

**JOHN WESLEY'S MINDSET AT THE COMMENCEMENT
OF HIS GEORGIA SOJOURN:
SUFFERING AND THE INTRODUCTION OF PRIMITIVE
CHRISTIANITY TO THE INDIANS**

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Two revealing sets of correspondence with Richard Morgan, Jr., and John Burton are highly significant for understanding John Wesley's mindset at the beginning of the Georgia mission (October, 1735, to December, 1737).¹ These letters exchanged in the autumn of 1735 are especially valuable since they are the only letters written within a month of the commencement of the journey where both sides of the correspondence have survived. In Wesley's sermons prior to 1732 the theme of persecution and suffering was not prominent, however, this subject was a central topic of Wesley's thinking as he prepared to depart for Georgia.² Wesley's idealization of the doctrine, discipline, and practice of the primitive church had been a central aspect of his theology and devotional practice since his introduction to John Clayton and the Manchester Nonjurors in 1732. His conception of Georgia as a laboratory to implement his vision of primitive Christianity was a central aspect of his mindset at the time he embarked for Georgia. Wesley was driven by his conviction that primitive Christianity could be revived amongst the Georgian Indians.

The correspondence with Morgan provides insight into Wesley's influence on one of his students. It is clear from Morgan's letter seeking advice and moral support that his tutor's sway over him was significant at the time of Wesley's departure from Oxford.³ Morgan's letter focused on the opposition of the rector of Lincoln College, the Reverend Euseby Isham, to the Oxford Methodist practice of rigorous fasting. Isham, clearly taking advantage of Wesley's absence, had targeted Morgan in an attempt to per-

¹ On Wesley and Georgia see Geordan Hammond, "Restoring Primitive Christianity: John Wesley and Georgia, 1735-1737" (Ph.D. diss., U. Manchester, 2008).

² Wesley's *A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week* (1733) quote the words of the "holy Martyr" St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107) whom in response to being persecuted said "It is now that I begin to be a Disciple of Christ," 5th ed. (Bristol: J. Palmer, 1755), 37. See also Wesley's letter to his father stating that a follower of Christ "cannot be saved without being despised" in *Letters I*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 25 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (hereinafter cited as *BE*) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), Dec. 10-19, 1734, 407.

³ In addition to the evidence provided by this letter, Wesley's influence on Morgan is further illustrated by Morgan's November 27, 1735, letter stating his desire to join his tutor in Georgia (Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library of Manchester, Letters to John Wesley Box, folder M).

suade him to protect his health and come into conformity with the behavior he expected from Lincoln students. Perhaps Isham was concerned about the damaged reputation that would befall the College if Morgan suffered the same fate (i.e. death) as his younger brother William, which was blamed by some on his excessive fasting. William's association with the Oxford Methodists caused many in Oxford and beyond to suspect them of religious fanaticism.⁴ Isham pressured Morgan by urging him to dine in the college hall on Fridays rather than excuse himself to fast which he called "a relative duty . . . not confined to any particular time." Morgan was conflicted and thought he might obey the rector's request while still practicing abstinence. At the same time, he thought about the Oxford Methodist stance "that the children of God must suffer persecution from the world." He recognized that this view was fundamentally opposed to Isham's belief that Christians should seek to be held "in esteem" by others.⁵ Morgan reported that Isham "said as much as if you [Wesley] frightened others from religion by your example, and that you might have done a great deal of good if you had been less strict." He declared he was under spiritual attack and needed Wesley's counsel on how he could remain in the way of salvation.⁶

In his reply, Wesley condemned Morgan's thoughts of leaving off Friday fasting as blatantly sinful.⁷ He concisely defined the purpose and necessity of fasting in contradistinction to Isham as "not a means of chastity only, but of deadness to pleasure, and heavenly-mindedness, and consequently necessary (in such a measure as agrees with health) to all persons in all times of life." To underscore his complete opposition to Isham's notion of genteel Christianity, Wesley, in his characteristically direct way stated that "Till a man gives offence he will do no good, and the more offence he gives by adhering to the gospel of Christ the more good he will do; and the more good he does the more offense he will give." This point of view was shared by the leader of German pietism, August Hermann Francke, whose *Nicodemus; or, a Treatise against the Fear of Man* (1701) Wesley recommended to counteract the idea that Christians should be esteemed by the world. In this letter, Wesley's integration of the social and ethical aspects of Christian living was set out with unmistakable clarity.⁸

The immediacy of Wesley's correspondence with his friend John Burton, fellow of Corpus Christi, Oxford and member of the Georgia Trustees, makes them of especial importance in evaluating his mindset as he prepared for a

⁴ See John Wesley's defense of their conduct in his letter to Richard Morgan, Sr., in Wesley, *Journal and Diaries I 1735-1738*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, vol. 18 of *BE* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), Oct. [19], 1732, 123-135.

⁵ See Wesley's condemnation of the idea that "to be useful a man must be esteemed" in Wesley to Samuel Wesley, Sr., Dec. 10-19, 1734, *Letters*, 408.

⁶ Sept. 25, 1735, *Letters*, 433-434.

⁷ For Wesley's later views on fasting, see "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Seventh" (1748), *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 1 of *BE* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 592-611.

⁸ [30 Sept. 1735], *Letters*, 437-438. Cf. Wesley to Richard Morgan, Jr., Feb. 16, 1737, *Letters*, 491-492, where Wesley again stresses the theme of persecution and suffering.

new stage in his life. Their reflection of his thoughts accurately reveals his concerns in close proximity to the onset of the Georgia mission, opinions which he maintained while in the colony. Their virtue lies in the direct window they offer into Wesley's state of mind at the time they were written. The letters should be evaluated in the context of the shift in Wesley's thought and practice, which occurred during his last few years at Oxford, toward a more intense austere and rigorously disciplined Christian life. Like his diaries, these letters are a largely unedited primary source.

Correspondence between Burton and Wesley reveals a good deal about their varying expectations of Wesley's missionary venture. Burton, who recruited Wesley for the Georgia mission on behalf of the Trustees,⁹ assumed that Wesley's chief motive was to do "good to the souls of others, and in consequence of that to your own." His pragmatic advice focused, in the first place, on the opportunities to care for the hundreds of souls on the two ships headed for Georgia. He believed that their confinement and exposure to "the wonders of [the] Lord in the deep" would prepare the passengers for religious teaching that should be delivered both in public and private. The heart of his counsel focused on the idea of "Christian prudence." Burton believed, "The generality of the people are babes in progress of their Christian life, to be fed with milk instead of strong meat." Therefore, the wise minister should "distinguish between what is essential and merely circumstantial to Christianity" as "men are apt to deceive themselves in such cases" and enforce "the traditions and ordinances of men . . . with more zeal than the weighty matters of God's law." Taking the people's varying spiritual journeys into account, Burton recommended that "what arises *pro re nata* ['to meet some special circumstances'] will have a greater influence than laboured discourse." According to Burton, pragmatic teaching and pastoral care coupled with a focus on the essentials of Christianity were all the more necessary since Wesley would inherit a flock with an abundance of different religious persuasions. Burton had his own idea of the kind of clergyman he wanted Wesley to be, he was to become like the apostle Paul who became all things to all people.¹⁰

Wesley's letter of October 10, 1735, to Burton has often rightly been cited as evidence of his mindset going into the Georgia mission.¹¹ Biographers have repeatedly focused on his comment that his "chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul" and have seen this as foreshadowing (or embodying) his crisis of faith leading to his "evangelical conversion."¹² Although this statement is clearly an inver-

⁹ John Wesley MS, in *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, vol. 8 (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1916), 151.

¹⁰ Sept. 28, 1735, *Letters*, 434-437.

¹¹ *Letters*, 439-442.

¹² See, for example, Leslie F. Church, *Oglethorpe: A Study in Philanthropy in England and Georgia* (London: Epworth Press, 1932), 195. Cf. Wesley's comment on the need to "persuade" his parishioners to save their souls, Wesley to George Whitefield and the Oxford Methodists, Sept. 10, 1736, *Letters*, 472.

sion of Burton's advice and sounds narcissistic, it has perhaps been the case that interpreting it in the light of later evangelical sensibilities has led to a level of distortion. While smacking of "works righteousness" to evangelical ears, saving one's soul in contemporary Anglican ethos was connected with the biblical injunction to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."¹³ The language of saving one's soul and its association with Philippians 2:12 was central to the holy living school exemplified by Wesley's mentor, William Law, who interpreted the verse as referring to "The salvation of our souls"—a "salvation [that] depends upon the *sincerity* and *perfection* of our endeavours to obtain it."¹⁴ Likewise, this same connection was made by other High Churchmen such as William Tilly whose two sermons on "free will" were based on Philippians 2:12-13. At Oxford, Wesley abridged these sermons and recorded preaching from the first text on three occasions and the second text twice.¹⁵ This shows that long before he went to Georgia, Wesley (through Tilly) closely linked to "work out your salvation" with the following verse ("for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure") as he later did in his 1785 sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation."¹⁶ Tilly concluded his sermons by relating working out one's salvation with "the Salvation of our Immortal Souls."¹⁷ Just days before he set sail for Georgia, Wesley enthusiastically recommended Tilly to Richard Morgan, Jr.: "Dr. Tilly's sermons on free will are the best I ever saw. His text is, 'Work out your [own] salvation with fear and trembling.' May you all assist one another so to do, and be not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."¹⁸

Understanding the twelfth and thirteenth verses of Philippians chapter two together is crucial because it explicitly makes working out one's salvation dependent on God's work within the believer. According to Tilly, "*Baptismal and preventing Grace*" restores enough free will to allow a per-

¹³ Philippians 2:12 (AV).

¹⁴ *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (London: William Innys, 1729), 30, 32; cf. Wesley's *Prayer*, 70 and Susanna Wesley's statement that her life's goal was to "save the souls of [her]... children," Letter to John Wesley (Feb. 21, 1731-1732), *Letters*, 327. Wesley first recorded reading Law's *Serious Call* in December, 1730. See Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists" (Ph.D. diss., Duke U., 1972), app. IV.

¹⁵ Wesley's manuscript abridgements can be found in volume 19 of the Colman Collection at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre. On Tilly's influence on Wesley see Charles A. Rogers, "John Wesley and William Tilly," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 35 (1966): 137-141 and Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 100-103, 320-321.

¹⁶ *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of *BE* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 199-209; cf. Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: William Bowyer, 1755), 528-529. In his 1730 sermon "The Promise of Understanding," Wesley's connection of Philippians 2:13 to "the life of grace" and the Spirit of God that works in us further supports the near certainty that he would have understood working out one's salvation as a duty enabled by God's grace, *Sermons IV*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 4 of *BE* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 284.

¹⁷ *Sixteen Sermons, All (except one) Preach'd before the University of Oxford, At St. Mary's, Upon Several Occasions* (London: Bernard Lintott, 1712), 282.

¹⁸ *Letters*, 438.

son to cooperate with “the *Grace of God* [which] *works with us*, and enables us *to will and to do of his good Pleasure . . .*”¹⁹ In his 1733 sermon “The Circumcision of the Heart,” Wesley, in reference to Philippians 2:13 stressed that nothing good can be thought or done “without the supernatural assistance of his [God’s] Spirit.”²⁰ Wesley’s reference to saving his soul may reflect the influence of both William Law and William Tilly, but his interpretation of Philippians 2:12-13 has more in common with Tilly than Law.

The context of Wesley’s letter clearly shows that saving his soul was more about striving for Christian perfection than an admission of spiritual depression. However, for Wesley, the path to perfection is enabled by God’s grace. In his early sermons, holiness is the inward renewal of human nature in God’s image rather than the result of Christian activities.²¹ Here the 1734 resolution of Wesley’s Oxford Methodist and missionary colleague, Benjamin Ingham, is informative: “God’s grace assisting me, to make the salvation of my soul my chief and only concern, but never to depend upon my own strength because I can do nothing without God’s Assistance.”²² It is important to note that the language of saving one’s soul, for Wesley, was not a pre-Aldersgate aberration, as late as 1789, he reflected that the goal of the early Methodist societies was “to save our own souls.”²³

An aspect of Wesley’s thinking that becomes abundantly clear through this letter is that his missionary aspirations were directed toward the Indians and not the colonists. Delivering the apostolic faith to the Indians was to be the means of working out his salvation. Preaching to the Indians would be the method of understanding the true primitive gospel. His pious desires were artfully spelled out in the following words:

I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathens. They have no comments to construe away the text, no vain philosophy to corrupt it, no luxurious, sensual, covetous, ambitious expounders to soften its unpleasing truths, to reconcile earthly-mindedness and faith, the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world. They have no party, no interest to serve, and are therefore fit to receive the gospel in its simplicity. They are as little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God. And consequently they shall know of every doctrine I preach, whether it be of God. From these, therefore, I hope to learn the purity of that faith which was once delivered to the saints, the genuine sense and full extent of those laws which none can understand that mind earthly things.²⁴

¹⁹ Tilly, 250, 229.

²⁰ *Sermons*, 1:404.

²¹ “The One Thing Needful” (written May, 1734), *Sermons*, 4:352-359; cf. Richard P. Heitzenrater, “The *Imitatio Christi* and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley’s Ministry with the Poor,” in M. Douglas Meeks (ed.), *Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1995), 56.

²² *Diary of an Oxford Methodist Benjamin Ingham, 1733-1734*, Richard P. Heitzenrater, ed. (Durham: Duke UP, 1985), Jan. 31, 1734, 109.

²³ “Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church,” in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9 of *BE* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 539; cf. Wesley’s use of Philippians 2:12 in his definition of a “United Society” in *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies* (1743), *BE*, 9:69.

²⁴ Letters, 439.

Wesley's idealized vision obviously says more about himself than the Georgian Indians. Coming immediately after his statement about saving his soul, this serves as a condemnation of nominal Christianity in Oxford and a justification for his quest to establish true apostolic Christianity in the Georgia wilderness. In Georgia, the corrupting effects of worldliness will be abolished in favor of the simple gospel of pure apostolic faith. By implication, primitive non-Christian people ignorant of European intellectual traditions are in the best position to revive true Christianity. Wesley goes on to point out that primitive faith will pave the way to right practice.

Although Wesley's comments about the Indians are patronizing in the extreme, it does not follow that his hope was to bombard them with a combination of Christianity and trade, an approach that was not encouraged by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG)²⁵ and was often rejected by eighteenth-century SPG missionaries who repeatedly saw immoral colonists and Indian traders as their enemies.²⁶ His ideal was not to make Indians into English men and women or spread English culture, nor did he take the widely held position espoused in several annual sermons preached before the Trustees that Indians must be civilized before being converted to Christianity.²⁷ In fact, he took the controversial position of praising what he saw as the simple lifestyle of the Indians which he believed was more akin

²⁵ The Society's "Instructions" to its missionaries shows that such an approach was foreign to their directions that missionaries should keep a single-minded focus on providing care for their parishioners. See *A Collection of Papers Printed by Order of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1715), 18-26. In Georgia, Wesley read David Humphreys' *An Historical Account* (1730) of the SPG which contains a summary of the "Instructions" for SPG missionaries, Wesley, *Diary*, July 12, 1737, 527. Although the SPG paid Wesley's salary, he was not a typical SPG missionary under the authority of the Bishop of London and the Society. He was licensed by the Georgia Trustees and served as a volunteer missionary. See "Wesley's Acceptance of the Georgia Mission," app. 5, in Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity', 324-326.

²⁶ See, for example, the comments of Commissary Gideon Johnson of South Carolina, Frank J. Klingberg, "The Indian Frontier in South Carolina as Seen by the S.P.G. Missionary," *Journal of Southern History* 5 (1939): 483-484. Andrew Porter has argued against the prevalent stereotype that nineteenth-century Protestant missions were consistently characterized by cultural imperialism, *Religion Versus Empire? British Protestant Missions and Overseas Expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004), 316-330. Perhaps the anti-imperialist attitude of some nineteenth-century missionaries was inherited from the refusal of some eighteenth-century SPG missionaries such as Wesley to closely associate English culture with Christianity.

²⁷ Samuel Smith, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia in America, And before the Associates of the late Rev. Dr. Bray, for Converting the Negroes in the British Plantations, and for other good Purposes. At their First Yearly-Meeting, in the Parish Church of St. Augustin on Tuesday February 23, 1730/31* (London: J. March, 1733), 14; John Burton, *The Duty and Reward of Propagating Principles of Religion and Virtue exemplified in the History of Abraham. A Sermon Preach'd before the Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia in America. And before the Associates of the late Rev. Dr. Thomas Bray for Converting the Negroes in the British Plantations, and for other good Purposes. At their Anniversary-Meeting in the Parish Church of St. Mary-Le-Bow. On Thursday March 15, 1732* (London: J. March, 1733), 31; cf. the opinion of Wesley's predecessor, Samuel Quincy, Quincy to Henry Newman (Jan. 15, 1735), *Henry Newman's Salzburger Letterbooks*, George Fenwick Jones, ed. (Athens: U. Georgia P., 1966), 530-533, and Henry Newman's advice to Wesley in his letter of June 8, 1736 in W. O. B. Allen and Edmund McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1698-1898* (London: SPCK, 1898), 391.

to life in the apostolic era than that of contemporary England.²⁸ Wesley was convinced that, for himself, certain means to holy living could be more readily accomplished whilst living in a primitive environment with the Indians. First of all, unwieldy passions and lusts of the flesh could be conquered through ascetic living.²⁹ A simple diet based “on water and the fruits of the earth” coupled with living amongst foreign women would be a means to mortify “the lust of the flesh” and imitate the apostolic life of celibate asceticism.³⁰ Living amongst Indian women who “are almost of a different species” would do little to gratify “the lust of the eye,” and would put him in close touch with God’s creation.³¹ The “pride of life” understood in terms of materialism had not infected “the wilds of America.” While Burton urged him not to be put off “by light scoffs of [the] idle and profane,”³² Wesley was convinced that such persecution and contempt that he was sure to labor under would be a welcome support to holy living.³³ A further benefit of the mission would be realized in the opportunity to use his speech solely for God’s glory.

The apostolic virtue of suffering and persecution, though not a central aspect of Wesley’s theology prior to his contact with William Law and the Manchester Nonjurors in 1732, became a chief feature of his thought thereafter.³⁴ As an aspect of his justification for declining his father’s offer of the Epworth rectory and remaining at Oxford, Wesley appealed to the persecution he suffered under at the university claiming it was an indispensable requirement for “doing good in the world” and the best instrument to promote personal holiness.³⁵ This thesis found in his letter to Burton remained a key

²⁸ It was a common assumption of Protestant missionaries that the early Christians provided the model for conversion experience. However, the first Christians were primarily urban dwellers and it took a long time before Europeans realized that the Americas were fundamentally different than the ancient Mediterranean and no simple repetition of the primitive Christian experience was possible amongst nomadic peoples. See James Muldoon, “Introduction: Seeking Spiritual Gold in the Americas,” *The Spiritual Conversion of the Americas*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville: UP Florida, 2004), 1-15.

²⁹ See the discussion of Wesley’s practice of vegetarianism, fasting, imitating apostolic poverty, and ascetical sleeping habits in Georgia in Hammond, “Restoring Primitive Christianity,” 72-74, 187-194.

³⁰ Celibacy was generally frowned upon by eighteenth-century Anglicans. See Jeremy Gregory, “Gender and the Clerical Profession in England, 1660-1850,” in *Gender and Christian Religion*, Studies in Church History 34 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), 247-248. In 1733, Wesley persuaded his sister Patty of the benefit of celibacy. See V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 237. Some contemporaries suspected “Methodists” despised marriage. See John Wesley to Lady Cox (Mar. 7, 1738), *Letters*, 532, n. 2. Thomas Coke later praised Wesley’s asceticism in Georgia. See *The Substance of a Sermon Preached ... On the Death of the Rev. John Wesley*, 2nd ed. (London: G. Paramore, 1791), 9-11, 17.

³¹ Cf. John Wesley to Charles Wesley (Mar. 22, 1736), *Letters*, 454 and Benjamin Ingham’s Journal in Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1873), 66.

³² Burton to Wesley (Sept. 18, 1735), *Letters*, 435 n.

³³ Cf. John Wesley to Samuel Wesley, Sr. (Dec. 10, 1734), *Letters*, 407.

³⁴ See Law, *A Practical Treatise upon Christian Perfection* (London: William and John Innys, 1726), 95, whose thought was a major influence during this period.

³⁵ John Wesley to Samuel Wesley, Sr. (Dec. 10-19, 1734), *Letters*, 408.

topic of his thought during the Georgia mission.³⁶

Glyndwr Williams has noted that “The concept of the innocent primitive has been present in western culture almost from its literate beginnings, but the ages of discoveries had brought him from a remote past to the present, distant in space but no longer in time, available for scrutiny, dissection, perhaps emulation.” European accounts of the Native Americans produced no consensus view. For every favorable account there was a scathing critique. Writers exploited the Indians both to praise and critique European societies. Wesley’s letter to Burton clearly shows that he agreed with the sympathetic image of the Indians whose lifestyle he believed was worthy of emulation. Those with a similar outlook often complimented the Indians’ physical features, simplicity, liberty, equality, lack of division of wealth, and absence of private property prompting them to share their goods in common. For people who doubted the benefits of contemporary economic, political, and technological developments, the Indians could represent a primitive “golden age of simplicity and virtue.”³⁷

One of the most interesting aspects of Wesley’s letter is his association of the Indian lifestyle with that of the early church at Jerusalem both of whom he believed held all goods in common. While this was not strictly true of the Indians, they were certainly much closer to this ideal than the majority of Wesley’s countrymen. For Wesley, sharing all things in common was the most reliable method to guard against the love of money and concentrate on the spiritual life. Because of its relation to Wesley’s vision of introducing primitive Christianity to the Indians, it will be instructive to investigate further his thoughts on the primitive community of goods.

In his insightful article on “John Wesley and the Community of Goods,” John Walsh has traced the development of this idea in Wesley’s thought and its application in early Methodist practice.³⁸ Wesley’s interest in the Church Fathers and primitive practice made the issue of communitarianism a natural

³⁶ See Wesley to Johann Martin Bolzium and Israel Christian Gronau [Mar. 13, 1736], *Letters*, 449; John Wesley to Charles Wesley (Mar. 22, 1736), *Letters*, 452; Wesley to Dr. Timothy Cutler [July 23, 1737], *Letters*, 515; Wesley, Manuscript Journal, Oct. 25, 1736, 435-436; Wesley to Morgan [Feb. 16, 1737], *Letters*, 491; Charles Wesley to John Wesley [Oct. 1-6 and 15-25, 1736], (Jan. 2, 1738), *Letters*, 477, 484, 524-525; Ingham to Wesley (June 17, 1735), Methodist Archives and Research Centre, Letters to John Wesley Box, folder I; Delamotte to Wesley (Feb. 23, 1738), *Letters*, 530. For the seventeenth-century theological background on suffering, see J. Sears McGee, *The Godly Man in Stuart England: Anglicans, Puritans, and the Two Tables, 1620-1670* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 15-67.

³⁷ Glyndwr Williams, “Savages Noble and Ignoble: Concepts of the North American Indian,” *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. P. J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams (London: Dent, 1982), 187, 196. On the noble savage from the perspective of SPG missionaries, see Frank J. Klingberg, *Anglican Humanitarianism in Colonial New York* (Philadelphia: Church Historical Society, 1940), 49-86.

³⁸ Based on reports about Benjamin Ingham preaching in favor of community of goods in 1740, he was probably also interested in this primitive practice during the Georgia mission. Charles Wesley likely also shared this concern if his 1744 poem entitled “Primitive Christianity” is reflective of his earlier views. See Walsh, in Keith Robbins, ed., *Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America c.1750-c.1950. Essays in Honour of W. R. Ward*, Studies in Church History Subsidia 7 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 25, 37.

topic of interest for him. Acts 2:44-47 describes the apostolic practice:

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Wesley's subsequent exegesis of these verses was broadly in agreement with his thinking prior to the Georgia mission. He argued that the apostolic community of goods continued "long after" the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) and "was a natural Fruit of that Love wherewith each Member of the Community loved every other as his own Soul." According to Wesley, although there is no scriptural "Command" requiring this, it certainly would have continued up to the present if the church had maintained the spirit of sacrificial love embodied by the early church. Therefore, he concluded, "To affirm therefore, That *Christ* did not *design it should continue*, is neither more nor less than to affirm, That *Christ* did not *design this Love should continue*, I see no proof of this."³⁹

For Wesley, the biblical testimony to the community of goods lent heavy authority to the primitive origins of the practice. However, he would also have been influenced by Anthony Horneck, Claude Fleury, and William Law's description of the practice of sharing goods in common in the early church and his reading of the Church Fathers, Justin Martyr and Tertullian, both of whom extolled this virtue.⁴⁰ From what we know of Wesley's later thoughts on these verses, it does not seem that he explicitly advocated a contemporary renewal of the early church practice involving the surrender of private property and the selling of all worldly goods for redistribution to the Christian community and the poor. What he probably had in mind was the Oxford Methodist (and later "select society") practice of contributing to a common fund for charitable uses (a staple of the Anglican religious society movement).⁴¹ Stewardship of money and a disciplined habit of giving to the poor were actions intimately bound up with Wesley's notion of the community of goods. Although few High Churchmen advocated Christian communitarianism, there was a general consensus amongst the spectrum of churchmen that the primitive Christians provided models for contemporary

³⁹ See Wesley's exegesis of Acts 2:45 in his *Explanatory Notes*, 295; cf. his comments on Acts 4:32-37, pp. 300-301.

⁴⁰ Horneck, "Letter to a Person of Quality Concerning the Lives of the Primitive Christians" in *The Happy Ascetic* (London: T. N. for Henry Mortlock, 1681), 487; Fleury, *The Manners of the Ancient Christians*, ed. John Wesley, 5th ed. (London: G. Paramore, 1791), 7-8; Law, *Christian Perfection*, 106; William Reeves, *The Apologies of Justin Martyr, Tertullian . . .* (London: W. B. for A. and J. Churchill, 1709), 37, 335. All of these authors were read by Wesley at Oxford (see Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists," app. IV).⁷

⁴¹ Walsh, 38-41. Anthony Horneck, *Several Sermons upon the Fifth of St. Matthew: Being Part of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. To Which is added, The Life of the Author, by Richard, Lord Bishop of Bath and Wells*, 2 vols., 3rd ed. (London: J. R. for B. Aylmer, 1706), viii-x, rule 11, cf. 12; Josiah Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London*, 6th ed. (London: M. Downing, 1744), 108-114, rule 5, cf. 7.

belief and practice. High Churchmen (including Wesley) seem to have been attracted to the ideal of primitive Christianity, in part, as a form of social protest against the perceived moral degradation and extravagancy of Walpole's England.⁴²

Wesley's Nonjuror mentors were determined to utilize the tools of scholarship to recover the true ecclesiastical and devotional practice of the early church.⁴³ However, as Walsh has shown, what set Wesley apart from his contemporaries was his additional emphasis on the social ethics of the first Christians. In this way, Wesley moved beyond the typical bounds of High Church interest in the doctrine, ecclesiology, and spirituality of the primitive church to include social ethics.⁴⁴ For Wesley, practicing the community of goods was an obvious means by which the social ethos of primitive Christianity could be renewed. Nonetheless, although he does not appear to have advocated a radical form of redistribution of goods, his viewpoint was bound to be received with some suspicion due to the opposition to Christians holding goods in common expressed in the Thirty-Eighth Article of the Church of England. Based on Wesley's later reflections that the Oxford Holy Club shared their resources, it seems that his expectation that this practice would be continued in the context of his work with the Indians was at least partly founded upon his satisfaction with this practice amongst his Oxford friends.⁴⁵

Wesley's exchange of letters with Richard Morgan, Jr., and John Burton reveal his preoccupation with the necessity and benefit of suffering in the Christian life. His expectation that he would undergo suffering in Georgia prepared him for the hardships that accompany living in a primitive society, while his positive view of persecution prevented him from being a model of an accommodating parish priest. Wesley's correspondence with Burton illustrates that prior to embarking for Georgia, he was intellectually and spiritually driven by his determination to create the primitive church anew amongst the Indians in the pristine Georgia wilderness. Despite his best intentions Wesley was not able to put this goal into practice, nonetheless, he did not question the propriety of restoring the doctrine and practice of the primitive church, he merely shifted his vision to his parishioners in Savannah. His lack of opportunity to serve as a missionary to the Indians did not squelch his life-long endeavor to raise up a people who would embody the holiness of the primitive Christians.

⁴² Walsh, 30.

⁴³ See Robert D. Cornwall, "The Search for the Primitive Church: The Use of Early Church Fathers in the High Church Anglican Tradition, 1680-1745," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 59 (1990): 303-329 and Hammond, "Restoring Primitive Christianity," 30-37.

⁴⁴ Walsh, 31, 37.

⁴⁵ "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel" (preached 1777), *Sermons*, 3:582; cf. John Wesley to Samuel Wesley, Sr. (Dec. 10, 1734), *Letters*, 405.