is not extinguished yet, "it is not quite put out".<sup>34</sup> And this must be done. This is the second point in Wesley's motive.

Wesley leads his fight against the rebellion, in the second place, positively, in attacking it. As to the matter of pouring water or oil into the flame, Wesley, referring to his first address, points out that he "had written a little tract upon the subject before I knew the

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<sup>32</sup> L VI 182, 1775.

<sup>33</sup> W XI 123, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>34</sup> W XI 129, Calm Engld, 1777.

American ports were shut up".<sup>35</sup> The purpose of this tract was "to quench the fire" of rebellion.<sup>36</sup> "I labour to put out this flame. Ought not every true patriot to do the same?"<sup>37</sup> On the whole Wesley regards this address as the contribution of his "mite toward putting out the flame which rages all over the land".<sup>38</sup>

In the second address, while still facing the raging flames, Wesley begs: "Let us do our utmost to extinguish them".<sup>39</sup> He wants "to extinguish the flames, lest they (i.e. the English and American brethren) and their substance be consumed together!"<sup>40</sup> This means precisely to pour water instead of oil into the fire, or as Wesley explains it in detail, to bring "the assuaging water of heart-felt grief and pious concern, with the helping hand of wisdom, moderation, and love".<sup>41</sup>

The third address entails Wesley's wish "to quench the remains of that evil fire". He claims to "have a view to contribute all that in me lies to the public welfare and tranquillity".<sup>42</sup> In fighting against

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<sup>35</sup> L VI 182, 1775.

<sup>36</sup> L VI 193, 1775.

<sup>37</sup> J VI 83, 1775.

<sup>38</sup> L VI 193, 1775.

<sup>39</sup> W XI 123, Seas Gr Brit, 1776.

<sup>40</sup> Ib. 121.

<sup>41</sup> Ib. 123.

<sup>42</sup> W XI 129, Calm Engld, 1777.

what he thought were the remains of rebellion Wesley asked God to bless this address as he did the former, "to the quenching of that evil fire which is still among us"<sup>43</sup>

In this fight against rebellion Wesley thinks of course, at this stage of the development, of the Americans. "Now, there is no possible way to put out this flame or hinder its rising higher and higher but to show that the Americans are not used either cruelly or unjustly."<sup>44</sup> He concludes that "with this view, to quench the fire, by laying the blame where it was due, the Calm Address was written".<sup>45</sup> The reaction to Wesley's addresses and the further political development revealed that Wesley was thus not able to help to check the rebellion. This result, however, did in no way change his conviction that he acted in the only way his theology allowed him.

The reaction to Wesley's conduct in war as expressed through his addresses was very critical. On the one hand he was criticized for how he came to his arguments, on the other hand for what he said in them. As to the reproaches against his personal integrity, which accused him of having plagiarized the address to the colonies from Samuel Johnson's "Taxation no Tyranny", and of having been hired by the monarchial party, Wesley answered them with one sarcastic remark: "If hireling writers on either side judge of me by themselves, that I

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<sup>43</sup> J VI 138, 1777.

<sup>44</sup> L VI 193, 1775.

<sup>45</sup> Ib.

cannot help."<sup>46</sup> As to the reproaches against the substance he presented, Wesley comments himself that "many are excessively angry, and would willingly burn me and it (i.e. the address to the American colonies) together". Wesley even admits that this is "provoking". And with a certain satisfaction he notices that "above forty thousand of them have been printed in three weeks, and still the demand for them is as great as ever."<sup>47</sup>

All the reactions to Wesley's conduct and his addresses did not reach him where it was intended. His concepts were too deeply rooted in his theology for this. And in a sense he even foresaw the criticisms. "I was well aware of the treatment this (address to the American colonies) would bring upon myself." Wesley was prepared for any kind of reaction, which, therefore, could not alter his position. "But let it be, so I may in any degree serve my King and country."<sup>48</sup> Wesley feels the urgency of this service, and is careless as to personal consequences.

In the third place, Wesley's conduct in war is a conduct within the church and within the state, within the Methodist societies of Great Britain and from within them toward the nation. It is advisable to present this aspect of Wesley's conduct in war in a chronological order.

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<sup>46</sup>J VI 82 f., 1775.

<sup>47</sup>L VI 182, 1775.

<sup>48</sup>W XI 80, Calm Am, 1775.

During the disturbances of the 1745 rising, the Methodists in general and Wesley in particular were suspected of supporting both the Pretender and Roman Catholicism. These two factors were at that time closely interrelated as the house of Stuart was Roman Catholic, and was supported by France, the Roman Catholic enemy of the country. Both of these factors in their implications upon Wesley and Methodism point back to the conflict which had arisen between the Methodists and the Church of England. As the connection with the Church of England meant the loyalty to the king and the country, this contrast allowed the inference of Methodism's insubordination, and insubordination was identified with Popery. Because of this twofold suspicion toward the Methodists, Wesley drew up, in March, 1744, "the humble Address of the Societies in England and Wales, in derision called Methodists", an address "to the King's Most Excellent Majesty".<sup>49</sup> In it he argues that the Methodists, an inconsiderable group, "a people scattered and peeled, and trodden under foot, from the beginning hitherto", would never have presumed to address the king, were they not constrained to do it by the two reasons mentioned. In this study we have to point to Wesley's account for his and the Methodists' loyalty to the king, facing the fact "that we are still traduced as inclined to Popery, and consequently disaffected to your Majesty".<sup>50</sup> Wesley, in this address to the king, declares, limits, and specifies the loyalty of the Methodists.

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<sup>49</sup>J III 123 f., 1744.

<sup>50</sup>Ib. 123.

Wesley first declares the loyalty of the Methodists, in the presence of God Almighty. "We think it incumbent upon us...to tender for ourselves our most dutiful regards to your sacred Majesty; and to declare, in the presence of Him we serve, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, that we...are steadily attached to your Majesty's royal person and illustrious house."<sup>51</sup>

Wesley then limits the loyalty of the Methodists, through the obedience to the Word of God. "We cannot, indeed, say or do either more or less than we apprehend consistent with the written Word of God; but we are ready to obey your Majesty to the uttermost, in all things which we conceive agreeable thereto."<sup>52</sup>

And Wesley finally specifies the loyalty of the Methodists, as crowned by intercessory prayer. "Silver and gold (most of us must own) we have none; but such as we have we humbly beg your Majesty to accept, together with our hearts and prayers." And Wesley himself continues with a prayerful wish for the king. "May He who hath bought us with His blood, the Prince of all the kings of the earth, fight against all the enemies of your Majesty with the two-edged sword that cometh out of His mouth!"<sup>53</sup> The intercessory prayer for the king, and the public exhortation for it, is a very vital part of Wesley's conduct in times of war. We see him assure both his personal prayers for the king, and the exhortation of the Methodists to do likewise, during

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<sup>51</sup> Ib.

<sup>52</sup> Ib.

<sup>53</sup> Ib. 124.

those days when he shared the alarm at Newcastle, in 1745. In a letter to the Mayor of the town he wrote: "All I can do for His Majesty, whom I honour and love (I think not less than I did my own father) is this: I cry unto God day by day, in public and in private, to put all his enemies to confusion; and I exhort all that hear me to do the same".<sup>54</sup>

The address to the king Wesley never delivered to him. He himself only says he laid it aside "upon farther consideration".<sup>55</sup> We know, however, that this consideration was influenced by a letter from his brother Charles who objected to the address which spoke in the name of the Methodists, out of ecclesiastical reasons. "It would constitute us a sect," he wrote, "at least it would seem to allow that we are a body distinct from the national Church; whereas we are only a sound part of that Church."<sup>56</sup> Charles' letter to John shows how intimately church and state affairs were connected. This can furthermore be seen in an incident which occurred also in 1745, under the impression of the threat of the Pretender. At this time the Wesleys received the advice, in view of the political situation "to return to the Church, to renounce all our lay assistants, to dissolve our societies, to leave off field-preaching, and to accept of honourable

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<sup>54</sup>L II 41, 1745.

<sup>55</sup>Ib.

<sup>56</sup>Charles Wesley, Journal, ed. Thomas Jackson, 2 Vols., London 1849, I, pp. 354 f.

preferment". John Wesley refused this suggestion, his only comment being: "What is man!".<sup>57</sup>

During the Seven Years War, in 1756, Wesley conceived the plan of recruiting soldiers among the Methodists. He indicated this plan first in a letter to Ebenezer Blackwell whom he wrote that "by God's help I will do what a good subject ought".<sup>58</sup> And in a letter to James West he further explained his plan. He first wanted to carry it out in cooperation with George Whitefield, namely the plan of making "an offer of raising a company of volunteers for His Majesty's service". But Whitefield withdrew from the idea, he thought such an offer was premature in the circumstances, and Wesley felt "constrained to make the following (offer) independently of him". And this is the offer: "To raise for His Majesty's service at least two hundred volunteers, to be supported by contributions among themselves; and to be ready in case of an invasion to act for a year (if needed so long) at His Majesty's pleasure, only within...miles of London." The exact number of miles was supposed to be inserted later. Connected with this offer was the wish, if the offer was accepted, of having "arms out of the Tower, giving the usual security for their return, and some of His Majesty's sergeants to instruct them in the military exercise."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>J III 178, 1745.

<sup>58</sup>L III 164, 1756.

<sup>59</sup>L III 165, 1756.

This offer proves beyond question that Wesley was anything but a pacifist. It even seems that he did not allow or respect pacifistic convictions among the Methodists, in spite of his principle of to think and to let think.<sup>60</sup> But to return to Wesley's offer. It is interesting to see that he again did not find the approval of his brother Charles. Charles almost ridiculed the plan of his brother and his brother himself, saying: "I question whether my brother's soldiers, with all his pains and haste to train them up, will not be too tardy to rescue us."<sup>61</sup>

As an appendix to Wesley's conduct during the Seven Years War we may point to his experience with the French prisoners at Redruth, in 1757. He preached at this place in the open air, French prisoners mixing with the usual congregation. Wesley remarks that "it rained all the time I preached, but none went away. A shower of rain will not frighten experienced soldiers". While at Redruth Wesley learned about an occurrence of a few days before. English prisoners who had been in France "passed through Redruth going home, but in a most forlorn condition". Wesley states with compassion that "none showed more compassion to them than the French". And he continues to tell how "they gave them food, clothes, or money", although they had almost nothing themselves.<sup>62</sup> Wesley's interest in this incident is a clear

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<sup>60</sup> E.g. L IV 216, 1763.

<sup>61</sup> Charles Wesley, Journal, II, p. 200.

<sup>62</sup> J IV 237, 1757.

demonstration of his concern for people which we have already touched here and there.

During the American War of Independence Wesley's main trouble is to keep the spirit of rebellion from the Methodists. In 1775 he writes to Lord North that this "is as much as I ever can do, and sometimes more than I can do", namely "to keep this plague from infecting my own friends".<sup>63</sup> He complains that, wherever he goes, "nineteen of twenty to whom I speak in defence of the King seem never to have heard a word spoken for him before".<sup>64</sup> This observation makes him preach loyalty whenever possible, e.g. in Plymouth and Newbury, the two instances we want to point out.

In Plymouth Wesley found that "some of our friends here were deeply prejudiced against the King and all his Ministers". This was the occasion for him to speak "freely and largely" on this subject in the society. He hoped that "God applied it to their hearts; and I think there is not one of them now who does not see things in another light".<sup>65</sup>

In Newbury Wesley was informed that "there were many red-hot patriots here". He took the occasion "to give a strong exhortation to 'fear God, and honour the King'".<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>L VI 176, 1775.

<sup>64</sup>Ib.

<sup>65</sup>J VI 78, 1775.

<sup>66</sup>J VI 81, 1775.

These two examples show again that to Wesley his personal conduct in war and the ideas he expressed about it are but the one attitude toward war which is occasioned by the political situation of the 18th century, which proceeds from his theology, and which is apparent in his personal conduct. With this remark we can conclude the discussion of Wesley's attitude toward war as such and ask, in a final chapter, the question of its significance.

**CONCLUSION**

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ATTITUDE TOWARD WAR  
FOR METHODISM AND THE WORLD**

## CHAPTER VIII

### WAR AND THE OBLIGATION OF METHODISM

In the introduction of this study we raised the question of war and the heritage of Methodism. Selecting the example of American Methodism, the attempt was made to show that the Methodist Church considers her position on war as her historic position, mediated to her through John Wesley. This claim led us to the further investigation of John Wesley's attitude toward war. A consideration of similar statements in British Methodism could have served the same purpose.

In the conclusion of this study we point to the significance of war and the obligation of Methodism. The problem of war places Methodism, as it places the Church in general, under a mediating, bipolar obligation. This obligation of Methodism, and we have now to think of World Methodism, is the fulfilling of its mission by bearing witness in the world while, at the same time, critically evaluating its past. As to the problem of war, Methodism's judgment upon its past concerns above all John Wesley's attitude toward war. In this study the attempt has not been made to give such an evaluation, but

rather to lead up to it by presenting Wesley's attitude and interpreting it in the light of his theology. It may be advisable, therefore, to conclude our investigation with a summary of our findings.

The problem of John Wesley's attitude toward war is discussed in three parts, its historical formation, its theological determination, and its practical manifestation. The first part, the historical formation of Wesley's attitude, is a study of war and the comments of Wesley relative to it. Wesley's discussion of war is occasioned by four periods of war during the eighteenth century: the Jacobite rising of 1744 and 1745 with the alarm about the Pretender; the Seven Years War with its particular threats of French invasions to Britain around the year of 1756; the American War of Independence, its forebodings of 1768 and its decisive years of 1775 to 1778; and the resulting effects of this war on the European continent, the new war with France and Spain. During this time Britain felt particularly threatened in 1779. The sources, occasioned by these four periods, are listed in detail.

The second part, the theological determination of Wesley's attitude, investigates its foundation in the dogmatic concepts of God and man and its explication in the ethical norms for man and society. As to war and the providence of God, Wesley develops the view that God is the God of history. He is the Creator, the Preserver, and the Consummator of creation. In His providence He (anthropocentrically speaking) helps man in war, and He uses war (theocentrically speaking) as a means of punishing the sin of man in order to restore peace after

the repentance of man.

As to war and the sin of man, Wesley asserts that sin is the cause, the content, and the consequence of war. It is first shown that sin is indeed the cause of war. Sin as leading to war is essentially the contempt of God. It is manifest in various vices, especially in pride. Furthermore not only one's enemies or a few of one's countrymen are the guilty sinners, but everyone collectively participates in this guilt. Wesley includes himself. In a telling way he also traces the American War of Independence back to the sin of the slave-trade. It is then demonstrated that war is horror (the emotional argument), that it is insanity (the humanistic argument), and that it is actual and original sin (the theological argument). Finally it is indicated that sin is also the inevitable outcome of war.

As to war and the repentance of man, Wesley interprets war as a call to repentance, and defines repentance as the necessary and proper ethical attitude in war. The form of repentance is fasting and prayer, its purpose the healing and preventing of the evil of war.

As to war and the order of society, Wesley speaks of the origin, the dominion, and the citizen of the state. The origin of the state is from God whose delegate it is. But a right over life and death, a right to go to war, is excluded from its power. The dominion of the state is, first, the act of domination through the king, his sovereignty. For the king, war can be unavoidable for self-defense, to oppress rebellion. This makes it understandable, but does not sanction it. The dominion of the state is, second, the area of the

domain, the country. The country is an organism, created by God, which should not be divided by war. (This is said with special reference to the fratricidal strife between Britain and her American colonies.) The citizen of the state stands under the twofold loyalty to God and to king and country. The loyalty to God is the basis of the loyalty to king and country.

In the third part, the practical manifestation of Wesley's attitude, attention is given to war and the conduct of John Wesley. There are two areas of his activity, church and state. He acts within the Methodist societies, within Britain, and from within the first toward the second. He hurries to be with the Methodists in danger in order to share their worries. He gives a mainly literary contribution to the king's fight against rebellion. And he exhorts the Methodists to be loyal to the king and the country. He even offers the actual help of the Methodists for the defense of the country.

We see that Wesley's theological and practical attitude toward war is to a great extent that of his own time. He writes and acts as an 18th century clergyman of High Church upbringing and warm loyalist sympathies. On the other hand he is also anxious to avoid strife and needless bloodshed. This tension must not be dissolved.

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