

JOHN WESLEY IN GEORGIA: SUCCESS OR FAILURE?*

The vexed question of the 'success' or 'failure' of John Wesley's Georgia mission (October 1735 to December 1737) has drawn the attention of nearly all of his biographers. This issue has divided them into five interpretative camps, each represented by several writers. Some have not hesitated to call the Georgia mission a failure;¹ others have declined to declare it either a failure or success;² while a third option has been to conclude that it was not a failure although these interpreters have generally also declined to call it an unmitigated success;³ an alternative approach has been to see Georgia as a 'preface to victory' and emphasize what Wesley learned by the experience that prepared him for his 'conversion' at Aldersgate and the revival;⁴ a nuanced version of the first

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- ¹ Richard Watson, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (New York, 1831), 35; Julia Wedgwood, *John Wesley and the Evangelical Reaction of the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1870), 104, 113, 114; Matthew Lelièvre, *John Wesley: His Life and Work* (London, n.d. [1871]), 25; William Cannon, 'John Wesley's Years in Georgia', *Methodist History* 1 (1963), 2-4; V. H. H. Green, *John Wesley* (London, 1964), 44; A. Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart: John Wesley, Evangelist* (London, 1967), 53; the Calvinist C. H. Spurgeon, *The Two Wesleys: A Lecture Delivered in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Lecture Hall, on December 6th 1861* (London, 1894); and the historians of colonial Georgia, E. Merton Coulter ('When John Wesley Preached in Georgia', *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 9 (1925), 344), David T. Morgan ('John Wesley's Sojourn in Georgia Revisited', *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 64 (1980), 253-62), and in a more guarded sense Harold E. Davis (*The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1976), 193, 214-16).
- ² John Hampson, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (Sunderland, 1791), 186; Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, vol. 1 (London, 1870), 170; Umphrey Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion* (Nashville, 1936), 77; Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury* (Durham, NC, 1976), 21-23; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd edn. (London, 2002), 135 and the early historians of colonial Georgia William Bacon Stevens (*A History of Georgia* (New York, 1847)) and Charles C. Jones (*The History of Georgia* (Boston, 1883)).
- ³ John Telford, *The Life of John Wesley*, rev. edn. (London, 1924 [1886]), 87; John Overton, *John Wesley* (London, 1891), 51; John S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies* (London, 1921), 145-46; Richard Green, *The Conversion of John Wesley* (London, 1937), 24; Warren Thomas Smith, 'The Wesleys in Georgia: An Evaluation', *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 7 (1979), 1-11; Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, 1995), 69 and 'Wesley in America', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 54 (2003), 89.
- ⁴ John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (London, 1796), 2:31; Thomas Coke and Francis Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London, 1792), 94; Haygood S. Bowden, *History of Savannah Methodism from John Wesley to Silas Johnson* (Macon, GA, 1929), 25; Leslie F. Church, *Oglethorpe: A Study in Philanthropy in England and Georgia* (London, 1932), 191, 211, 218; Lee, 73; Frederick E. Maser, 'Preface to Victory: An Analysis of John Wesley's Mission to Georgia', *Religion in Life* 25 (1956), 280-93; Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London, 2000), 51-52 and *From Wesley to Asbury*, 13.

and fourth interpretations has been to label the venture a failure that involved positive developments in Wesley's life.⁵ Determining whether Wesley's mission was a success or failure has been influenced by the religious commitments of his biographers. The last two interpretations in particular (and in some cases the first interpretation) require an anachronistic approach that evaluates Wesley in the light of later developments. The question of Wesley's success or failure should be evaluated by examining his ministry in its historical context and in comparison to the experience of other missionary clergy in Georgia.

Wesley embarked as an Anglican missionary to Georgia determined to restore the doctrine, discipline, and practice of the primitive church in the pristine Georgia wilderness. He approached the Georgia mission as a laboratory to implement his vision of primitive Christianity. As an Anglican High Churchman influenced by the Nonjurors, Wesley's clerical practice in the colony was marked by his endeavour to restore primitive Christianity through renewing the precise liturgical practice of the early Christians.⁶ However, as Henry Rack has noted, Wesley's early biographers found it difficult 'to understand the significance and possible value of Wesley's early high church phase'.⁷ Negative assessments of Wesley's High Churchmanship have led some Methodist writers to question if Wesley was a 'true Christian' during the Georgia period. Biographers who have taken this position have generally focused on his comment that he went to Georgia to save his soul,⁸ his supposed spiritual depression in Georgia, and his failure to convert the Indians.⁹

⁵ Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (Oxford, 1964), 11-14; Luke L. Keefer, Jr. 'John Wesley: Disciple of Early Christianity', Ph.D. diss. (Temple University, 1982), 81-86.

⁶ See Geordan Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity: John Wesley and Georgia, 1735-1737', Ph.D. thesis (The University of Manchester, 2008). Wesley's conception of his mission was shared by his fellow missionaries (Charles Wesley, Benjamin Ingham, and Charles Delamotte); however, the Georgia Trustees and James Oglethorpe, while acknowledging the missionaries' original goal was to convert the Indians, stressed the need for a full-time parish priest in Savannah (for example, see John Wesley, *Journal and Diaries*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, vol. 18 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, 1988), (30 June 1736), 163).

⁷ Rack, 'Wesley Portrayed: Character and Criticism in Some Early Biographies', *Methodist History* 43 (2005), 111.

⁸ See Wesley to John Burton (10 Oct. 1735), *Letters I*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 25 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Oxford, 1980), 439 and the discussion of this comment in Hammond, 57-58.

⁹ On the centrality of the Indians to Wesley's conception of restoring primitive Christianity in Georgia see Geordan Hammond, 'John Wesley's Mindset at the Commencement of his Georgia Sojourn: Suffering and the Introduction of Primitive Christianity to the Indians', *Methodist History* 47 (forthcoming, 2008).

This strand of interpretation can be found from Thomas Coke and Henry Moore (1792) to A. Skevington Wood (1967), although recent biographers have shied away from this stark conclusion.¹⁰ The reason Wesley was said to have not been a true Christian is simple: he was, according to these writers, not then acquainted with the fullness of the gospel and he was seeking salvation by works in a state of emotional and spiritual confusion.

In particular, scholars writing from within the tradition of evangelical Methodism have tended to view Wesley's mission to Georgia as a glaring failure. Although there were few signs of an impending crisis, these scholars have tended to note that during his voyage back to England he felt he lacked inner certainty of salvation.¹¹ A number of additional 'failures' drawn from Wesley's journals and letters are often cited: Wesley failed to find assurance of salvation through imitating the spiritual discipline and liturgical practices of the primitive church.¹² He had become disillusioned with mystical quietism and rejected it as a possible means of assurance.¹³ His spiritual struggles were compounded by the stress he endured from the legal action taken against him.¹⁴ Perhaps worst of all, he failed in his primary goal of converting Indians to Christianity.¹⁵

Scholars who interpret Wesley's experience in Georgia with hindsight are generally drawn to view it in negative terms in comparison to his later evangelical successes. However, an alternative evaluation is possible when his ministry is viewed in the context of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel's (SPG) expectations for its missionaries.¹⁶ In addition to being advised generally to be a model of piety, missionaries

¹⁰ Coke and Moore, 97; Whitehead, 2:1; Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London, 1824), 1:233, 1:257; Tyerman, 166; Lelièvre, 20, 21; Maser, 280, 285, 288, 292; V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley* (London, 1961), 278 and *John Wesley*, 46; Cannon, 2-4; Wood, 53.

¹¹ Wesley, *Journal*, (22 Dec. 1737-1 Feb. 1738), 206-16.

¹² Wesley, *Journal*, (25 Jan. 1738), 212-13.

¹³ Moore, 1:245, 377; [Reginald Heber] 'The Life of Wesley; and the Rise and Progress of Methodism', *The Quarterly Review* 24 (Oct. & Jan. 1821), 14; John Wesley to Samuel Wesley, jun. (23 Nov. 1736), *Letters*, 487-89; cf. Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity', 222-26.

¹⁴ See the Grand Jury's 'Grievances' and indictments (Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, (22 Aug. and 1 Sept. 1737), 555-56, 559-62).

¹⁵ See Wesley's angry polemic against the Indians (Wesley, *Journal*, (2 Dec. 1737), 201-04).

¹⁶ Although the SPG paid Wesley's salary, Wesley 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', appendix 5 in Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity', 318-26 at 324-26).

were urged to hold daily morning and evening prayers and preach and catechize on Sundays. Generally they were requested to 'Instruct, Exhort, Admonish, and Reprove, as they have Occasion and Opportunity'.¹⁷ In all of these particulars, Wesley was an exemplar of a faithful SPG missionary. Likewise, when his ministry is analyzed in the context of the 'Georgia experiment', a more balanced view emerges. For example, it is possible to argue that he both adapted and failed to adapt his ministry to the new colony. On the one hand, his statement 'that there is a possible case wherein a part of his [the clergyman's] time ought to be employed in what less directly conduces to the glory of God' shows his willingness to adapt to the realities of colonial Georgia.¹⁸ At the same time, in his zeal for implementing what he deemed to be the practices of the primitive Christians, it might be argued that he failed to heed the advice of his friend John Burton, a fellow of Corpus Christi, Oxford, and a member of the Georgia Trustees, to 'distinguish between what is essential and what is merely circumstantial to Christianity, between what is indispensable and what is variable, between what is of divine and what is of human authority.'¹⁹ Wesley can perhaps be charged with failing to abide by his own conviction 'that prudence, as well as zeal, is of the utmost importance in the Christian life.'²⁰ Nonetheless, not all parishioners remembered him as a legalistic High Churchman: some criticized him for narrow minded austerity, while others praised him for consistent efforts to care for their physical and spiritual needs.²¹

Although Wesley was evidently in a state of spiritual anxiety during his voyage to England, his ministry should not be judged to have been fruitless for this reason. One of his greatest accomplishments was his publication of *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1737), the first hymnbook

¹⁷ *A Collection of Papers Printed by Order of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1715), 19. In Georgia Wesley read David Humphreys's *An Historical Account* (1730) of the SPG which contains a summary of the 'instructions' for SPG missionaries (Wesley, *Diary*, (12 July 1737), 527).

¹⁸ Wesley to Archibald Hutcheson (23 July 1736), *Letters*, 467.

¹⁹ Burton to Wesley (28 Oct. 1735), *Letters*, 436.

²⁰ Wesley to William Wogan (28 Mar. 1737), *Letters*, 500.

²¹ On criticisms of Wesley, see, for example, his *Journal* and *Diary*, 22 June 1736 and his *Manuscript Journal*, 21 Aug. 1736, pp. 161-62, 396, 411-12; on praise of Wesley see the *Diary of Viscount Percival Afterwards First Earl of Egmont*, vol. 2, Historical Manuscripts Commission (London, 1923), (16 Mar. 1737), 370; [Elizabeth Fallowfield] to Wesley [27 Dec. 1737] *Letters*, 523-24. Unlike the focus of Wesley's biographers on his inner spiritual shortcomings, colonists opposed to his ministry variously accused him of being an enthusiast, Roman Catholic, divisive clergyman, exploiter of women, and an incendiary against the magistrates of Savannah (see Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity', chapter 5).

designed for the use of an Anglican congregation and perhaps the first hymnbook printed in America.²² His sincerity and commitment to his parishioners was unquestionable as illustrated by his almost daily habit of visiting them from house to house.²³ His wide-ranging activities led him to gain a deep understanding of German religious language. He read prayers to French settlers and learned enough Italian to read prayers to colonists from that country.²⁴ He even went so far as to begin to learn Spanish in order to converse with some Spanish speaking Jews in his parish.²⁵ Wesley showed a strong concern for the children of Savannah and taught them the catechism on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.²⁶ His diary contains evidence that his pastoral work bore fruit through rising attendance at Savannah parish church. In 1737 average attendance at daily Morning and Evening Prayer increased by an average of ten worshippers compared to 1736. Likewise, 1737 saw an average increase of over seventeen parishioners at the three Sunday services with an increase in attendance of nearly twenty-four at the second Morning Prayer accompanied by a sermon and communion office.²⁷

Wesley's occasional but steady praise of his parishioners indicates that his ministry should not be readily characterized as a failure consisting of a series of conflicts with the colonists. He believed there were some noteworthy signs of spiritual vitality in Savannah as when he arrived in the colony and found that 'Many seem to be awakened' and more chose to attend prayers than a public ball scheduled at the same time. To the Earl of Egmont, a Trustee of the Georgia colony, Wesley stated his opinion that in Savannah 'there are more who desire and endeavour to be Christians than I ever found in any town of the same size in England.' He even went so far as to declare to James Hutton that 'There is a strange motus animorum ['moving of spirits'], as it seems, continually increasing...Not only young men and maidens praise the name of the Lord, but children too (in years, though in seriousness and

²² (Charles-Town, 1737). There are two known copies of the original edition of this hymn book; one can be found in the Methodist Archives and Research Centre at John Rylands Library, Manchester and the other is housed in the New York City Public Library.

²³ See Wesley, *Manuscript Journal*, (7 Mar. 1736), 365; *Journal*, (10 May 1736), 158; *Manuscript Journal*, (10 Sept. 1736), 420; Wesley to George Whitefield and the Oxford Methodists [10 Sept. 1736], *Letters*, 472 and *Manuscript Journal*, (30 July 1737), 530.

²⁴ Wesley, *Journal*, (29-30 Oct. 1737), 194.

²⁵ Wesley, *Diary*, (28 June 1736), 398; *Manuscript Journal*, (4 Apr. 1737), 495; John C. English, 'John Wesley and His "Jewish Parishioners": Jewish-Christian Relationships in Savannah, Georgia, 1736-1737', *Methodist History* 36 (1998), 220-27.

²⁶ Wesley to Dr Bray's Associates (26 Feb. 1737), *Letters*, 494-95.

²⁷ See 'An Overview and Analysis of Wesley's Parish Ministry in Savannah', appendix 11, in Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity', 351-58.

understanding, men) are not terrified from bearing the reproach of Christ.²⁸ Wesley was in no doubt that the Spirit of God was at work amongst some of his parishioners.

A number of innovative clerical practices that became characteristic of the Evangelical Revival can readily be observed in examining the Georgia mission.²⁹ Benjamin Ingham reported that on the Simmonds 'Wesley began to preach without notes, expounding a portion of Scripture extempore, according to the ancient usage.'³⁰ Charles Wesley's statement to the Trustees that his brother 'preaches by heart' indicates John continued this practice in Georgia.³¹ At the request of the Anglican clergyman, Thomas Thompson, Wesley prayed extemporaneously on account of the large number of Dissenters in the congregation when he conducted divine service at Ponpon Chapel, South Carolina.³² In Georgia, he began a rough itinerant ministry making occasional rounds to the smaller settlements outside Savannah where he read prayers either in private homes or in the open air.³³ Wesley's extensive use of lay leaders was perhaps his most innovative practice. Ingham, a deacon, supplied Wesley's place in Savannah on occasion.³⁴ Charles Delamotte was employed as a teacher and catechist. In Wesley's absence he took over the pastoral work of his parish and possibly led the religious societies in Savannah.³⁵ Robert Hows played a crucial role in initiating the Savannah society before Wesley's arrival in the colony and Wesley

²⁸ John Wesley to Charles Wesley (22 Mar. 1736), *Letters*, 452; John Wesley to Susanna Wesley (18 Mar. 1736), *Letters*, 451; Wesley to the Earl of Egmont [12 Nov. 1736], *Letters*, 486; Wesley to James Hutton [16 June 1737], *Letters*, 509-10; cf. Wesley, Manuscript Journal, (30 Apr. 1737), 504. His generalized negative statements such as Americans are indolent and lazy should not be ignored (Manuscript Journal, (15 Apr. 1737), 499).

²⁹ Frank Baker has shown that in Georgia Wesley instituted a number of practices which later became standard Methodist practices (*John Wesley*, 51-54).

³⁰ Benjamin Ingham's Journal in Luke Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (London, 1873), 19 Oct. 1735, 68; cf. Wesley, *Journal*, (17 Oct. 1735), 137 and Manuscript Journal and Diary, (19 Oct. 1735), 313.

³¹ Egmont, *Diary*, (8 Dec. 1736), 2:313-14.

³² Wesley, Manuscript Journal, (24 Apr. 1737), 502.

³³ Wesley gave evidence that he was thinking in terms of an itinerant ministry in his letter 'To George Whitefield and the Oxford Methodists' in his reference to the work to be done in the 'smaller settlements' (10 Sept. 1736), *Letters*, 472; cf. Wesley to [Richard Morgan, jun. [16 Feb. 1737], *Letters*, 491. Nehemiah Curnock (1:274) saw Savannah, Frederica, Thunderbolt, Skidaway, Irene, and Yamacraw or (Cowpen) as on his list along with the German parts of Savannah, New Ebenezer, and Darien (*The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, vol. 1 (London, 1938), 274. This type of roving ministry was encouraged by the SPG (*A Collection of Papers*, 25).

³⁴ Wesley, *Journal*, (12 Oct. 1736), 172.

³⁵ Wesley, *Journal* and Manuscript Journal, (30 Apr. 1737), 181-82, 504; cf. Delamotte to Wesley (23 Feb. 1738), *Letters*, 529-31.

encouraged Hows in his work as a leader of a Saturday evening communion preparation class and other devotional gatherings.³⁶ After Charles Wesley left Frederica, John Wesley relied on lay leaders to read prayers and lead religious societies there.³⁷ Perhaps the most radical aspect of his Georgia experiments was his extensive use of women in lay leadership within his religious societies.³⁸ There is no doubt that Wesley's religious societies, which met weekly on Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday and fairly regularly on other weekdays, were thriving from the autumn of 1736 until at least a year later when the Sophia Williamson controversy broke out and Wesley stopped keeping a daily diary record of his activities.³⁹

Wesley was by no means the only clergyman who struggled in colonial Georgia; in fact, all Anglican missionaries with the notable exception of the Swiss clergyman Bartholomew Zouberbuhler (served 1746-66) experienced similar difficulties and had short tenures in the colony.⁴⁰ In his study of religion in colonial Georgia, Harold Davis has concluded that 'The overpowering testimony from [contemporary] lay people and ministers alike' was that colonial Georgians were an irreligious people.⁴¹

³⁶ Hows to Thomas Coram, (16 May 1735), *Original Papers of the Trustees and Oglethorpe, 1735-37*, vol. 21 of the *Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, ed. Allen D. Chandler and Lucian L. Knight (New York, 1970), 164-65. Hows is mentioned on twenty-four occasions in Wesley's Diary in association with the Saturday evening religious society between 4 Dec. 1736 and 27 Aug. 1737.

³⁷ Wesley, Manuscript Journal, no date, 418; cf. Elisha Dobree to the Georgia Trustees (*Colonial Records of Georgia*, 21:286).

³⁸ Margaret Bovey, Margaret Gilbert, and Sophia Hopkey were three of the most active members of Wesley's religious societies. See also the discussion of Wesley's interest in restoring the apostolic office of deaconess in Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity'.

³⁹ Hammond, 'Restoring Primitive Christianity', 198-209.

⁴⁰ George Whitefield had some success in Georgia through his popular preaching and orphanage, but he was not in the colony consistently enough to allow a judgement of his success as a parish minister.

Although Wesley's ministry was by no means smooth sailing, the available evidence shows that serious opposition to his work in Savannah did not arise until disputes erupted following his denial of communion to Sophia Williamson.⁴² Even after this event attendance at divine service and communion increased although over time the weight of opposition and unlikelihood of it being resolved made his position untenable.⁴³ During the whole of the Georgia mission there were few signs of the spiritual doubts that plagued him on his voyage back to England. It seems that for the most part Wesley was happy in Georgia although conditions there were never ideal and certain elements of frustration were always present (e.g. his inability to be a missionary to the Indians and his unstable relationship with Oglethorpe). His self flagellating autobiography of 24 May 1738 in which he stated that in Georgia 'I sought to establish my own righteousness' should be read alongside other positive recollections made later in life.⁴⁴

The efficacy of Wesley's ministry in Georgia will no doubt continue to

⁴¹ Davis, 197; cf. Phinizy Spalding 'Life in Georgia under the Trustees', in Kenneth Coleman (ed.), *A History of Georgia* (Athens, GA, 1977), 39 and H. P. Thompson *Into All Lands: The History of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts 1701-1950* (London, 1951), 55. In the larger context of southern history, John B. Boles has argued that unlike in the north, there was no 'great awakening' in the south until the nineteenth century, while Thomas J. Little has contended that southern evangelicalism originated in early eighteenth-century South Carolina revivalism. The salient point in the context of this essay is that Little does not associate Georgia with early-eighteenth century evangelicalism (Boles, 'Evangelical Protestantism in the Old South: From Religious Dissent to Cultural Dominance', in Charles Regan Wilson (ed.), *Religion in the South* (Jackson, MS, 1985), 13-34; Little, 'The Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Revivalism in South Carolina, 1700-1740', *Church History* 75 (2006), 768-808). Regarding religion the Georgia Charter read: 'there shall be a liberty of conscience allowed in the worship of God, to all persons inhabiting, or which shall inhabit or be resident within our said province, and that all such persons, except papists, shall have a free exercise of religion; so they be contented with the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of the same, not giving offense or scandal to the government' (*Georgia Charter, Laws, and Minutes of Trustees, 1732-52*, vol. 1 of the *Colonial Records of Georgia*, ed. Allen D. Chandler and Lucian L. Knight (New York, 1970), 21). Most of the original Georgia Trustees were pious Anglicans who conceived of establishing the colony as a act of Christian charity (for example, see Oglethorpe's *A New and Accurate Account of the Provinces of South-Carolina and Georgia* (1732), in Rodney M. Baine, (ed.), *The Publications of James Edward Oglethorpe* (Athens, GA, 1994), 208). In 1758, the Church of England became the legally established church in Georgia.

⁴² This is affirmed by William Stephens (Stephens to Trustees (27 May 1738), *Original Papers of the Trustees and Oglethorpe, 1737-39*, vol. 22, part 1 of the *Colonial Records of Georgia*, 167).

⁴³ Wesley, *Journal*, (14 Aug. 1737), 189.

⁴⁴ For example, his *Journal* entry for 24 May 1738 might be compared to his sermon 'The Late Work of God in North America', (1778) in which he claimed he witnessed 'an awakening among the English, both at Savannah and Frederica' (Wesley, *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, 1986), 598-99).

be a subject of debate amongst scholars. However, the available evidence is sufficient to call into question the simplistic interpretation of his experience in Georgia as a failure. A careful analysis of Wesley's ministry in Georgia lends support to the reluctance of some biographers from John Hampson (1796) to Henry Rack (1989) to pronounce Wesley's Georgia sojourn as either a success or failure. Elements of both 'success' and 'failure' can easily be discerned, therefore absolute judgements of Wesley's Georgia mission shed little light on his experience in the New World and probably reveal more about the religious commitments of the biographer than Wesley himself. Recently, a substantial number of Wesley scholars have argued that polarities propagated by Methodist biographers between the pre and post Aldersgate Wesley have been overstated, contributing to caricatures of Wesley that stress the discontinuity between a supposed pre and post evangelical Wesley to the detriment of recognizing areas of continuity in his life.⁴⁵ One life-long concern that was central to Wesley's ministry in Georgia was his passion to restore the doctrine, discipline, and practice of the primitive church. Near the end of his life, Wesley reflected that he 'went to America, strongly attached to the Bible, the primitive Church, and the Church of England' and returned from the New World in the same 'spirit'.⁴⁶ For Wesley, his ministry in Georgia was not remembered as a clear-cut failure.⁴⁷

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⁴⁵ See Randy L. Maddox, ed. *Aldersgate Reconsidered* (Nashville, 1990). It is evident that although several leading scholars who helped pioneer the Wesley works project (still in progress as The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley) believed that a complete critical edition of Wesley's works would serve to widen scholarly interest in Wesley beyond the sometimes narrow confines of Methodist semi-hagiography, there remains a need for contextual and critical interpretations of Wesley. For a succinct summary of this vision, see Kenneth E. Rowe, 'Editor's Introduction: The Search for the Historical Wesley', in id. (ed.), *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition* (Metuchen, NJ, 1976), 1-10.

⁴⁶ Wesley, 'Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church' (1789), in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9 of The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley (Nashville, 1989), 538.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Wesley, *Journal*, (3 Feb. 1738), 221-23; *Journals and Diaries*, ed. Ward and Heitzenrater, vol. 23 of , (4 Apr. 1784), 301